

Pride and Protest in Letters and Song: Jazz Artists and Writers during the Civil Rights
Movement, 1955-1965

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ABSTRACT

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Pride and Protest in Letters and Song: Jazz Artists and Writers during the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965

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Pride and Protest in Letters and Song is a traditional historical narrative which examines racial justice advocacy, as expressed in artistic works by several preeminent jazz musicians and the writers who allied with them during the pivotal 1955 to 1965 span of the American Civil Rights Movement. The work interrogates milestone confrontations during the civil rights movement, such as the Little Rock Nine Crisis, the African Anticolonial Movement, and the pivotal 1963 direct action campaigns waged by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC, the NAACP and SNCC. The aim of this method of historical inquiry is to determine why and how these events motivated the profiled musicians and writers to use their gifts to express opinions on the racial tumult of the era. It was found that the artistic works produced during the era had little real-world impact on the overwhelmingly Southern and church-based civil rights campaigns. However, what the profiled musicians and writers had to say about the civil rights movements is worth knowing because the historical record demonstrates they were thought leaders. Several of the observations they made and ideological stances they adopted were prescient, indicating future strategic shifts and points of view on the quest for racial justice in the United States and across the African Diaspora.

PREFACE

This narrative history tells the story of how a select group of jazz musicians and jazz-admiring writers used their creative gifts to raise their audiences' awareness of the social, economic and political forces impacting African Americans. It focuses on a ten-year period beginning in 1955 and ending in 1965. During the same ten-year span in which civil rights movement leaders mounted their most potent challenges to the nation's longstanding segregationist policies and practices, this select group of musicians and writers enjoyed coincident career pinnacles, by both critical and commercial measures. These advocates in the jazz elite joined the fray, using their artistic expression and cultural prominence to push for racial justice. But, to borrow a phrase from jazz aficionado James Marshall Hendrix, the story "goes a little deeper than that."¹

The Twentieth Century was only a few months old when two African American intellectuals declared their people's quest to claim their rightful status as full citizens of the United States. These two African American intellectuals heralded a coming struggle for political rights, civil rights and economic justice that would transform America in the century ahead and, in turn, spark a global campaign for human rights. These two African Americans made this powerful and prescient proclamation – in a song.

Before Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, before Alain Locke announced the arrival of the "New Negro" of

¹ Jimi Hendrix, "Highway Chile," from *Are You Experienced?* The Jimi Hendrix Experience (Reprise, 1967).

the Harlem Renaissance² and before W.E.B. Du Bois prophesized that the “problem of the Twentieth Century” would be “the problem of the color-line,”³ James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson published a song that reminded African Americans of the travails they had overcome and that envisioned their ultimate victory over the monstrous racial injustices of Jim Crow.

Educator and lawyer James Weldon Johnson had first written the song’s lyric as a poem. Five hundred school children performed it to celebrate the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday on February 12, 1900 in Jacksonville, Florida. His younger brother, pianist-composer John Rosamond Johnson, set the poem to music and together they published it in New York that same year. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” became so popular that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), co-founded in 1911 by W.E.B. Du Bois among other notables, adopted it as its official song.⁴ Over a century later, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” remains one of the most beloved songs of the American Civil Rights Movement, is often called “the Black National Anthem” and is annually sung by those gathered at Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday celebrations.

The reason “Lift Every Voice and Sing” has endured longer than any other “message song” that will be examined in this dissertation is because it was written by two middle class black leaders who saw other black leaders as the primary audience for the song and its message. It has been embraced by successive generations of black clergy,

² Alain Locke, “The New Negro” in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Charles Boni, Inc., 1925, republished by Simon & Schuster, 1997), 11-7 and 14-16.

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 1. Originally published in 1903.

⁴ “Lift Every Voice and Sing: The Poem and The Song,” Black Culture Connection; <http://www.pbs.org/black-culture-authors-spoken-word-poetry/lift-every-voice-and-sing/html> [accessed May 9, 2016].

professionals, business owners and politicians who have had the platform and means to keep the song in the consciousness of African American communities across the nation. Far from being a “folk song” of the movement, it is a “talented tenth” song, to use Du Bois’s famous term. Its message flowed down from the black elite rather than up from the working class black communities. This observation is not made to disparage the song. It is made to understand how and why the song has become a revered cultural artifact of African Americans’ long struggle for justice and equality.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” rose to popularity among African Americans long before the advent of record players or radio. To listen to a new composition in the early 1900s, one had to hear it performed “live” or purchase its piano sheet music and play it as well as sing the lyric personally. Serendipity favored the Johnson brothers and their song. It happened that the piano was *the* status symbol among black families of means at the turn-of-the-Twentieth Century. The piano held a special allure for African Americans because it was an instrument many of their parents and grandparents had longed to own but were denied during slavery. Even destitute sharecropping blacks aspired to have a piano in their ramshackle cabins. This fascination with the symbol of American musical culture perturbed early Twentieth Century black leader Booker T. Washington. He urged Southern Negroes, most of whom were only a generation removed from the total impoverishment of captivity, to live thriftily and focus on acquiring practical agricultural and industrial skills that would allow them to sustain themselves in a racially segregated society. Washington condemned the pretentiousness of the high culture-worshipping “liberal education” being foisted upon his people. He saw it as foolish for blacks, most of whom could barely afford to buy coal to heat their homes, to spend their scarce dollars to

buy a second-hand piano.⁵ Yet, Washington underestimated the self-esteem many African Americans gained by owning a piano. By the early 1900s, a piano in the home announced a black family's gentility. It is worth noting that Ferdinand La Menthe (Jelly Roll) Morton, born in New Orleans in 1890, and Edward Kennedy (Duke) Ellington, born in Washington, D.C. in 1899, were both raised by economically stable black families who owned a piano,⁶ the instrument both men mastered to their future fame.

The ability to read music and play piano was most valued as a sign of cultivation among middle class black women. Tens of thousands of well-to-do black families purchased the sheet music of John Rosamond Johnson and James Weldon Johnson's song. John Rosamond Johnson, who was a shrewd marketer, had arranged the music as a "spiritual," a dignified form of hymnal music favored by educated blacks in the Victorian America era. The Fisk Jubilee Singers had popularized spirituals with their triumphant international tours in the 1870s. Despite spirituals being viewed as "old fashioned" by the early 1900s, the genre remained a source of cultural pride for middle class blacks. The song's dignified spiritual arrangement made the black elite more receptive to the aspirational lyrics written by James Weldon Johnson. While the black elite, themselves at the mercy of Jim Crow despite education or status, shared James Weldon Johnson's grand vision of victory over racial injustice, it is hard to imagine them taking the message as seriously if John Rosamond Johnson had composed the accompanying music in a

⁵ Booker T. Washington, "Industrial Education for the Negro," in *The Negro Problem*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903; republished by CreateSpace Publishing, 2017), 4-7. https://btwsociety.org/library/books/The_Negro_Problem/01.html [Accessed December 15, 2017].

⁶ John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 24.

“ragtime” style. Thus, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the indisputable patriarch of songs whose composers advocated for racial justice, benefitted from being published and disseminated before the music industry’s emergence. It had the advantage of direct composer-to-audience communication of its intended message without interference or interpretation by record company intermediaries and without compromising its original musical arrangement and performance to achieve commercial success.

The explosive growth of the entertainment industry in the 1920s obliterated the social context that allowed “Lift Every Voice and Sing” to take root and become an evergreen civil rights anthem. Enriched and empowered by the public’s growing appetite for popular music, the recording industry’s monopolistic grip on artists and production made improbable the commercial release of a “leader-to-like-minded-audience” political message song as the 1920s began to roar. James Weldon Johnson recognized that in composing ragtime tunes, blues and spirituals blacks had displayed their “power to create” folk art that had wide appeal. However, Johnson himself thought songwriting was *not* an effective way for Africans Americans to demonstrate their intellectual parity. Johnson observed that the entertainment industry reflected white audiences’ demand for unchallenging, stereotype-reinforcing music from black performers, who had to satisfy these expectations if they were to have any hope of commercial success. In his 1922 collection, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Johnson argued that African Americans could most forcibly challenge and discredit racist ideologies by creating literature and other

forms of high art – not by writing and performing popular music.⁷ Johnson acknowledged the popularity of black folk music, from ragtime to spirituals to the then-current blues craze, but warned: “The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.”⁸ What Johnson did not foresee when he wrote those words in 1922 was the emergence of extraordinarily talented musicians, such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, who would, by infusing it with elements of classical composition and instrumental virtuosity, elevate jazz to a cultural stratum in which it would be perceived as not only entertainment but also as art.

Despite the commercial and cultural strictures that often restrained them, artists composed and found a way to release songs – although relatively few and far between – that advocated for racial justice, decried brutality, applauded sacrifice, encouraged reconciliation and voiced hope in humankind’s better nature. Some of these songs gained commercial success and even critical acclaim. African American artists wrote most of them, which indicates how present the civil rights struggle was in their perception of their social reality. A decade long interest, indeed, a fascination with who created these songs, why they did so and how this music impacted the long struggle for political, civil and economic justice for blacks motivated this dissertation. A vexing question arises for anyone

⁷ James Weldon Johnson, “Preface” to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, in *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 283-300.

⁸ James Weldon Johnson, “Preface” in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. James Weldon Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1922), accessed December 14, 2017, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/johnson/preface1.html.

who admires the premier jazz musicians of the last century as among those who made the most valuable contributors to America's culture and quality of life. Why are there so few jazz compositions in the discography of noteworthy civil rights-related "message songs" released since establishment of the recording industry?

There are several folk songs and gospel songs whose lyrics espouse righteous determination, justice and equality, "We Shall Overcome" and "Freedom Road" chief among them. The soul music/ rhythm & blues genre accounts for at least a dozen of the most popular message songs whose themes are black struggle, endurance and uplift. Among the best-known rhythm & blues message songs are Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," released in 1965 after he was killed in a Los Angeles motel; "We're a Winner," a hit for Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions in 1968; "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," from Marvin Gaye's groundbreaking socially conscious album, *What's Going On*, released in 1971; and "The Greatest Love of All." The last song listed was originally performed by a jazz artist, George Benson, for the 1977 movie "The Greatest" starring the late Muhammad Ali, but later elevated to a universal proclamation of black self-esteem by Whitney Houston in her soaring 1985 cover of the song.⁹ Pride in their African heritage inspired several of the reggae songs of Bob Marley and the Wailers. Marley's "Africa Unite," released in 1979, is an unabashed paean to Pan-Africanism. Stevie Wonder celebrated the successful campaign to establish a federal holiday in remembrance of Martin Luther King, Jr. on King's natal day anniversary with his joyous

⁹ Wesley Morris, "Defining, and Proclaiming, a New Black Power," *New York Times*, June 16, 2016, Arts Section.

“Happy Birthday,” a 1980 song which incorporated reggae rhythm patterns. Rappers, although derided by staid civil rights activists, have regularly confronted institutionalized discrimination. Seminal rap groups that rose to prominence in the late 1980s, such as Public Enemy and N.W.A., frequently made caustic criticism of contemporary racial injustices the focal point of their lyrics.

Billie Holiday is credited with recording the song that heralded the gathering civil rights movement. In her haunting 1939 rendition of “Strange Fruit,” Holiday jolted the world with an unforgettable condemnation of the rampant lynching of black men. The song made it impossible for any American with a sense of humanity to ignore the gruesome practice happening in their midst. During the murderous white backlash against black voter registration and desegregation efforts in the South, Nina Simone’s angrily spat the strident “Mississippi Goddam” in 1964. A few years later, in 1969, Simone stirring encouraged the younger generation of African Americans with her proudly chauvinistic “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.”

Yet, Holiday and Simone aside, who else among jazz artists has bequeathed American culture a song of advocacy worth remembrance? Is there something about the music of jazz musicians or their status as members or near-members of America’s cultural elite that makes them less likely to engage politically? If the accomplishments of the American Civil Rights Movement were the most socially significant contribution African Americans made to the United States in the Twentieth Century, cannot it also be said that the compositions of jazz’s best artists were the most culturally significant contribution African Americans made to the United States over the same span of time?

African American intellectuals with an activist bent, such as The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Kenneth B. Clark, Ella Baker and Pauli Murray, either led or influenced the modern civil rights movement. A cadre of thoughtful, socially engaged individuals were also responsible for the evolution of the art form called jazz. Their ranks include Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Charles Mingus and the more politically conservative Twentieth Century American cultural giant Duke Ellington. It is a fair observation that their jazz audiences, and the public in general, have viewed jazz musicians as entertainers or artists, but not as thinkers or activists. However, it is recognized here, as it has been by historian Eric Porter, that several of the very best jazz musicians “in their efforts to articulate their aesthetic visions and publicly address issues relevant to their lives...have functioned”¹⁰ as public intellectuals. The least stringent definition of a “public intellectual” is a figure whose objective is to enlighten the well-educated members of a society. Elite jazz musicians, simply because their music became more complicated and less accessible to general entertainment-seeking audiences from 1955 to 1965, meet this standard. However, several of them, such as Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone, as well as the writers who affiliated themselves with jazz such as Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, Maya Angelou and James Baldwin, meet the more demanding definition of a public intellectual. That definition identifies a public intellectual as someone who

¹⁰ Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xiv.

addresses a socially controversial topic or intervenes in a political dispute to shape or influence public opinion.¹¹

Thus, the jazz artists and writers examined here can be said to have acted as public intellectuals. They directed civil rights-themed music, prose and poetry to other African American thought leaders and white cultural and political elites they believed could advance the racial justice they espoused. Most of their messages of advocacy, for reasons that will be detailed as this historical narrative unfolds, failed to reach wider audiences, as jazz music itself continued its transformation into an elite music from 1955 to 1965. Unlike rhythm & blues, which rose in popularity during the same period, the jazz genre and its musicians became less popular in the black working-class community that gave it birth. The black working-class community, which had drawn its entertainment and cultural heroes from jazz since the Harlem Renaissance through World War Two, turned to rhythm and blues, later referred to as soul music, as the 1950s ended. Harry Belafonte in 1956 and then Dave Brubeck and Miles Davis topped the album charts in 1959. Nina Simone released a top-selling single in 1959: “I Loves You, Porgy,” from her debut album, *Little Girl Blue*. Only Dinah Washington, who crossed over from jazz to rhythm & blues, scored more than one Top Twenty hit after 1960.¹² Jazz artists’ weakening album and singles sales can be seen as an indicator of their declining commercial appeal to working-class

¹¹ Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 387-390. See also Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987; republished 2000), 5-8.

¹² “Year-end Charts – Year-end Albums – The Billboard Top 200,” *Billboard*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/charts/yearend_chart_display.html [Accessed February 7, 2018].

black audiences. Hence, that same community paid less attention to the political messages jazz artists sought to communicate.

Considering the scant appreciation they received from the public for their efforts, it is ironic that these musicians and writers risked their careers when they used their gifts to speak out on matters of racial justice. In some cases, they also sacrificed the artistic possibilities of their creative expression when they infused their music or prose with social commentary. A case in point is James Baldwin. Contemporary generations of young African American and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer activists admire Baldwin for his political outspokenness. They lionize him as a prescient, powerful and passionate voice for racial and LGBTQ equality. Yet, when Baldwin dove headlong into the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, his family and literary friends feared he was ruining his chances to become one of America's greatest writers. He had already demonstrated he was a good novelist. However, Baldwin's artistic sensibility could not survive his political involvement, according to his agent. He fretted that the intellectual and emotional energy Baldwin poured into the civil rights movement drained him of the creativity the writer would need to generate future great works. Social historian Carol Polsgrove observed that "there was truth" in the agent's warning. "The work Baldwin did for the movement was hard on the man and hard on his writing."¹³

In 1964, even the self-assured LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) worried in print how becoming a "celebrity spokesman" for black people after the success of his book, *Blues*

¹³ Carol Polsgrove, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 201.

People: Negro Music in White America, and his controversial play, *Dutchman*, would impact his art. In an essay entitled “LeRoi Jones Talking,” he stated:

I write now, full of trepidation because I know the death this society intends for me. I see Jimmy Baldwin almost unable to write about himself anymore. I’ve seen Du Bois, Wright, Chester Himes, driven away – Ellison silenced and fidgeting in some college. I think I almost feel the same forces massing against me, almost before I’ve begun.¹⁴

Nevertheless, these musicians and writers, by using their artistic expression to educate and exhort their audiences, met the challenge W.E.B. Du Bois put before anyone who was aware of racial injustice. Recalling his disgust at Atlanta’s so-called enlightened elite’s cavalier response to the scores of black men being lynched by whites in the rural towns around the city in the early 1900s, Du Bois offered this reflection in his unpublished audio autobiography in 1961: “My faith in knowledge as the answer to the Negro Problem was shaken. I made up my mind that if people were aware of essential matters...which they had to know they had not only to know, they had to *act*.”¹⁵ By expressing their views in music, a select group of jazz artists did act. Their expressions constitute a form of social or political advocacy. Given the popularity and favorable regard in which most of the outspoken jazz artists were held, they reached a significant audience when they commented on racial matters, whether that audience agreed or disagreed with their points of view.

Again, public intellectuals play a vital role in modern society. With their ideas they “participate in the creation and dismantling of social hierarchies.”¹⁶ Several of the jazz

¹⁴ Amiri Baraka, “LeRoi Jones Talking” in *Home: Social Essays* (Newark, NJ: Akashic Books, 2009), 179-180.

¹⁵ A transcription of an audio interview with emphasis reflected in speech pattern. “The Atlanta Years (excerpt),” W.E.B. Du Bois; recorded by Moses Aschi; from the album *W.E.B. DuBois: A Recorded Autobiography*, Folkways (1961).

¹⁶ Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* xiii.

artists and jazz-focused writers whose works will be investigated in this dissertation can be categorized as public intellectuals. Ellington, Roach, Mingus, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Nat Hentoff, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Lorraine Hansberry and Maya Angelou are prime examples. This status and their artistic acclaim gave whatever opinions they chose to express a higher profile in the fevered American debate over race that raged from 1955 to 1965. What events during the modern civil rights movement impelled jazz artists and writers to advocacy in their artistic expression? How did the political views imbedded in their expression align with the proclaimed objectives of the movement's iconic leaders, especially from 1955 to 1965, when the leaders mounted their most impactful campaigns? This dissertation will explore these questions. The answers unearthed will hopefully provide valuable additions to the historiography on how jazz musicians and jazz-influenced writers, during the most important years of the modern American Civil Rights Movement, expressed pride and protest and endeavored to do so within works of artistic merit.

DEDICATION

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the sacrifice, support and love of my wife, Alice Flowers. She was my faithful partner in this endeavor. Alice urged me onward and never doubted my ability to generate a worthy work of scholarship. This dissertation is dedicated to her.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

God has wrought many things out of oppression. He has endowed his creatures with the capacity to create –and from this capacity has flowed the sweet songs of sorrow and joy that allowed man to cope with his environment and many different situations.

Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

Most musicians' compositions and performances offer a ready lens through which to examine their perceptions about identity, culture, politics and society. Weighing against this axiom is the recognition that market-driven machinations by the entertainment industry have often blurred the image musicians sought to project and muted the message they desired to convey. Yet, during the most important years of the American Civil Rights Movement, a select group of jazz artists, through their determination, ingenuity and recruitment of critical supporters, circumvented culture industry barriers designed to deter political outspokenness by musicians. They created and promoted musical works that celebrated the accomplishments and inspiring humanity of African Americans and African peoples. Moreso, in solidarity with the Civil Rights and Pan-Africanist Movements of the era, they used their music to disseminate commentaries intended to improve and advance racial justice for African-descended peoples.

Again, the modern civil rights movement in the United States is the critical context for this history of public advocacy by jazz musicians and associated writers. The “modern era” of the movement, which chiefly sought federal redress against racial segregation and

¹ Foreword, The 1964 *Berliner Jazztage* (Berlin Jazz Festival) Programme. Clark Atlanta University Archives. <http://www.wclk.org/dr-martin-luther-king-importance-jazz.html>.

discrimination, began during World War Two. A. Philip Randolph and Eleanor Roosevelt's confidantes, Dorothy Height and Pauli Murray, and threats of a march on Washington by labor and civil rights activist A. Phillip Randolph convinced Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration to require equal job opportunities for blacks in factories contracted for war production.² This breakthrough framed the strategy for future direct pleas to the executive branch to dismantle Jim Crow barriers to racial equality.³

Most observers agree the movement seized national attention in May 1954 when the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. When did the civil rights movement end? Activist/writer Tom Hayden argued that it has not. He espoused the "long view" of the civil rights movement and saw it reflected in the election and administration of President Barack Obama.⁴ Still, it is undeniable that the most important years of the modern American Civil Rights Movement fell within the ten years beginning in 1955 and ending in 1965. The cataclysmic confrontations of the era, including Emmett Till's murder, the Little Rock Nine Crisis, the Greensboro Four Lunch Counter Sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, Birmingham 1963, Freedom

² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16-24. See also John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 422-432 and Dorothy I. Height, *Open Wide The Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2003), 115-122.

³ Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 4-7. See also Kenneth O'Reilly, "The Roosevelt Administration and Black America: Federal Surveillance and Civil Rights During the New Deal and World War II Years," *Phylon* 48, no. 1 (1987): 12-15; and Paul M. Sparrow, "Eleanor Roosevelt's Battle to End Lynching," (February 12, 2016) in the FDR Presidential Library Online Archives, accessed December 26, 2017, <https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2016/02/12/eleanor-roosevelts-battle-to-end-lynching.html>.

⁴ Tom Hayden, *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 176-184.

Summer 1964 and the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965, all continue to reverberate in the social and political consciousness of the nation.

A Nation-Changing Decade of Civil Rights Activism (1955 to 1965)

This narrative concentrates on personalities and events of the most turbulent and triumphant years of the modern civil rights movement: 1955 to 1965. In 1955, Emmett Till's gruesome murder in Mississippi and Rosa Park's courageous defiance sparked the movement's conflagration. The next ten years witnessed an epic struggle by African Americans and their allies in politics, the media and sympathetic citizenry to dismantle racial segregation, discrimination and other myriad injustices wrought upon them since their so-called Emancipation after the American Civil War. In 1965, just one year after the passage of the historic Civil Rights Act, the movement struck another blow for social justice by convincing Congress to enact the Voting Rights Act.

The Voting Rights Act is seen as the crowning achievement of the Civil Rights Movement and viewed by some as its closing chapter as well. The remaining hurdle to African Americans' full participation in U.S. society, their accrued impoverishment resulting from enforced exclusion and unequal access to economic opportunities for hundreds of years, has proven insurmountable in the years since 1965. Overcoming economic inequality or what is now referred to as the "wealth gap" between blacks and whites, was the mission that consumed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after 1965. His final foray into direct action, "The Poor People's Campaign," is testament to his recognition of the devastating financial effects of institutional racism on black families.

Yet, in 1965, King, other civil rights movement leaders, advocates and sympathizers achieved a breakthrough that did, nonetheless, profoundly change the

political landscape of the United States. The Voting Rights Act propelled hundreds of African Americans into elective office in major cities, state legislatures, Congress and ultimately the highest elected office in the nation.⁵ Among advocates and sympathizers who celebrated the passage of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965 were several prominent jazz artists, critics and writers who had supported the civil rights movement since its beginnings in the early 1940s. Many of them took credit for helping build public awareness and support for racial equality through their music and words. The argument here is they deserved that acknowledgment.

A Golden Age for Jazz (1955 to 1965)

By the mid-1950s, jazz had gained acceptance among U.S. cultural and political elites as a legitimate art form. It was more than popular entertainment. Jazz was “hip.” At least Bop jazz was, as fifties “Beat” icons, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg had proselytized in their books, poems and essays. Jazz had been infiltrating New York City’s high culture since the late 1940s. Anatole Broyard theorized about jazz’s cultural influence in his 1948 essay, “Portrait of a Hipster,” published in the *Partisan Review*.⁶ Broyard himself was a Creole who passed for white.⁷ His fascination with racial implications of jazz’s impact on white culture is ironic. Classical musician and composer Gunther Schuller had the amazing good fortune to be called in to play French horn and arrange for Miles

⁵ Dorothy I. Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003). 268-269. See also James C. Cobb, “The Voting Rights Act at 50: How It Changed the World,” *Time* August 6, 2015. <http://time.com/3985479/voting-rights-act-1965-results.html> [Accessed November 11, 2017]

⁶ Anatole Broyard, “A Portrait of the Hipster,” *Partisan Review* (June 1948), 45-49.

⁷ Joyce Johnson, “Passing Strange” *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, October 21, 2007. Book review of Bliss Broyard’s *One Drop: My Father’s Hidden Life – A Story of Race and Family Secrets*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/21/books/review/Johnson.html> [Accessed November 11, 2017].

Davis during the trumpeter's recording sessions for his *Birth of the Cool* album in 1949. Schuller became an enthusiastic jazz convert and authored several acclaimed critical commentaries on the music in the 1950s.⁸

New York intellectuals continued their infatuation with jazz as the fifties decade rolled on. The trapping of jazz, its insouciance, its freedom, its image, permeated the city's cultural Avant Garde. Poet William Jay Smith eulogized bop saxophone legend Charlie Parker in "Death of a Jazz Musician" in a 1956 *Partisan Review* article. Kerouac wrote and narrated a jazz-scored "Beats" film short, *Pull My Daisy*, in 1959.⁹ Kerouac's narration of the film demonstrates how jazz had influenced his style. There is a confident rhythmic flow to his delivery. Kerouac's witty commentary of the events taking place on screen is the narrative equivalent of a Dizzy Gillespie trumpet solo that winks with humor as it dazzles with virtuosity.

Actor/director John Cassavetes also created a 1959 film and it is one which has race and jazz as thematic elements. *Shadows* tells the story of a young African American woman who is so fair skinned she is perceived as white. She and her two jazz musician brothers, one very fair like her and another dark-skinned, are enmeshed in New York City's bohemian scene. The woman, an aspiring writer, has multiple affairs, one with an older white intellectual and another with a young white hipster, to the angry disapproval of her darker skinned brother. She ends up with a mild mannered black man, who is shocked by the woman's independence and bold sexuality. Cassavetes added jazz gravitas to the film,

⁸ Allan Kozinn, "Gunther Schuller Dies at 89; Composer Synthesized Classical and Jazz," *New York Times* (June 21, 2015) <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/arts/music/gunther-schuller-composer-who-synthesized-classical-jazz-music/html> [Accessed April 18, 2016].

⁹ Robert Frank, *Pull My Daisy* (New York: Steidl Publishing, 2008), 1-7; 65- 68.

which won the Critics Award at the 1960 Venice Film Festival, by attracting Charles Mingus to write its incidental music. It was Mingus's first film score.¹⁰ The New York scene produced ground-breaking fare and these works reflected how the city's leading figures in the performing and literary arts drew creative inspiration from jazz musicians and the writers and critics who extolled jazz.

Across the nation, jazz won the affection of middlebrow audiences, too. Dave Brubeck appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine (the only white jazz artist to be so honored) in 1954.¹¹ Big band jazz – a style despised by the Beats – was anointed as “highbrow,” with Duke Ellington's Orchestra performing at the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1951 and Louis Armstrong joining the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Leonard Bernstein conducting, in 1956.¹² George Wein launched the Newport Jazz Festivals in the mid-1950s, bringing jazz not only to middlebrow audiences but also to the Northeast's wealthy leisure classes.

Hollywood rekindled its romance with jazz. Frank Sinatra starred as a heroin-addicted jazz drummer in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955). Armstrong won a supporting role in *High Society* (1956), starring Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Grace Kelly. Duke Ellington bookended the decade with two impressive movie successes. He wrote the theme song for John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* in 1950 and scored the entire soundtrack for Otto Preminger's *Anatomy of a Murder* in 1959.

¹⁰ Leonard Maltin, “Notes” *Shadows* (1959), *Leonard Maltin Classic Movies Guide*, 2005. <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/89746/Shadows/notes.html> [Accessed December 27, 2017].

¹¹ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48.

¹² Terry Teachout, *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2010), 6-9.

Jazz had gained powerful fans among certain members of the political elite by the mid-1950s. Jazz critics John Wilson and Marshall Stearns held high-ranking positions within the U.S. State Department. Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., married to jazz pianist Hazel Scott, successfully lobbied for the Eisenhower Administration to underwrite international “goodwill” tours for artists such as Dizzy Gillespie. Even Vice President Richard Nixon counted himself as a jazz lover.¹³

On the literary front, African American novelist and former trumpeter Ralph Ellison published his first essay on jazz, “Living with Music,” in the December 1955 issue of *High Fidelity* magazine.¹⁴ The essay would draw a line in the sand between Ellison and allied African American proponents who argued that jazz was irrevocably rooted in Black culture and classical music admirers of jazz, such as Gunther Schuller, who believed jazz’s best compositions transcended its humble beginnings. Schuller’s main argument was that certain recorded jazz compositions had achieved more musical complexity and sophistication, which catapulted them into the realm of high culture. Ellison’s rebuttal to Schuller was that the best way to experience and understand jazz was to hear it performed “live.” Further, Ellison argued that one could not adopt jazz’s more sophisticated compositions and disown its blues-based danceable songs. All of it was jazz. All of it enriched American culture and shaped the identity of all Americans in Ellison’s thinking. The debate would rage on for decades, with critics Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch

¹³ Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 6-7 and 18.

¹⁴ Robert G. O’Meally, ed., *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002), 11.

continuing the Ellison line-of-reasoning and Whitney Balliett and Terry Teachout subscribing to Schuller's point of view.

However, there was little debate that jazz, by the mid-1950s, had gained popularity among American middle class and upper-class families of all races. The technological leap forward in audio recording aided jazz's renaissance. Long-playing high fidelity 33and 1/3 rpm albums were spacious sound canvasses upon which gifted jazz musicians – formerly constrained to tinny three-minute-long 78 rpm discs – could display their talents in sonically pleasing richness. Families purchased stereo consoles and proudly made them the center of entertaining in their homes. Duke Ellington's *Ellington Uptown in Hi-Fi* was a favorite test record for hi-fi salesmen hawking record players to potential buyers.¹⁵

Conversely, most highbrow and middle brow audiences were aghast at the new loud and lewd rock and roll embraced by American teenagers. Jazz, once the low-down music of brothels and speakeasies, was now tasteful and more intellectually sophisticated in their opinion. The well-heeled patrons who flocked by the thousands to the Newport Jazz festivals and the New York intellectuals who had been warming to jazz since the late 1940s found comfort by the mid-1950s in the music of Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong. This music evoked tradition. Even the once avant-garde bebopper Dizzy Gillespie – who also played to massive crowds at Newport on multiple occasions in the 1950s – seemed “safe” compared to Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley and Little Richard. As the United States entered the second half of the 1950s and

¹⁵ John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 311-312.

the 1960s, jazz artists, their producers and the critics who interpreted their music ascended to the apex of their prestige and influence in American society, especially among opinion leaders in culture and politics.

Jazz was at its modern peak, quality-wise, during the modern civil rights era. The artists who rose to stardom and the albums they released, starting in the late 1950s and ending in the mid-to-late 1960s, are recognizable to even an occasional jazz listener and boggle the mind of jazz enthusiasts. Here is a sampling of the albums, now considered jazz masterpieces, which were released just between 1956 and 1966: *Ellington at Newport '56* (Duke Ellington's best-selling album during his lifetime); *Ella Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook* by Ella Fitzgerald with Duke Ellington, *Little Girl Blue* by Nina Simone; *Giant Steps* by John Coltrane; *Kind of Blue* by the first great Miles Davis Quintet and the best-selling jazz album of all-time; *Shape of Things to Come* by Ornette Coleman; *Somethin' Else* by Cannonball Adderley; *Time Out* by Dave Brubeck, *Saxophone Colossus* by Sonny Rollins; *The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall* featuring Thelonious Monk; *The Hottest New Group in Jazz* by Lambert, Hendricks and Ross; *Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley* by Ms. Wilson and Mr. Adderley; *We Free Kings* by Rahsaan Roland Kirk; *Pastel Blues* by Nina Simone; *Seven Steps to Heaven* by the second great Miles Davis Quintet, which brought Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter to stardom,; *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane; and *Wild is The Wind* by Nina Simone, an album that included her Black feminist anthem, "Four Women."¹⁶

¹⁶ David Remnick, " 100 Essential Jazz Albums," *New Yorker* (May 19, 2008).
<https://www.newyorker.com/2008/05/19/100-essential-jazz-albums.html> [Accessed November 2, 2017].
 See also Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Oxford

Linking the Civil Rights Movement to African Nations' Campaigns for Sovereignty.

The late 1950s to the mid-1960s witnessed the concurrent maturation and expansion of the modern civil rights movement in the United States. This historic quest for racial justice by African Americans and the violent resistance with which their efforts were met consumed the nation and transfixed the larger world, especially Africans fighting to end European colonial control of their governments. During this same span of time, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Patrice Lumumba among several other nationalist leaders led independence campaigns to free their African nations from the colonial yoke. The leaders of the emerging African nations declared their solidarity with African Americans in the civil rights movement and with oppressed African-descended peoples in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.¹⁷

Several of these African leaders, Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal in particular, had admired the black writers and musicians of America for decades. They professed a cultural kinship with them. Other African leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, had attended historically black colleges in the United States before returning to their home nations. African American intellectual and cultural elites drew inspiration and hope from the success freedom fighters were having on the Continent. This dynamic was even more prevalent among a cadre of Diaspora-focused jazz artists and writers, such as Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. Relatedly, the more highly regarded

University Press, 2007) and Barry Kernfeld, ed., *The New Grove Encyclopedia of Jazz*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) for reference artist profiles and listing of major recorded works.

¹⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 107-110 and 140-145. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years*, 214. See also Elliott P. Skinner, "The Dialectic between Diasporas and Homelands" in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, Joseph E. Harris, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993), 33-37.

African American jazz musicians had gained powerful fans among certain members of the U.S. political elite by the mid-1950s. Jazz critics John Wilson and Marshall Stearns – the latter of whom would become a mentor to pioneering Pan Africanist pianist Randy Weston – held high-ranking positions within the U.S. State Department. Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., married to jazz pianist Hazel Scott, successfully lobbied for the Eisenhower Administration to underwrite international “goodwill” tours for artists such as Dizzy Gillespie.¹⁸ These goodwill tours of African nations further strengthened the mutual appreciation between the jazz artists and the ascendant African political elites.

Harnessing the Power of Song in the Modern Age

The explosive growth of commercial recording and radio in the second half of the 1920s obliterated the social context in which “Lift Every Voice and Sing” took root and became an enduring song of uplift among African Americans. The scions who ruled the young entertainment industry’s mightiest corporations sought to maximize profitability from the most talented composers and performers by marketing them as entertainers and entertainers *only*. They suppressed and censored unsolicited political statements and social commentaries by those musicians who attempted to use the power of song to challenge existing social, economic and political orthodoxies.

Ironically, the same mass communication technologies the record and radio broadcasting companies deftly exploited to fuel their rapid growth also could be employed to enable those defiant artists who were determined to reach national and even international audiences with messages imbedded in their music. Technology’s ability to help an artist

¹⁸ Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 6-7 and 18.

directly to convey a message to a larger audience included television. Louis Armstrong's dramatic performance of "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" on the national broadcast of *The Ed Sullivan Show* occurred just a month after the Montgomery bus boycott ended with the desegregation of municipal bus seating. Was Armstrong's performance of the song a lament of the racial inequities imposed on him and his people? Jazz biographer Terry Teachout believes that indeed it was. Armstrong "said nothing about the Montgomery boycott. He didn't have to. His music said all that needed saying, as it would when he played for a segregated audience of blacks in Georgia."¹⁹

Music's intrinsic appeal to humankind, amplified, projected and multiplied by modern technology, imbued the most gifted composers and performers with unprecedented power to not only entertain but also persuade the public. Among the first to recognize the potential social suasion popular recording artists wielded was the philosopher-essayist Alain Locke, who popularized the phrase the "New Negro" to refer to the generation of black artists and scholars who vaulted to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance era. Locke initially identified literary accomplishment as how African Americans could demonstrate their cultural and social worth to the larger society. He was the son of a black middle-class family who viewed jazz, at least initially, as a crude blues-based folk music created by the black working poor. Yet, as radio and record players made music an ever more present part of popular culture, Locke recognized that jazz musicians had become admired and potentially influential figures. Referring to jazz's surging popularity in the

¹⁹ Terry Teachout, *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong* (Boston: First Mariner Books, 2010), 328.

late 1920s and early 1930s, Locke mockingly called it a “jazz epidemic” rather than a “jazz revolution.”²⁰

As the prestige and influence of Harlem Renaissance writers waned during the Depression, Locke changed his position on jazz. Like James Weldon Johnson, Locke identified Ellington as an artist capable of producing jazz that was on par with classical music. “Super-jazz” was the term Locke used to describe Ellington’s long-form compositions. Although he still invested most of his hope in black literary achievement as indisputable proof of African Americans’ intellectual prowess and humanity, Locke by the 1930s was willing to acknowledge there were black composers capable of producing “classical jazz.” This evolution in his thinking helped further his argument that blacks were valuable contributors to American society and deserved to be seen and treated as equals to whites.

The Locke-Du Bois Divide on Politics in Art

Locke did not simply believe in “art for art’s sake.” His consistent position was blacks could achieve recognition as full members of American society only by producing exceptional, lasting works of art. Great art, in Locke’s thinking, had to be “free to pursue its own ends.” It had to be “free to choose either ‘individualistic expression’ or ‘group expression’.”²¹ Thus, it is not surprising an artist such as Ellington, who as early as the mid-1930s, had expressed his discomfort over being narrowly categorized as a “jazz” musician and who openly aspired to European-styled classical music, would draw Locke’s

²⁰ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc.: 1936), 81-83.

²¹ Alain Locke, “Art or Propaganda?” originally published in *Harlem*, Vol. 1, No.1 (November 1928). See also Nathan Irvin Huggins, ed., *Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 121.

attention and approval. Ellington, in Locke's opinion, was an exceptional artist who could ennoble the race by the sheer quality of his work and who did not have to resort to infusing his music with overt political themes. Locke decried the politicization of artistic expression and argued that "propaganda perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it."²²

W.E.B. Du Bois, on the other hand, famously noted that "all art is propaganda" in his "Criteria for Negro Art" speech, delivered to the 1926 Conference of the NAACP in Chicago. Du Bois was disgusted at the naiveté, as he deemed it, of African American intellectuals such as Locke. In Du Bois's estimation, they had settled for a "high minded program of literary and cultural achievement as a substitute for mass agitation, even as lynchings, anti-black riots and a resurgent Klan raged unabated well into the 1920s."²³ Du Bois had concluded it was the duty of the most gifted African Americans to defend the race's right to full citizenship.

Influenced by his Victorian America-era morals and elitist perspective, Du Bois took a dim view of Harlem Renaissance writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and Claude McKay's frequent depictions of the salacious side of life among the black working class. He felt their presentation of ribald vignettes made them complicit in confirming negative black stereotypes among white cultural and political elites. Du Bois nonetheless applauded their outrage at the continuous insults and injuries inflicted upon African Americans by white institutions and people. In this aspect of their art, DuBois supported

²² Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" in *Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, 122.

²³ Kevin Gaines, "W.E.B. Du Bois," in Cary D. Wintz, ed., *Harlem Speaks: A Living History of the Harlem Renaissance*, (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2006), 332.

the young writers because he saw them as willing propagandists or advocates for African Americans. He viewed exceptional writers and artists, with the leading jazz musicians specifically added later, as valuable members of the “Talented Tenth” of the race. Du Bois argued that the black writer and artist possessed a distinct perception of America, what he termed “second sight” or “double consciousness.” Du Bois theorized that it emanated from being forced to experience life as a member of a disparaged, unwanted population of former African-descended slaves but still having a world outlook based on living immersed in American society, despite not being seen as a legitimate member of it because of the same racialized past.²⁴ Technology deepened African Americans’ immersion in U.S. culture. National newspapers, telephones and radio programs allowed them to experience the same unfolding political, social and cultural phenomena, in general, as non-black Americans.

Du Bois was also convinced this distinct perception of America, based on double consciousness, gave the African American artist the ability to produce works of universally meaningful expression. Du Bois felt it was the black artist’s responsibility to use this unique capability to reveal “truth” and “beauty.”²⁵ By so doing, the black artist would dispel white doubts about the full humanity of the race. If Du Bois’s dogged insistence on pro-black propaganda appears strident, it should be noted that, as late as 1937, upper-middle brow publications such as the *New Yorker* magazine rejected aspects of Du Bois’s scholarship. In its review of Du Bois’s socio-political tome, *Black Reconstruction*, the *New Yorker* snidely noted “the author held the ‘odd view, in distinction to most previous writers,

²⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1903; republished in 1989), xv and 6-10.

²⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” *The Crisis* Volume 32 (October 1926), 290-297

that the Negro is a human being.”²⁶ With technology providing the means for widespread dissemination of their work, Du Bois believed the black artist and writer could counter the white supremacist propaganda embedded in history by producing art of indisputable quality that would compel recognition from white America. As Du Bois stated in his 1926 speech to the NAACP, “some one touches the race on the shoulder and says, ‘He did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro...He is just human.’”²⁷

Augmenting Du Bois’s pro-black political perspective with a pro-black cultural viewpoint was Langston Hughes, a jazz-affiliated man of letters who wrote extensively about the civil rights movement from 1955 to 1965. Hughes believed the humanity of African Americans could be expressed best to the world by artists who loved themselves and embraced their unique racial culture. To the formalists such as Locke and his poetic peer Countee Cullen, he leveled an eloquent rebuke in an essay entitled “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” which was published also in 1926 in *The Nation* magazine. The essay was an obvious slap at Countee Cullen, who had publicly criticized black dialect poetry and folk art as crude. To prove their merit, Cullen urged the leading black writers of Harlem Renaissance to master Western poetic forms such as the sonnets, odes, ballads and free verse. The twenty-four-year -old Hughes countered with this declaration:

I am ashamed of the black poet who says, ‘I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet,’ as though his own racial world were not as interesting as any other world. An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he must choose. Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith penetrate the closed ears of colored near intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. We

²⁶ Kevin Gaines, “W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Harlem Speaks: A Living History of the Harlem Renaissance*, Cary D. Wintz, ed. (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2006), 337.

²⁷ Gaines, “W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Harlem Speaks*, 333.

younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter.²⁸

During his Harlem Renaissance heyday and thereafter, Hughes unapologetically used his writing to celebrate African American people, their culture and their communities. In the early 1950s, Hughes would find himself embroiled in an eerily similar public debate. As the winds of the modern civil rights movement began to build, he would cross swords with James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison over whether racial politics could or should be the chief motivation for any substantial work of art.²⁹ In seeking a framework to assess the varied perspectives of jazz artists and writers such as Hughes and Ellison on race in America, the Locke-Du Bois divide over propaganda in black art provides a useful complement to E. Franklin Frazier's "effacement- glorification" theory of racial identity.

Ideology Matters

Another key objective of this historical narrative is an honest evaluation of the different ideological approaches and debates among the "jazz advocates" regarding the best way forward for the civil rights movement and campaigns for independence among the emerging African nations. It is anticipated that three ideological themes will emerge in their advocacy:

Integrationism: Adopted by the NAACP soon after its founding in 1908, this ideology equated racial segregation to social oppression and economic inequality. African Americans decried the shoddy public accommodations they were forced to tolerate and the

²⁸ Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation* 122 (June 23, 1926), pp.692-694.

²⁹ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967 I Dream A World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 200-206.

poor public services to which they had access, if they had any access to these services at all. Their apt description of their plight was that the dominant white political system had relegated them to “second-class citizenship.” It became the motive force behind the organization’s legal campaign to integrate public schools, which led to *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in May 1954.³⁰ The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. embraced the ideology during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956. In 1959, he identified it as the objective of his call for an escalating campaign of non-violent resistance. King reasoned that “constructive integration” promoted “genuine intergroup and interpersonal living.”³¹ In King’s vision, face-to-face interactions in the workplace, in schools, in travel and in public gatherings were the most effective means of debunking hateful myths and generating empathetic understanding among the races. Integrationism, in terms of its strategy and tactics, relies on legalistic processes and direct action, including non-violent protest, to compel federal authorities to abolish racially unjust laws, black voter disenfranchisement and other systematic discrimination by state and local governments and private corporations.

Pan Africanism: Chief proponents included W.E.B. Dubois throughout his long life in academia and activism and Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmichael) after his adoption of more militant activism in 1966.³² The 2015 edition of *The Encyclopedia*

³⁰ Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1998), 16-27.

³¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Future of Integration,” Speech Delivered at The University of Iowa, Wednesday, November 11, 1959, Iowa City, Iowa. The Archive: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-violent Social Change. <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/future-integration-1.html> [Accessed February 9, 2018].

³² Penial E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2014), 213-218.

Britannica defines Pan Africanism as “the idea that peoples of African descent have common interests and should be unified.”³³ This 2015 definition is substantially the same, but far less fervently stated, as the one proclaimed by Trinidad-born black activist Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Toure) in a 1970 speech he gave at Morehouse College Gymnasium in Atlanta: “Pan-Africanism is grounded in the belief that Africa is one; the artificial borders being the result of the Berlin Conference, where European powers carved up the continent and divided the spoils among themselves. Pan-Africanism is grounded in the belief that all African peoples, wherever we may be, are one, and as Dr. Nkrumah says, ‘belong to the African nation.’”³⁴

This more assertive concept of Pan-Africanism had been widely embraced by young African American activists on college campuses by the late 1950s. Hundreds of continental African exchange students, especially those matriculating at historically black colleges and universities, exchanged ideas and argued social change strategies with the same young Black Americans who would go on to become members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the early 1960s. Another argument made in this dissertation is that intellectual cross-pollination across the “Black Atlantic”³⁵ informed the activism of black leaders such as Carmichael as well as the artistic expression of several jazz artists and writers.

³³ Peter Kuryla, “Pan-Africanism,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/664787/Pan-Africanism.html> [Accessed March 27, 2015].

³⁴ Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1971), 221.

³⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 195-199.

Black Nationalism: The activist H. Rap Brown promoted this ideology. After his pilgrimage to Mecca, el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz (formerly Malcolm X) subscribed to it, as did poet, jazz critic, essayist and playwright Amiri Baraka. It is a political and cultural belief system centered on a racial definition of national identity. It celebrates Black Americans' African heritage and rejects Western European culture as exploitative and oppressive to African descended peoples. It encompasses the belief that Blacks fare better when they establish their own institutions and businesses but is not as extreme as Black Separatism, which espouses the establishment of a separate "nation" for African Americans, i.e., a reservation system comparable to that held by Native Americans or a territory specially allocated for a Black population only, as once envisioned by leaders of the Nation of Islam: Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X/ Malik el-Shabazz and later by Stokely Carmichael.

The term "racial justice," as used in this dissertation, refers to the manifestation of goals and objectives intended to establish, defend and advance social, political, economic and cultural opportunities and equitable treatment for African Americans, continental Africans and other African-descended peoples in the Diaspora. While it is recognized that other so-called racial groups, ethnic and religious minorities have suffered injustice in the United States and elsewhere in the modern world, this work's focus is directed at the injustice wrought against Blacks.

As used in this text, "Black" includes continental Africans, African-descended people in the Diaspora and African Americans. Although the overwhelming focus is on African American artists, because the advocacy examined is sometimes international in scope and includes all three groups, the term "Black" is generally used to encompass all

the “people of color” impacted. While advocacy’s most forceful form, direct action or “activism,” is included in its definition here, so are its less confrontational manifestations, such as spoken protest, written commentary and advocacy contained in artistic expression, specifically in the music the world identifies as jazz.

Literature Review: Why a Dissertation on This Subject

Memoirs, dozens of essays and online blogs chronicle the exploits of jazz artists who were outspoken in favor of civil rights. Yet, extended historical investigations of racial justice advocacy by *both* jazz artists and jazz-influenced writers have been few and far between. *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (2000) by David Margolick is one of the rare efforts. *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics and Activists* (2002) by Eric Porter is another. The “Black Arts Movement” and its uncompromising identity politics in jazz have also been the subject of academic inquiry with such works as Iain Anderson’s *This is Our Music* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

The previous work whose theme is most closely aligned to this dissertation is a book by Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Dr. Monson focuses on how the social pressures generated by the civil rights movement compelled the most prominent jazz stars to join the fray by engaging in direct action, giving fund-raising concerts for the NAACP or embarking on State Department-sponsored tours of African nations. She thoroughly documents the artists’ activism. Her book is a critical essay, to use her own words, on “understanding how issues of race mediated between the aesthetic and political views of

the modern.”³⁶ Dr. Monson’s book serves as a foundation upon which this narrative seeks to build. In addition, this narrative identifies what milestones civil rights events and African anti-colonial campaigns inspired artists to create works and whether those works were meant to influence wider opinion, criticize political actors or celebrate black accomplishment and resolve. An assessment will also be made of the quality of these polemical works. Do some transcend the politics of the moment and reveal universal themes of human aspiration, pain, joy and longing? It is suspected that at least a few of the examined works of advocacy in artistic expression will rise to the afore-mentioned standard.

Returning to a review of the existing literature on this subject, significant instances of racial justice advocacy in the United States by iconic artists, from Charles Mingus to Abbey Lincoln to Nina Simone, have been siloed in biographies and autobiographies or have been presented as anecdotal or supporting material in historical narratives on other subjects, such as jazz’s evolution into a modern art or The Cold War. *The Brothers* by Stephen Kinzer ³⁷ and Penny M. Von Eschen’s *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* ³⁸ are two illustrations of the latter. In these works, the authors acknowledge the racial pride and Pan African empathies of the jazz artists involved (Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong among them) yet still portray them as pawns in the global Cold War chess game played by the U.S. State Department and CIA. African

³⁶ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17.

³⁷ Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013).

³⁸ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

American jazz artists were keenly aware of their popularity and the platform it afforded them to speak out in support of justice and equity for their fellow African Americans at home and their African and African-descended brethren abroad. Further, they chose *when* to advocate and *how* to advocate in the context of the social and political forces that impacted their personal lives and affiliated communities.

Jazz artists and writers produced significant statements of advocacy at critical junctures in racialized political confrontations and turmoil. One case in point is the production and release of Max Roach's free jazz/ African Diaspora- inflected album, *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, in 1960. Nat Hentoff, a leading jazz and social critic, produced the album. The album featured Afro-Cuban and African musicians and contained multiple references to apartheid South Africa and the civil rights struggles in the United States. The album's cover features a photo of a defiant Greensboro Four peering at the camera from the now famous Woolworth's lunch counter at which they staged a successful months-long sit-in. Hentoff, Roach and his wife, Abbey Lincoln, released this album in the same year of the Sharpeville Massacre and the Freedom Riders' first harrowing Greyhound gauntlets into the Deep South. The timing was not a coincidence.

To establish balance, this dissertation will weigh the leading arguments during the period examined which opposed artists using their music, prose and visibility to advocate for political outcomes and proposed social remedies. James Baldwin, himself an outspoken supporter of the civil rights movement, earlier in his career leveled a stinging argument against artists using "their art" for political purposes in "Everybody's Favorite Protest Novel," contained in his collection of essays, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955). His criticisms of Richard Wright can easily be applied to the jazz artists and critics who decided to issue

political statements in their art. Baldwin's complaint, prior to 1957, was that by succumbing to the urge to protest racial injustice, the artist capitulated to the larger society's desire to reduce them to their "Negro-ness" and deny them full humanity. Baldwin observed that "protest art" seldom succeeded in its aims and was often "a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped in the sunlit prison of the American dream."³⁹

As noted earlier, Alain Locke likewise condemned post-Harlem Renaissance black writers who were being asked to contribute pro-Left plays and essays to Popular Front-sponsored theater groups in the 1930s. Polemics were corrosive to the artistic aesthetic, warned Locke. Although Locke excused artists and musicians' celebration of their blackness, he held a dim view of propagandistic works intended to agitate the audience to action or impose a point of view. Locke dismissed it as bad art. Locke stated: "My chief objection to propaganda, apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it."⁴⁰ Artists, by producing works intended to make a statement on the polemics of the moment, betrayed their higher calling to create art that constituted beauty, revealed lasting truths and that enriched its consumers. In seeking to convince the white majority of the beauty and worth of African Americans, Locke advised that "psalms will be more effective sermons."⁴¹ Like Locke, Ralph Ellison was profoundly uncomfortable with protest being the main point of

³⁹ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 19.

⁴⁰ Alain Locke, "Art of Propaganda?" *Harlem*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1928).
<https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/Locke-art-or-propaganda.html> [Accessed December 26, 2017].

⁴¹ Ibid.

artistic expression. He believed art's purpose was not to confront but transcend "those social conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice."⁴²

To return to the question of why certain jazz artists and writers chose to advocate for social justice, they engaged in this advocacy because they believed, like African American sociologist and feminist, Patricia Hill Collins, in the power of "intellectual activism." They believed ideas – properly harnessed and directed – can advance social justice.⁴³ Do polemics and aesthetics not mix, as Locke and later Ellison argued decades ago? Or can a jazz composition, such as "Strange Fruit," be a persuasive statement for justice and a great work of art at the same time?

What "Pride and Protest in Letters and Song: Jazz Artists and Writers during the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965" will add to the existing canon of scholarship on jazz artists is a traditional narrative history – focused on a core ten-year span of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s – of the most significant acts of racial justice advocacy via their art by jazz musicians and the writers who allied with them. The focus here is on whether the examined polemical expression was *more* than propaganda or an individual opinion on the racial conflicts of the era. Thus, a key question the dissertation asks is whether any of the songs or literary works also communicated something intangible but illuminating about humanity, thereby realizing the goal Du Bois challenged artists to pursue in 1926.

To achieve these objectives, the approach taken here will be to: (1) Identify milestone confrontations during the civil rights movement; (2) Examine the profiled artists'

⁴² Ralph Ellison, "Sound and the Mainstream/Blues People," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1953, 1964), 253-254.

⁴³ Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), xi.

personal histories, political perspectives and motivations; and (3) Assess the character of the advocacy these artists expressed in reacting to the civil rights event and the quality of the artistic works which were the medium for their commentaries.

Jazz artists and writers' advocacy in artistic expression during this era, whether it takes the form of music, literature or commentary imbedded in activism, are remnants of the civil rights movement itself. Most of the recognizable civil rights anthems fall within either gospel or folk genres. Songs such as "We Shall Overcome," "Freedom Road," "We Shall Not Be Moved," "If I Had a Hammer," and "Blowin' in the Wind" exude themes of courage, determination, altruism and empathy. They confirm American ideals. There is a fondness for these songs among political liberals and moderates because most of them have concluded, in hindsight, that the modern civil rights movement in the United States was successful. It did produce new Constitutional protections for racial minorities and women. But, from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s, victory was far from assured. Multiple setbacks plagued the movement. Advances along the road to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 were literally soaked in the blood of martyrs. Every step of the way, the modern civil rights movement fought determined resisters who wielded weapons of economic deprivation, deception, hatred, terror and murder.

Gospel and folk songs memorialize the valor and vision of the activists. But, they hardly capture the chaos and cruelty of the modern civil rights movement's pivotal battles. The music and prose by the jazz artists and writers examined in the following pages will further characterize the complex nature of the movement and how black cultural leaders reacted to its evolution. In the pursuit of achieving this objective, not only the famous songs, books and poems are significant. The lesser-known works of advocacy are also

important because they offer additional authentication of the fears, anger and hopes held by the artists while the many iconic civil rights confrontations were happening. These more obscure examples of advocacy in artistic expression present evidence which the listener or reader can interrogate to discern more detailed conclusions about their creators' perspectives on the movement. The persons who bequeathed these tangible works to history were among the most gifted of their time. A fresh assessment of what the most accomplished group of artists of the era chose to express in their words and music about the most significant social movement of Twentieth Century America is worth adding to the record.

CHAPTER 2: ELLINGTON AND HUGHES, THE PATRIARCHS

People who think that of me have not been listening to our music. For a long time, social protest and pride in the history of the Negro have been the most significant themes in what we've done.

Duke Ellington ¹

Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes, born in 1899 and 1902, were well into their fifties when the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling shot tremors through America's social and political terrain. Both had risen to fame during the Harlem Renaissance. Ellington and Hughes's storied, achievement-laden careers in jazz and letters, respectively, had made them beloved icons of African American communities across the nation and in much of the larger white society as well. However, exciting new black literary talents such as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Gwendolyn Brooks had eclipsed Hughes by 1955. Bebop's Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk had stolen the jazz spotlight from Ellington. Yet, these two men, each old enough to be the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s father, were among the first and most committed supporters of the young civil rights movement King would soon lead.

Ellington and Hughes enjoyed career rebirths coincident with the dawn of the movement. The outrage in African American communities over the escalating violence and social repression of blacks in the South created fresh opportunities for Hughes, a stalwart

¹ Duke Ellington, responding to critics who questioned whether he deserved to be awarded the 1959 Spingarn Medal, the highest award the NAACP bestows in essay by Nat Hentoff, "This Cat Needs No Pulitzer Prize," *New York Times Magazine* (12 September 1965), p.70. See also Claudia Roth Pierpont, "Black, Brown, and Beige: Duke Ellington's Music and Race in America," *New Yorker* (May 17, 2010). <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/05/17/black-brown-beige> [Accessed November 6, 2017]

“race man,”² to seize national attention with his essays and verse. From his redoubt as a weekly columnist for the *Chicago Defender*, Hughes fired the first cannon of national black outrage over the brutal Emmett Till murder in late summer 1955.³

A new appetite for jazz among white elite and middle-class audiences, whetted by the availability of ear-pleasing audio technology, benefitted Ellington, whose sonorous music could be better appreciated for its virtuosity in stereophonic sound on long-playing albums. What Ellington and Hughes gave to the fledgling civil rights movement was access to their East Coast and Hollywood network of admirers, admirers who were members of influential, wealthy, liberal-leaning elites. They helped the movement gain national prominence and amplify its message. Why and how did Ellington and Hughes gain such a platform from which to advocate for racial justice? The answer is that it was jazz’s cultural moment. Ellington was its foremost musician. Hughes was its foremost literary champion.

Critic Leonard Feather argued that jazz in its evolution as an art form had forced inter-racial understanding and empathy among those who created it and enjoyed it. In his 1957 publication, *The Book of Jazz: A Guide to the Entire Field*, Feather included an insightful chapter entitled “Race and Jazz.” Feather deduced why Jim Crow America was so deeply threatened by jazz. The reason was hiding in plain sight. But, it took Feather, an upper-class English outsider, to identify it. His argument was the allure of jazz, ever since

² Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967, I Dream a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 258-261.

³ Langston Hughes, “Concerning a Great Mississippi Writer and the Southern Negro” by in *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender*, Christopher C. De Santis, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 91-92.

its black musicians introduced it to the larger white world via performance, recordings and the radio in the 1920s, had encouraged, and even compelled, the “mixing of the races.” Years later, another jazz critic, Nat Hentoff, corroborated Feather’s argument by declaring that the race-mixing triggered by jazz had “hastened” the advent of the modern civil rights movement.”⁴ For their part, what Ellington and Hughes had long realized was: there is no greater weapon one can wield against the propaganda of hate, of pseudo-scientific and intellectual racism than the human understanding generated by person-to-person familiarization.

Jazz was the bridge to this familiarization. In New England during the early 1950s, white cultural and economic elites’ affection for jazz increased their understanding of social forces impacting black Americans. This same coterie of jazz aficionados recognized its leading musicians as intellectuals and encouraged them to infuse social commentary into their artistic expression. By the mid-1950s, the resurgent careers and racial views of Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes gave them considerable suasion when speaking on behalf of “their people.” They relished the opportunity and seized it. But, before examining their personal histories, which propelled them into the vanguard of the dawning civil rights movement, it is important to understand the crucial series of events that allowed jazz artists and writers to access the inner circle of thought leaders and opinion-shapers in mid-twentieth century America.

⁴ Nat Hentoff, “How Jazz Helped Hasten the Civil-Rights Movement,” *Wall Street Journal* (January 15, 2009) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123197292128083217.html> [Accessed October 28, 2017].

Lenox and Newport Set the Stage for Jazz's Popularity in the 1950s

Beginning in the early 1950s, the leading cultural writers regularly met, presented their ideas and debated jazz's history and social role. In a significant development, the writers and critics invited the leading jazz musicians to participate with them, as equals if not better, in these forums. A small, jazz-loving group of wealthy white elites hosted them in their tony suburban New England enclaves of Lenox, Massachusetts and Newport, Rhode Island. Economically, racially and socially, the locations are as far away as one could get from Topeka, Kansas in 1954 or Money, Mississippi and Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

For aware, ambitious jazz writers and musicians, the Lenox Music Inn and the Newport Jazz Festival residencies and roundtables in the mid-1950s were their "Highlander Folk School," to reference the Tennessee institution that taught civil disobedience philosophy and tactics to Septima Clark, Rosa Parks and John Lewis. From the outset, the upper class, liberal organizers of both the Lenox and Newport jazz workshops and forums encouraged intellectual discourse on social issues among invited panelists and musical experimentation from the jazz artists who came to play or lead musical workshops. Dizzy Gillespie found the setting to be "just ideal for modern jazz musicians, where musicians didn't have to compete with customers ordering drinks and were not pushed around musically to satisfy commercial demands."⁵

The many masterful performances by jazz greats at the venue have lodged the Newport Festival in popular memory as the epicenter of jazz's newfound cultural gravitas

⁵ Dizzy Gillespie [with Al Fraser], *To Be, or Not...To Bop* (New York: De Capo Press, 1979/1985), 401,404.

and reinvigorated commercial sales in the mid-1950s. However, the Newport founders modeled their successful venture on an earlier and lesser known initiative by a wealthy New York couple, Stephanie and Philip Barber. The transplanted New Yorkers bought an estate in the Berkshires from a Spanish heiress in 1950. With the ambition of creating a jazz and folk music equivalent of the Tanglewood classical music scene, they christened their new Lenox property the Music Inn and soon hired well-regarded folk music expert Alan Lomax and jazz critic Marshall Stearns to host a series of music seminars.

To attract an audience, they invited an eclectic roster of artists, including John Lee Hooker, Pete Seeger, Brownie McGhee, Mahalia Jackson, Dizzy Gillespie and Billy Taylor. They wooed an equally diverse group of writers, among them African American folklorist Willis James from Spelman College, Hughes, Nat Hentoff, music critic Gunther Schuller and semanticist S.I. Hayakawa. A few years after launching the roundtable discussions, the Barbers established the Lenox School of Jazz and offered residencies that attracted boundary-stretching artists such as Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus, Dave Brubeck and a rising new jazz pianist at the time, Randy Weston.⁶ The Barbers' racially integrated gatherings raised hackles among the mostly white and wealthy residents of the Berkshires. "Black people were not popular in New England," recalls Stephanie Barber. "In the early days, when we overflowed our own capacity we had problems finding beds at local inns for artists who happened to be black. People in the village did not approve of what we were doing. But in good New England

⁶John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 216-217.

fashion, they believed we had the right to do it.”⁷ In 1955, the Barbers staged the first jazz concert performances at the Music Inn that were open to the paying public. They were undoubtedly inspired to expand their offerings after witnessing the inaugural success of the jazz concert presented one hundred eighteen miles southeast of Lenox in the historic naval town of Newport.

A Boston jazz deejay named Nat Hentoff helped the visionary promoter and jazz pianist George Wein organize the first Newport Jazz Festival in 1954. As it was with Lenox four years earlier, a wealthy white couple made the venture possible. Louis Lorillard, a tobacco millionaire and his wife, Elaine Guthrie Lorillard, had attempted to stage an outdoor classical music festival in the early 1950s and it flopped because the New England elite already had Tanglewood as a premier classical outdoor music event. Enter Wein. He became convinced a professionally presented jazz concert would be a commercial success after he witnessed the growing interest among whites attending several Lenox jazz workshops, seminars and roundtable discussions – some of which featured Hentoff as a presenter. Wein enchanted the Lorillards with his vision of thrilling jazz performed under the sun and stars. The Lorillards agreed to underwrite the inaugural festival, which was staged on July 17 and 18, 1954. Wein presented the concerts at the Newport Casino under a band shell designed by the jazz-loving architect, Hsio Wen Shih. The savvy Hentoff had recommended a who’s who of jazz to perform at the inaugural festival. The Dizzy Gillespie Quintet, Ella Fitzgerald, Gerry Mulligan and Oscar Peterson graced the stage on the

⁷ Seth Rogovoy, “The Life and Times of Music Inn,” *Berkshire Magazine*, summer 1955, 34.

opening night. Billie Holiday, Erroll Garner, Stan Kenton, Lee Konitz and the Gene Krupa Trio were among the stars who performed on the second day. Nearly fourteen thousand jazz fans and curious onlookers attended, an improbable aggregation of “hipsters, bluebloods, rebels and hooligans,” as cultural historian John Gennari called them. Wein and the Lorillards knew they had struck a major chord that would resonate in popular culture for years to come.⁸

The first jazz music lecture held at Newport in 1954 drew an estimated one thousand attendees who listened to a panel discussion on “The Place of Jazz in American Culture.”⁹ In the ensuing years, the producers invited several African American writers known for their interest in jazz, Langston Hughes chief among them, to present papers and participate in roundtable discussions affiliated with the Newport Jazz Festival. By its third year of presentation, 1956, the Newport Jazz Festival attracted over 25,000 people, almost all of them white, to hear both traditional and modern jazz. The festival had become such a magnet for top tier performers that its organizers expanded the concert to three days: Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Veteran participant Hughes found himself amused and fascinated by middle-to-upper-class white people’s emotional response to what he called “black” music. The spectacle inspired Hughes to write and present one of his most socially and racially inclusive essays, “Jazz as Communication,” for a panel discussion held on July 6, 1956.¹⁰ The Newport Jazz Festival had already drawn the attention of Hollywood filmmakers as well. A few days after Hughes’s panel discussion, MGM released the

⁸ Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 225-229.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 254.

romantic musical, *High Society*, starring Grace Kelly, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, with a cameo appearance by Louis Armstrong. The film was shot in Newport and used a jazz festival attended by upper-class whites as one of its plot mechanisms.

By 1955, the Lenox School of Music seminars and, to a lesser extent, the Newport workshops had become forums for the exchange of ideas between jazz writers and musicians on one hand and liberal, empathetic white elites, on the other. The Lenox and Newport jazz roundtables popularized jazz, its roots and cultural import as topics of intellectual discourse. More significant still is the Barbers and Lorillards' unprecedented philanthropy, without which the Lenox Music Inn concerts, the Newport Jazz Festival and the associated workshops and seminars would not have been possible. Their patronage illustrates, in microcosm, how wealthy liberal democrats in the 1950s supplanted socialist organizations as the most reliable allies of outspoken jazz artists and racial justice advocates.

The Popular Front leaders and sympathizers who earlier applauded Langston Hughes's radical poetry and helped promote Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" took issue with the integrationist strategy and tactics the civil rights movement embraced after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Taylor Branch emphasized in his book, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, that the Communist Party "scorned" post- *Brown* efforts to integrate schools, the Montgomery bus boycott and black voter registration drives in the South. "In the prevailing wisdom laid down from Moscow, integration was a

‘revisionist’ pursuit based on the false hope of progress without world revolution.”¹¹ The American Communist Party’s uncompromising position made it easy for thought leaders in jazz and civil rights to forge new alliances with liberal-minded, wealthy white elites. These elites shared the jazz artists and activists’ idealistic vision of what America could be, whether they were the Barbers and Lorillards or Stanley Levison, who provided invaluable financial support and strategic advice to the young Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the months following the Montgomery bus boycott.

The always blunt-spoken Charles Mingus remembered the period as the time when jazz musicians, especially modernists, pivoted to a “progressive” white audience. Some educated blacks remained jazz fans, according to Mingus, but most black people felt a greater affinity to gospel and rhythm & blues.¹² Jazz had become the music of educated white and black elites, in Mingus’s opinion. Yet, those same elites would help spread the popularity of jazz down to middle class audiences, audiences who would buy Mingus’s albums. This burgeoning middle-class audience for jazz did not come about by happenstance.

After World War Two, veterans on the G.I. Bill deluged college campuses. As the university systems around the country “fattened up on cold war educational investments, they developed cultural infrastructure – art studios, concert halls, film editing facilities, etc. – to service the interests of both students and the surrounding middle-class populations.”¹³ Postsecondary institutions began offering courses on jazz and music schools began

¹¹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 209.

¹² John F. Goodman, *Mingus Speaks* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 11-12.

¹³ Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 212.

teaching jazz in the mid-1950s. Several of the instructors were members of the World War Two generation and jazz was their favorite popular music. They, in turn, created a new generation of jazz fans: the college students of the 1950s and early 1960s. As John Gennari noted, “Student musician numbers grew so markedly that music trade publications (*Down Beat* and *Billboard* most significantly) targeted the college market with advertisement for musical instruments, talent agencies, and record labels.”¹⁴ Incidentally, no jazz artist of the era capitalized on the burgeoning college market more than Dave Brubeck, himself a World War Two veteran. Before any major booking agent realized it, Brubeck’s savvy wife and unofficial manager, Iola, saw the earning potential of performing on primarily white, liberal college campuses in the 1950s.¹⁵ Brubeck skyrocketed to national fame and appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1954 largely on the momentum generated by his sold-out college tours.

Technological advances in audio recording, as noted in the introduction, helped boost jazz artists, whose virtuoso performances and textured arrangements could be heard in greater clarity, to unprecedented popularity from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. Upper class and middle-class whites, newly entranced by jazz, could savor it in “high fidelity” on 33 and 1/3 long-albums played on stereo consoles in the comfort of their homes. Students could for the first time in history listen to jazz in their dormitory rooms on portable record players.

¹⁴ Gennari, 212.

¹⁵ “Brubeck’s Real Manager,” Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of Pacific Library. See also Peter Keepnews, “Iola Brubeck, 90, Collaborator and Wife of Jazz Pianist,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2014, Page A26.

The music's commercial success and heightened cultural standing gave not just the writers but the *jazz musicians* a "voice" that thought leaders and politicians would at least hear if not heed. This development was unprecedented. The Lenox and Newport experiences, which helped establish jazz as an American treasure, elevated articulate jazz musicians to the heights of artists and thinkers. In joining the music's writers, what would the jazz artists say, how would they say it, where and to whom? Tens of thousands of those same educated whites and blacks Mingus identified earlier would purchase the new albums of his hero, Duke Ellington. Ellington's career resurrection had begun in 1953 with his crossover hit co-written with Billy Strayhorn, "Satin Doll." The song reached number twenty-seven on the *Billboard* popular music chart.¹⁶ It introduced Ellington to a new generation of listeners. The doo wop group, The Gaylords, covered it and bluesman Bill Doggett's version of "Satin Doll" became a jukebox staple in working-class black neighborhood bars and nightclubs. Duke Ellington's triumphant concert at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival signaled his renewed stature as an artist to middle class and upper class white audiences as well. Atoning for its earlier slight of the reigning jazz composer of the 20th Century, *Time* magazine honored the jazz maestro with a cover illustration of his own in August 1956. The reinvigorated Ellington had something to say beyond his music. He would use his cultural status and popularity to support the young civil rights leader whom he believed held great promise: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

¹⁶ "Satin Doll (1953)," <http://jazzstandards.com/compositions-0/satindoll.html>. [Accessed December 30, 2017]. See also Steve Sullivan, *Encyclopedia of Great Popular Song Recordings* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 292; and Joel Whitburn's *The Comparison Book 1954-1982*. Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc., 2015.

Ellington's Quest to Tell the Triumphal Tale of Black Americans

On December 5, 1956, Duke Ellington topped the bill of a fund-raising concert to help retire the debts owed by the Montgomery Improvement Association. Ellington likely savored this return to center stage on behalf of the cause. In the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, Duke Ellington had donated his talents to the fundraising efforts of multiple civil rights causes from the Scottsboro Boys defense fund to NAACP, netting the organizations tens of thousands of dollars in proceeds. One of the most critical fundraisers Ellington headlined was in January 1951, when his orchestra appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City to benefit the cash-strapped NAACP Legal Defense Fund as it prepared its fateful challenge to school desegregation.¹⁷ Unfortunately, he and the flagship advocacy group had an ugly falling out later in 1951 when the Richmond, Virginia chapter of the NAACP threatened to picket Ellington for performing in front of a racially segregated audience there. Stung by the protest, the usually unflappable maestro canceled the performance and lashed out at the NAACP. In a subsequent interview with the *St. Louis Argus*, Ellington huffed that most Negroes “ain’t ready” to combat segregation. His remarks created an uproar that spread through black newspapers like wildfire. The Baltimore *Afro-American* ran the headline: “DUKE ELLINGTON’S VIEWS ON JIM CROW SHOCK NATION: MAESTRO SAYS ‘WE AIN’T READY YET’.”¹⁸ Ellington wrote a three-page rebuttal in which he defended his long and demonstrated commitment

¹⁷ John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 266-267. See also Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 154-157.

¹⁸ “Duke Ellington’s Views...” *Afro-American*, December 1, 1951, p. 5. See also: “Boycott is Asked of Duke Ellington at Mosque Sunday,” *Richmond News Leader*, January 22, 1951. “Ellington Concert Off,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1951.

to racial justice for African Americans. Nonetheless, Ellington's former close relationship with the NAACP became one in which both sides viewed the other with suspicion. The estrangement lingered for years.

However, in 1955, a new front opened in the struggle for civil rights in the South. Its warriors used direct action and grass roots activism as their chief weapons, not litigation by lawyers. Ella Baker, Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin had organized a series of fundraisers through "In Friendship," a New York City-based coalition formed to direct economic aid to the fledgling civil rights movement in the South. Bayard Rustin used the outrage over Emmett Till's murder to raise enough East Coast philanthropists to establish In Friendship. As 1956 unfolded, helping the Montgomery Bus Boycott organizers succeed in breaking transit segregation became their number one priority. By the fall of 1956, Ellington had enjoyed a stunning commercial comeback. *Ellington in Hi-Fi* had become his biggest selling album of his career. Ellington and His Orchestra had thrilled the standing room only crowd at Newport in July. And, on August 20th of that year, his weathered but still regal visage graced the cover of *Time*.

His resurgence is why Rustin, Baker and Levison had Ellington at the top of their wish list of stars who could perform at fundraisers for the civil rights efforts afoot in the South. On the one-year anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Ellington joined Coretta Scott King and the new international singing sensation, Harry Belafonte, in an evening performance at New York Manhattan Center that raised nearly \$2,000.¹⁹ While it seems a paltry sum in today's economy, \$2,000 in 1956 was equivalent to \$17,912 in 2018

¹⁹ In Friendship, Memo, February 17, 1956, NAACPP-DLC.

currency and more than enough money to purchase a new Ford sedan. This aid came at a crucial juncture after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on November 13th of that year that Montgomery's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional.²⁰ The carpool drivers participating in the boycott had been beaten down by economic retaliation from the local White Citizens Council. These participants could not feed their families nor pay utility bills, mortgages and rents. The December 5, 1956 Ellington-Belafronte-Coretta Scott King concert generated two far more important benefits for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: it established a channel for future philanthropy for his efforts among sympathetic Northeastern white liberal economic and social elites and it acquainted King with Ellington. Ellington would not march on the front lines with King during the civil rights movement's most well-known episodes as Belafronte and other celebrities did.

Although he and King were both sons of relatively privileged African American families, King was willing to humble himself and suffer the indignities of the black poor and Ellington was not. Ellington had a regal sense of himself. He loathed the idea of being made to look small or powerless by whites. This aversion is evident in the lengths to which Ellington went in sidestepping Jim Crow restrictions when touring. He leased his own passenger rail cars when he and his orchestra traveled by train. King used Christian social realism²¹ and his oratorical skills to persuade white Americans to reject personal racial prejudices and dismantle racist institutions. Ellington believed black enterprise and self-

²⁰ Elaine Woo, "Coretta Scott King Built a Legacy by Preserving One," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2006. <http://latimes.com/local/obituaries/archives/la-me-coretta-scott-king-20060201-story.html> [Accessed May 16, 2017]

²¹ See references to Josiah Royce's philosophy of a "Beloved Community" in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Stride Toward Freedom*, 121-126. See also Foreword by Cornel West to re-issue of Ronald Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1932/2013), xi-xiv.

help, endurance and exceptionalism would eventually convince the American white majority that blacks were its most patriotic and worthy citizens. Despite his differences with King on the civil rights leader's strategy and tactics, Ellington and King gained a respect for each other that would endure the rest of their lives.

The modern civil rights movement began to take form on the domestic front during World War Two. With factories running around the clock in the soaring war economy, the pioneering African American labor leader and social activist A. Philip Randolph threatened a massive "march on Washington" by Negroes if the FDR administration did not intervene to combat rampant discrimination in the armed forces and publicly contracted employment. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, aghast at the propaganda victory such a spectacle would give the Communist Party USA, issued an Executive Order 8802 in 1941. It prohibited discrimination by industries receiving federal dollars to produce equipment, goods and materials for the war effort. During the same span of time, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a nationally distributed black-owned newspaper, proclaimed that African Americans' mission was to achieve a "Double Victory" by the war's end: "victory over fascism and imperialism abroad and over racism at home."²²

Over a million African Americans had migrated to the Northeast, Great Lakes region, West Coast and Pacific Northwest between the latter years of the Great Depression and the early 1940s. Freed – by distance – from the threat of immediate violent retaliation

²² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20. See also Lerone Bennett, Jr., *What Manner of Man* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964).

by the Ku Klux Klan and other menacing white vigilante groups, this latest “Northern Migration” wave of blacks had become more demonstrative in their impatience and anger at racist mistreatment by individuals and institutions. Membership in the NAACP grew from 50,000 to over 450,000 during World War Two: a clear indicator of African Americans’ surging demand for racial justice.

The paychecks they earned in World War Two-fueled factories produced some improvement, relatively speaking, in the economic fortunes of blacks. They still suffered discrimination at the hands of white-led unions and prejudiced white co-workers in the war production plants. Chester Himes’ seething novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, depicts the hair-trigger racial animosity between whites and blacks in the war factories with his tale of Bob Jones, a young Midwestern black man who moved to Los Angeles to gain employment in its ship-building yards.²³ Despite the recalcitrant racism they endured, many African Americans had a growing sense of pride in their contribution to the nation. As the “Double V” campaign waged by black self-help organizations and newspapers across the country constantly reminded them, African American men and women were also fighting and dying for the United States of America.

Duke Ellington, who by then had already enjoyed a long career and widespread popularity, sensed that African Americans were on the cusp of significant progress in claiming their long-overdue full citizenship as Americans. He, like most blacks, perceived the DAR’s invitation in September 1942 to Marion Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall, after its fierce refusal to allow her to perform there just three years earlier, as another

²³ Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press: 1945, 1986), 183-196.

sign the bastions of racism were weakening. World War Two, ironically, provided blacks perhaps the most important leap forward by affording them the opportunity to once again prove, on the world stage, their patriotism to a nation that mistreated them socially and economically. Reflecting on the era in his memoir, *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington mused: “...we discovered that our country was in deep trouble again. So, just as always before, the Black, Brown and Beige were soon right in there for the Red, White and Blue.”²⁴

Since the early 1930s, Ellington had pondered the possibility of producing a concert length musical work that told the story of African Americans’ sojourn in the United States. In early summer 1941, he lent his compositional skills and orchestra to a Popular Front-associated group of Hollywood producers and actors who financed and produced *Jump for Joy*. Ellington himself characterized the “revu-iscal” as “theatrical propaganda” conceived with the goal of “correcting the race situation” in America by eliminating “Uncle Tom” stereotypes in the movies and Broadway productions. In his memoir, Ellington, always loathe to publicly denounce or criticize anyone, subtly indicated his annoyance with having to collaborate with fifteen writers, who critiqued and rewrote the show after each nightly performance of its eleven-week run at the Mayan Theatre in Los Angeles.²⁵ Ellington, nevertheless, gleaned useful lessons from the experience. He would remind interviewers that *Jump for Joy* brought the striking Dorothy Dandridge, the revue’s teenaged female lead, to the attention of Hollywood studio heads.²⁶ The production also allowed the ever-charming Ellington to form lasting relationships with socially conscious Hollywood movie

²⁴ Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 182.

²⁵ Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*, 177-180.

²⁶ Terry Teachout, *Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington* (New York: Gotham Books, 2013), 226-228.

industry leaders, relationships that would give him a high profile when the modern civil rights movement exploded into the public's consciousness in the mid-1950s.

Contrary to his *bon vivant* “above politics” veneer, Ellington was supportive of efforts to realize racial justice throughout his life. Ellington especially despised racism's impoverishing impact on black people.²⁷ He had applauded FDR's late 1941 executive order prohibiting racial discrimination in federal hiring and, as noted earlier, sensed that the “Double V” campaign was a promising strategy for black advancement. When his agent William Morris, who was aware of the ambitious but uneven *Jump for Joy*, suggested Ellington produce his own concert length revue, he seized the opportunity to premier a work that told the story he had long considered. It was with his first major long-form composition, *Black, Brown and Beige: A Tone Parallel to the History of the Negro in America*, which he debuted on January 23, 1943, at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

The musical work, its message and the institutional venue in which it was presented are as far removed as they could be from “Strange Fruit,” its searing condemnation of racial violence and the white cultural elite-mocking Café Society. In 1939, Billie Holiday challenged racism and those who turned a blind eye to its most heinous acts. Four years later, Ellington, with *Black, Brown and Beige*, sought to tell the triumphant story of African Americans' collective achievements and his own artistic accomplishments, all the while overcoming racism and still loving America.

²⁷ Duke Ellington, *My People* (liner notes)

An under recognized component of Ellington's confident manner was his conviction that he was a member of Du Bois's vaunted black "talented tenth", a belief instilled in him since he was a boy by his middle-class mother and the nurturing, self-assured black community in which he was raised. His black teachers taught racial pride and impelled him to comport himself in a dignified manner. Ellington, recalling his eighth-grade English teacher, Mrs. Boston, accepted the challenge she put before her students to uplift the race. He saw it as his duty: "...no matter where you go or what you do, you are representing your race and your responsibility is to command respect for the race. They taught that. I've always had that."²⁸

Ellington, compared to Billie Holiday and her trauma-ravaged childhood, had every advantage in his personal life an African American born in the Jim Crow era could expect to have. He was born male, light-skinned and attractive to a married, economically secure couple. His mother, who doted upon him, enjoyed prominent social standing in the well-ordered black community of Washington, D.C.

Ellington's undeniable talent, his relentless drive to succeed over a 55-year career and his ability to charm most of the arbiters of prestige – cultural critics – make his legend believable and enduring. In *Beyond Category*, John Edward Hasse provided some key insights into Ellington's self-invention and, although he claimed not to want to do so, Ellington's character. One such character insight is the light-skinned Ellington's early disdain for the "skin-hue caste system" so prevalent in African American society (and

²⁸ Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 33.

white society as well in its assessment of African American celebrities). Ellington, as a teenager, defied class boundaries and associated with other African Americans of all hues and backgrounds, whether those backgrounds were privileged, poor or underworld in nature.²⁹ This aptitude for forming beneficial relationships with all kinds of people, demonstrated by the time he was in his late teens, contributed to his eventual success as a bandleader and composer. Ellington hated “boxes” and never wanted to be placed in one, whether it was race, class, or musical genre. He resisted categorization throughout his career. His well-known catchphrase “beyond category” had a dual meaning. It is well-known that he used it as the ultimate compliment to other people. He also used it as a defiant declaration of his own identity and musical accomplishments.

Hasse revealed another aspect of Ellington’s character, which is reflected in his decision as a very young man on how he would deal with the unavoidable white racism and discrimination that he faced in America. Ellington decided he would not be an “angry black man.” He would not bristle at hateful racial persecution and openly confront white racism, politically or personally. During the summer of 1919, the United States experienced the worst interracial violence (overwhelmingly white violence against blacks) in the history of the republic. Harlem Renaissance writer James Weldon Johnson ruefully called it the “Red Summer” because so much African American blood ran in the streets. In Ellington’s hometown of Washington, D.C., white soldiers and sailors, many recently returned from World War One, attacked hundreds of unarmed black citizens. The then twenty-year-old Ellington made his decision. Seeing his people “victimized by racial

²⁹ Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 29-32.

prejudice, Ellington chose...to deal with the larger world by outsmarting it, by playing the trickster, the sly fox, garbed in the sheep's clothing of charm. He would dazzle them with his manners, polish, style, and entertainment, all the time pursuing his own goals. And, he would walk with pride, head held high, everywhere he went.”³⁰

Ellington inherited his charming wiles from his smooth-talking father, James Edward Ellington. James Edward carried himself as a middle-class man-about-town, although his highest paying job was as a lower-rung butler at The White House. Ellington's extremely fair-skinned (“so light she could pass for white,” as the black colloquialism goes), elegant mother, Daisy, conveyed a sense of privilege upon her son and imbued him with strong self-confidence. Ellington, by his late teens, had become known around Washington, D.C. not only for his piano playing but also for being a bespoke man with a magnetic personality. Hasse revealed Edward Kennedy Ellington became “Duke” Ellington around 1919 when he started having his fawning neighborhood friends announce his upcoming performances at clubs and dance halls. “When Ellington arrived at the club, Jerry Rhea [another Washington friend] would be with him to fling open the door and tell the people, ‘Get out of the way, ‘cause here comes the Duke.’”³¹ This is American self-invention at its most elemental. Ellington's mother made him feel like a pampered aristocrat. So, he adopted a title and it fit his regal personality like his tailored suits. When the Washingtonians left the nation's Capital to find fortune and fame in Harlem in the early

³⁰ Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 50.

³¹ Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 51.

1920s, their leader would soon be introduced to New York City and the nation as Duke Ellington.

Ellington, when he met King in New York City thirty years later, was the most famous bandleader, in any musical genre, in the United States and perhaps the entire world. He lent his popularity, entertainment industry connections and occasional advice to the young civil rights activist. Ellington believed a microcosm of authentic democracy could be seen in jazz: people working together as equals to produce lush, harmonic and adventurous music and yet within the same song allowing the freedom for a soloist to pursue individual excellence which synergistically advances the music. Providing for the common good did not exclude the pursuit of individual excellence in Ellington's world view. Leaders, like himself, demonstrated excellence and thereby commanded respect. In King, Ellington saw a fellow member of Du Bois's "talented tenth." He beheld a committed, capable leader who could help write a heroic chapter to the triumphant tale of African Americans' sojourn to full equality in the United States.

Langston Hughes: Jazz's Elder Statesman and Champion of His People

They done beat me and mistreat me,
Barrel-staved me and enslaved me,
Lynched me, run me, and Jim Crowed me,
Acted like they never knowed me.

But I'm here, still here---
And, I intend to be!
It'll never be *that* easy, white folks,
To get rid of me...

Langston Hughes (1953) ³²

³² Poem excerpt used by permission. Harry Ober Associates, Inc.

James Mercer Langston Hughes, despite his continued presence on the literary scene since the late 1920s, had endured more setbacks than he had enjoyed successes in the years immediately preceding the United States Supreme Court's May 17, 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and Rosa Park's December 1, 1955 act of defiance against segregated bus seating in Montgomery. The 1940s had been years in the wilderness for Hughes. Few of his published works sold well and fewer still earned critical praise. Hughes's lyrics for *Street Scene*, a musical adaption of the Elmer Rice play which paired Hughes's words with Kurt Weill's music, generated the biggest commercial success for the faded poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance. The royalties from the musical netted Hughes enough income to buy his first home, in his beloved Harlem, at the age of 46.³³

In 1950, a young African American poetess from Chicago whom Hughes had admired and encouraged for several years, Gwendolyn Brooks, won the Pulitzer Prize, an honor his own poetry never earned. Stung by the prospect of being made obsolete by the younger generation of black writers and poets, Hughes responded to their challenge. In 1951, after drawing inspiration from the be-bop and blues milieu in which he frequently immersed himself, Hughes produced a new "suite" of poems that he felt were among his best. He entitled the collection, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. But, his Communist-friendly outspokenness of the 1930s had come back to haunt him in the specter of U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy. Rumors that he was going to be subpoenaed by the Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations, which was probing into prominent citizens'

³³ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941 -1967, I Dream a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122-127.

involvement with the Communist Party of America (CPUSA), spooked Hughes's publisher Henry Holt.³⁴ Holt distanced itself from Hughes and the *Montage* collection, from which Lorraine Hansberry would excerpt the title of her award-winning play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, sold poorly and disappeared from the bookstores. Holt summoned more courage and vigorously promoted Hughes's next work, a book of short stories, *Laughing to Keep from Crying*, published in January 1952. For the first time in years, Hughes received mostly positive reviews from literary critics for his work. These short stories – some previously published, some new – which he had written over the previous seventeen years reflected changes in the racial climate, from Hughes's perspective, since the mid-1930s.

The polite critical applause Hughes's short story collection had drawn soon seemed stinting compared to the overwhelming ovation critics gave Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which was published only three months later in April 1952. This development prompted mixed feelings in Hughes. He genuinely admired Ellison but envied his success. Hughes, while on one of the many poetry reading tours that he undertook to make ends meet in the 1930s, first met Ellison when the young Oklahoman was still a student at Tuskegee Institute. When Ellison moved to New York in 1936, Hughes regularly conferred with him and considered Ellison a protégé. Hughes had successfully recommended Ellison to The New School for a lecturing post in 1945 and he also suggested to the *Saturday Evening Post* editorial staff that they hire Ellison as a reviewer. Hughes had even dedicated the first edition of his book-length poem of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* to Ellison and his wife, Fanny. Yet, Ellison, like Richard Wright before him in the late 1930s, believed he had

³⁴ Ibid., 209-215.

outgrown Hughes years before the completion of *The Invisible Man*. Hughes scholar Arnold Rampersad, who interviewed Ellison in 1983, shared this less than flattering reflection on his one-time mentor from the author: “Langston was a lot of fun to be with,” Ellison allowed, “and a warm and gracious person, but as far as being impressed by his intellectuality is concerned, how could I be? There were people at Tuskegee who were far more intellectual.” Ellison added that Hughes in his writing “used his emotions and sensibility far more than his intellect.”³⁵

He discounted Hughes’s dedication of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* to him, conjecturing that Hughes was likely grateful to him for advising the older man that bebop was a new form of jazz that deserved serious attention. This explanation is somewhat at odds with Ellison’s later disparagement of be-bop in “Living with Music,” one of his first essays on jazz which appeared in the December 1955 issue of *High Fidelity* magazine. Nevertheless, Hughes proudly declared he had sought to emulate, in verse, the daredevil improvisation, unorthodox rhythms and jagged melodies of bebop when he wrote *Montage*.

It is unclear whether Hughes, at the time, was aware that Ellison had concluded the older writer had been irresponsible with his gift over the years and that his poetry and prose had lost their luster. Hughes heaped praise on *The Invisible Man*. He wrote effusive reviews of it in his column in the nationally distributed black weekly newspaper, *Chicago Defender*, and strongly recommended that *Defender* readers buy a copy.

There is no doubt that Hughes knew James Baldwin viewed him as a relic. In Gwendolyn Brooks, with her poetic lens focused intently on the travails and hand-made

³⁵ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 202.

joys of working class black urban life, Hughes saw a literary daughter and the promise of a new Harlem Renaissance that would celebrate African American culture. In Baldwin, especially in his first book *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Hughes saw a writer whose confessional themes and gritty, if not sordid, realism could damage public perception of blacks. Hughes had received an advance copy of the book in February 1953. Despite his misgivings, Hughes valued racial loyalty and wrote a complimentary blurb for Baldwin's novel to Knopf prior to its commercial publication. Baldwin was fiercely competitive and like Ellison aspired to absolute literary standards, which he felt Hughes had either evaded or was incapable of attaining. Hughes was an outdated racial chauvinist in Baldwin's thinking. It took little time for Baldwin to blast away at a poet he felt was long past his prime.

In the Winter 1953 issue of *Perspectives USA* magazine, edited by the scholarly critic Lionel Trilling, Baldwin joined another young black writer named Richard Gibson in penning individual essays decrying racially focused political themes in literature. The co-authored commentary had first appeared in *Partisan Review*, but the *Perspectives USA* periodical circulated the article internationally. The magazine dubbed the essays "Two Protests Against Protest." In his essay, Gibson expressed his disgust at the black faces leering out at him from most black literature. He exhorted the young black writer to turn to the "great books" of Joyce, Proust and Kafka and avoid the narrow Negro themes of

Chester Himes. Gibson reminded young black writers that they are the contemporaries of Pound, Eliot and Auden and “not merely of Langston Hughes.”³⁶

Baldwin’s work, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” was subtler in its criticism of Hughes but it impugned him nonetheless. In the introduction to a recent Dodd Mead edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Hughes had praised the book as an American classic. In his essay, Baldwin eviscerated Stowe’s work as a “very bad novel.” His stance was a slap to Hughes’s face within knowing literary circles. Still, the main target of Baldwin’s fire was Richard Wright. Baldwin sniffed that Stowe’s book traded on the “terror of damnation” and *Native Son* was its modern complement. Baldwin argued that Wright in creating Bigger Thomas, the Novel’s doomed black character who murders a white woman, had accepted society’s view that Thomas was a monster and inhuman and acted accordingly. “The failure of the protest novel,” Baldwin trumpeted, “lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.”³⁷

Hughes was not impressed by Baldwin’s soaring prose. In a letter to his good friend Arna Bontemps, Hughes cracked that *Go Tell it on the Mountain* must be one of the books Baldwin was protesting. Hughes soon confronted Baldwin by writing him a terse letter in which he flatly stated: “I did not expect you to write such a colored book.” Again, writing to Bontemps, Hughes expressed exasperation and bewilderment at the new black writers. Hughes had heard it all before in the pronouncements of Countee Cullen and like-minded

³⁶ Richard Gibson and James Baldwin, “Two Protests Against Protests,” *Perspectives USA* 2 (Winter 1953), 89-100.

³⁷ Quoted in Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 206.

African American poets and authors during the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes argued these black writers mistakenly believed, like Cullen, they could create art that evaded its social context. Hughes saw Baldwin, Gibson and those who subscribed to their world view as both snobbish and self-deluded in believing they could absorb “white” artistic values and produce art that was purified of any racial content. Hughes, once again, was espousing his commitment to the “art as propaganda” doctrine of W.E.B. Du Bois, one of his early literary heroes. He was also defending his loving celebration of black people.

Although he had often included ribald images of black street life and culture in his own writings, Hughes openly fretted that the new young writers focused far too often on themes of black criminality. Further, he believed they were exploiting liberal white guilt with their autographical portrayals of social and economic tribulations. To be fair to Baldwin, Gibson and others who shared their views on the modern writer’s role, Hughes fired the first shot at them. He did so after Chester Himes’s novel, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go*, which presented an unflinching portrayal of race and class in a Los Angeles World War Two industrial shipyard, created a minor sensation. In his acidly satirical essay “How to Be a Bad Writer (in Ten Easy Lessons),” Hughes noted in the second lesson: “If you are a Negro, try to write with an eye dead on the white market – use modern stereotypes of older stereotypes – big burly Negroes, criminals, low-lifers, and prostitutes.” Hughes’s third lesson was “Put in a lot of profanity and...near-pornography and you’ll be so modern you pre-date Pompeii in your lonely crusade toward the best seller lists. By all means be misunderstood, unappreciated and ahead of your own time in print and out, then you can

be felt-sorry-for by your own self, if not the public.”³⁸ Hughes took one additional swing at Himes with the “lonely crusade” reference in his third lesson, clearly mocking Himes’s most recent novel which bore that name.

Langston Hughes, to his credit, did not bemoan his dismissal as an important black literary voice by the white critical establishment in the mid-1950s. Maintaining a brave face, he congratulated Melvin Tolson, upon whom the New York cultural establishment lavished praise for his book of poetry, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*,³⁹ on his great success and continued to encourage other young black writers and poets. Modernist African American writers such as Ellison and Baldwin were unflagging nevertheless in disparaging Hughes’s prose and poems as saccharin in their unexamined celebration of blackness and black people. The “poet low-rate of Harlem” still had a loyal throng of readers on the African continent. Hughes’s racial pride and the racial lens through which he viewed the world had long drawn the admiration of Africans educated in the West. The New York literary arbiters’ verdict that Hughes was finished did nothing to diminish the high regard in which these educated African elites held Hughes’s work, particularly the glowing poetry he had written about Africa. Remarkably, Hughes penned most of these poems after visiting the continent for several months when he was in his early twenties. His thirty-year-old torrid affair with Africa had born him several accomplished children

³⁸ Langston Hughes, “How to Be a Bad Writer (in Ten Easy Lessons),” *Harlem Quarterly* 1 (Spring 1950): 13.

³⁹ Allen Tate, foreword, in Melvin B. Tolson, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Collier Books, 1954, 1970), 11.

who now lovingly claimed him as their father. Hughes's literary embrace of his African heritage made him a pioneering cultural, if not political, Pan Africanist.

Dozens of African nations would slip the yoke of white colonialism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A dynamic cadre of Western-educated African elites ascended to political power. Their leaders sought literature that reassured their long-oppressed people of their beauty and worth. The young leaders of the new African nations recognized this. Langston Hughes was their American poet and, in 1954, they helped reinvigorate his career.

In 1954, Henry Nxumalo, the assistant editor of *Drum: Africa's Leading Magazine*, headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa, invited Hughes to join the judges' panel for its third international short story competition. On the heels of this gratifying offer, Hughes received a request from Kwame Nkrumah, the most famous future African head of state to attend a historically black college or university (Lincoln University where Hughes taught in the late 1920s), to help the Ghanaian independence movement leader write his official biography. Another notable African graduate of Lincoln University, Benjamin Nnamdi "Zik" Azikiwe, who was a leader in Nigeria's quest to free itself from colonial rule, informed Hughes that he would attend the Lincoln University Centennial celebration. Hughes had included one of Azikiwe's student poems in the Lincoln Centennial commemorative volume and the Nigerian was greatly flattered. Starting in the mid-1950s, South African writer-activists fighting against apartheid regularly contacted him. Hughes

praised the work of “colored” anti-apartheid author Peter Abrahams (*Tell Freedom*) and corresponded with white South African racial justice activist Nadine Gordimer.⁴⁰

African leaders-in-waiting, exiled in several of whom had taken up residence in Europe, also sought Hughes’s counsel. From Paris, Senegal’s Leopold Sedar Senghor, long an admirer of Hughes, exchanged letters about the political power of poetry with the black American. Alioune Diop requested Hughes’s advice on how to improve the quality of *Presence Africaine*, a magazine which would become the most influential cultural journal in the Francophone diaspora during the African nations’ fight for independence.⁴¹ Langston Hughes’s rapport with Africans and both their Anglophone and Francophone-influenced cultures sets him apart from other African American and white American writers and critics in the fifties who wrote about jazz and its influence on U.S. culture. It is difficult to find one essay Ellison wrote on Africa and its connection to jazz and black American culture. Baldwin expressed personal support for the African anti-colonial struggle.⁴² Yet, in his writing, he did not especially espouse or recognize Pan-Africanism as a source of political power and inspiration for African Americans.

African cultural and political leaders’ demonstrated affection toward Hughes in the mid-1950s lit a Pan African awareness and intellectual activism in him that burned brightly until the end of his life in 1967. Regarding his afore-mentioned invitation to judge the international short story competition for the Johannesburg-based *Drum* literary journal,

⁴⁰ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 236-238.

⁴¹ Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 283.

⁴² Margaret Mead and James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race* (New York: J.B. Lippincott & Co.. 1971), transcript of audio recording.

Hughes not only served as a judge, he championed several of the young African writers who submitted entries. He gathered their best stories and fashioned them into a compilation that he shopped to dozens of publishers for years. In the Eisenhower decade of the Cold War, there was little appetite for foreign literature, especially from Africa. Still, Hughes kept trying until 1960 when he convinced Crown Publishers to print the trove of works. Hughes edited the compilation. He entitled it: *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories and Poems by Black Africans*.⁴³

Hughes's unabashed artistic and political support of Africans provided him a new avenue of artistic expression when black jazz musicians began to draw inspiration from the dauntless African leaders' campaigns for nationhood and the cultural heritage of "Mother Africa" writ large. Hughes's long-standing racial chauvinism, his unrepentant focus on the beauty of black people and their culture – especially jazz and the blues – had prompted prominent African leaders to value his work as an ameliorant to the self-hate instilled in their people by colonialism. Hughes was a hero to the cultural and political elites of Africa.

On the western side of the Atlantic, the violent white backlash to legal advances in the battle for civil rights would make Hughes's proudly black poetic voice similarly relevant to black leaders in the United States. The integrated society liberal cultural observers assumed would soon follow the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* – an enlightened society which rendered Hughes's racial perspective outdated in Ellison and Baldwin's opinion—was nowhere near. It became clear to realistic observers that racial integration would be fiercely resisted, with its opponents resorting to murderous acts of

⁴³ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 238.

terror, for years to come. In this political context, Langston Hughes's "emotional" prose and poetry regained resonance especially among black community leaders and college students angered by Southern white intractability and northern white indifference.

Langston Hughes stands apart, and in terms of racial justice advocacy, above other jazz writers because of his lifelong immersion in the culture of the black working class. Hughes since the 1920s had been a part of elite literary circles nationally and internationally. When he could finally afford a home, Hughes expressed immense satisfaction and pride that he was able to purchase a comfortable two-story brownstone in Harlem. He enjoyed living amongst "his people," to paraphrase the title of one of his early poems, "My People." However, the most persuasive evidence of Hughes's empathy and understanding of the average African American was the weekly column he wrote on race, politics and popular culture for the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most venerated national black newspapers, from 1942 to 1962.⁴⁴ The column provided Hughes a steady source of income, but his twenty years of sharing his thoughts is testament that he chose to keep his finger on the pulse of black community. Hughes voiced the terrible travails and temporary triumphs of ordinary black people as they struggled to overcome violent racism in the South and economic discrimination "Up North" during the middle of the twentieth century.

The proliferation of vigilante White Citizens Councils shortly after the *Brown* decision signaled that Southerners would resort to terrorism to defend Jim Crow

⁴⁴ Christopher C. De Santis, *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics and Culture, 1942 -1962*, Christopher C. De Santis, Editor (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

institutions. In addition, they would fight it politically. In March 1956, congressmen representing a large swath of the old Confederacy declared their “Southern Manifesto” on the floor of the U.S. House, making known to the nation their intent to defy all federal laws and resist any federal action intended to impose the *Brown* decision on their states. Not one member of the House rose to oppose the resolution. The resolution was euphemistically titled the “Declaration of Constitutional Principles” and 82 Representatives and 19 Senators signed it.⁴⁵ In the months between the *Brown* decision and the Southern Manifesto, Rosa Parks had sparked the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott in December 1955, which would catapult the young Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into a national leadership role in the escalating battle for civil rights.

Also, in the span of time between the *Brown* decision and the Southern Manifesto, two white men had brutally murdered a fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. Till, a Chicagoan who was visiting relatives in Money, on a dare from his cousins, allegedly “wolf whistled” Carolyn Bryant, a white former beauty queen and grocery store owner. Her husband, Roy Bryant and his stepbrother, J.W. Milam, three days after the incident, appeared in the dead of night at the door of Mose Wright, Till’s uncle. They dragged Till from the modest cabin. He was never seen alive again. Three days after he was kidnapped, Till’s bloated and disfigured corpse was found floating in the Tallahatchie River. An all-white jury in Money, Mississippi acquitted Bryant and Milam

⁴⁵ John Kyle Day, *The Southern Manifesto: Massive Resistance and the Fight to Preserve Segregation* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 23-40. See also “The Southern Manifesto,” <http://history.house/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/The-Southern-Manifesto-of-1956> [accessed January 11, 2017].

after only sixty-seven minutes of deliberation on September 24, 1955.⁴⁶ The protests from black communities across the nation, and among supporters of civil and human rights, were immediate and full of fury. The premier African American writers in the estimation of the critical establishment during that time – Ellison, Baldwin, Wright, Richard Gibson and Melvin Tolson – were deafening in their silence regarding the lethal pushback white Southerners had mounted against any attempt to dismantle Jim Crow institutions, policies and practices. It is difficult to identify one major essay or commentary any of them wrote decrying the violence. If *Brown* signaled the “dawn of a racially integrated United States,” it was apparent to any rational observer that the white supremacists of the Old Confederacy would do all in their power to keep the sun from rising.

Into this darkness stepped Hughes. He was first among the jazz writers to directly protest the gruesome murder of Till. He published his wrenching poem, “Mississippi-1955,” in the *Chicago Defender* less than two weeks after the all-white jury in Money found Bryant and Milam innocent of any crime. Hughes additionally wrote the words to the earliest known song condemning the Till murder and subsequent trial. He entitled it “The Money, Mississippi Blues” and in early October 1955 sent the lyrics, without a lead sheet or any musical notation, to Henry Lee Moon of the NAACP. In one of the verses, Hughes added an ironic twist of history to the travesty of justice by referencing the elder Till’s military service and his widowed mother’s responsible parenting:

⁴⁶ Christopher Metress, “Langston Hughes’s ‘Mississippi -1955’: A Note on Revisions and an Appeal for Reconsideration” *African American Review* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2003), 139.

His father died for democracy
 Fighting in the army over the sea.
 His father died for the U.S.A.
 Why did they treat his son this-a-way?
 In Money, Money, Mississippi
 Money, Mississippi

His mother worked to raise her child,
 Dressed him neat, kept him from running wild.
 She sent him to the country when vacation came
 But he never got back to Chicago the same.
 They sent him back in a wooden box----

From Money,
 Money, Mississippi
 Money, Mississippi

The song was never recorded.⁴⁷ It nonetheless illustrates Hughes's facility with the blues idiom and his skillful use of it to express the black community's bitterness and rage.

In his *Defender* column, Hughes frequently advocated for civil rights and racial equality through his caricatured Negro common man, Jesse B. Semple. Speaking as "Semple," he served heaping helpings of "cullud" satire to his national audience. Semple argued that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. should run for president, even though King at the time was only 28 years old – seven years too young to meet the minimum age requirement of the office. Hughes, like Ellington, was deeply impressed by King's courage and character. "What King lacks in years," Hughes wrote under Semple's pseudonym, "he makes up for in guts. He did not run away from Montgomery when they put a bomb under

⁴⁷ Philip C. Kolin, Aaron Kramer and Clyde R. Appleton, "Blues for Emmett Till": The Earliest Extant Song about the Murder of Emmett Till, *African American Review* Vol. 42, No. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2008), 445-460.

his house, did he? What he lacks in years he also makes up in being wise. That minister is a wise man.”⁴⁸

Hughes himself was in in his mid-fifties in 1956. Although he was vigilant in reporting on civil rights, he never ventured to the South to experience the civil rights battlefield first hand. His days of putting himself in harm’s way, as he had done in Haiti in the 1920s and the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, were long behind him. Hughes believed he could launch his most damaging missives against racism from his typewriter in the study of his home at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem. From the very start of the civil rights movement, Hughes supported its leaders’ targeted campaigns of direct action against Jim Crow institutions and practices, which is far more than one can say for Baldwin and Ellison, who exiled themselves to Paris and Rome, respectively, as the conflagration over racial equality flamed ever higher. Their physical distance, Baldwin in France and Ellison in Italy, may have contributed to the two writers’ lack of commentary on the Emmett Till murder and other crimes committed by white supremacists against blacks in the South. It must be noted that Baldwin did return to the United States in late 1957 and became an ardent civil rights supporter in the late 1950s. He participated in many civil disobedience campaigns and marched side by side with the Kings, Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, Stokely Carmichael, John Lewis and other iconic leaders under the threat of physical violence during the 1960s.

⁴⁸ Langston Hughes, “King for President...Let’s Organize as Well as Mobilize, Says Semple,” *Chicago Defender* (National Edition), June 8, 1957, p. 10.

Hughes's unqualified affection for black people and his decades of poetry and prose which celebrated the enthralling culture of his race had garnered him acclaim from the leaders of the African nations emerging from dehumanizing colonialism in the 1950s. Those same aspects of his art and character reinvigorated his popularity among black Americans, including their cultural and political elites, who found themselves under social, economic, psychological and physical assault by white reactionaries determined to keep them from claiming full citizenship. Hughes, whose personal finances had been precarious as late as 1955, finally attained economic stability as the decade ended. His improved fortunes flowed directly from a combination of solid, if not overwhelming, critical and commercial successes of writings based squarely on his experiences living as a proud and socially aware black man in the United States. His second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander*, was published in 1956 to generally favorable reviews.

Hughes enjoyed far more success, unprecedented success, with his first musical love – jazz – as the 1950s rolled forward. An early peak for the Newport Jazz Festival and Hughes, in his efforts to connect jazz's democratic attributes (group interdependence combined with the freedom to pursue individual excellence) to the growing support among white liberals for racial justice, occurred in 1956. As noted earlier, Duke Ellington and his Orchestra were the runaway favorites of that year's concert performers. Hughes had witnessed Ellington's performance and it inspired him to write and present an essay called "Jazz as Communication" at a workshop held soon after the concert. Hughes claimed the best writers had absorbed a jazz aesthetic:

Jazz seeps into words – spelled out in words. Nelson Algren is influenced by jazz. Ralph Ellison is, too. Sartre, too. Jacques Prevert. Most of the best writers today are...Some of it came out in poems of mine in *Montage of a*

Dream Deferred later. Jazz again putting itself into words...Jazz is a heartbeat. The heartbeat is yours. You will tell me about its perspectives when you get ready.⁴⁹

The Newport Jazz Festival producers were quite pleased with Hughes's participation in their 1956 jazz roundtable seminar, so much so that they invited him back several years in a row. His charm as a conversationalist and broad knowledge of jazz won Hughes several famous admirers among the young black jazz modernists flocking to Newport and the Music Inn's Jazz School in nearby Lenox, Massachusetts. Hughes met Pan-Africanist pianist Randy Weston there. Bassist and composer Charles Mingus also came to know and respect Hughes through their encounters at the Newport Festivals and Music Inn jazz seminars.⁵⁰ Hughes's network of friends in jazz would benefit him immensely in the latter years of decade, when his profile as a spokesperson for "his people" and the cultural importance of jazz would rise even higher.

Many famous African Americans – from Muhammad Ali to Eldridge Cleaver to Lorraine Hansberry – who were alive when Klan members pummeled, shot in the head and then mutilated Emmett Till have commented in hindsight on how the horrific event appalled them.⁵¹ However, despite the shock and outrage over the brutal murder of Emmett Till, few African American musicians or writers chose *in 1955* to channel their rage and

⁴⁹ Langston Hughes, "Jazz as Communication (1956)," Poetry Foundation.
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237856> [November 7, 2014]

⁵⁰ John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 219-223.

⁵¹ Christopher Metress, "On That Third Day He Rose: Sacramental Memory and the Lynching of Emmett Till," in *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination*, Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress, editors (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 20-24.

disgust over the hateful act into a work of artistic expression. Langston Hughes was the exception. He abandoned his folk persona of Jesse B. Semple and used his national platform in *The Chicago Defender*, a weekly African American newspaper present in nearly every black community, to publish a poem entitled “Mississippi -1955.” It is dedicated to the memory of Emmett Till and although its title named Mississippi, in the poem Hughes indicts all states and regions for their willful blindness to violent assaults on blacks.

Oh, what sorrow!
 Oh, what pity!
 That tears and blood
 Should mix like rain
 And terror come again
 To Mississippi.

Come again?
 Where has terror been?
 On vacation? Up North?
 In some other section
 Of the nation,
 Lying low, unpublicized?
 Masked---with only
 Jaundiced eyes
 Showing through the mask?

With bitter sarcasm Hughes wonders where terror has been. “On vacation? Up North? In some other section of the nation? Lying low, unpublicized?” He uses the phrase “with only jaundiced eyes showing through the mask,”⁵² an obvious reference to Ku Klux Klan terrorists. Hughes’s more subtle inference is that until white America outlawed racial violence against blacks and intervened to prevent it, those who perpetrate it would continue

⁵² “Mississippi-1955 (To the Memory of Emmett Till)” from Langston Hughes’s column in the *Chicago Defender* (October 1, 1955) in “Langston Hughes Wonders Why No Lynching Probes.” Used by Permission.

their marauding. They would strike again in Mississippi where, in Hughes's closing words of verse: "tears and blood...and terror, fetid hot, yet clammy cold, remain."⁵³ With this poem, Hughes provides the first noteworthy example of advocacy in artistic expression, inspired by the events of the modern civil rights movement, by a major writer associated with jazz.

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: LITTLE ROCK GALVANIZES THE MOVEMENT AND JAZZ, 1957-1959

My people – the Negroes – are not looking for anything – we just want a square shake. But when I see on television and read about a crowd in Arkansas spitting and cursing at a little colored girl – I think I have a right to get sore – and say something about it.

Louis Armstrong ¹

An economic boycott by blacks in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 launched the modern Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Yet, it was the in-person defiance of a segregated institution by nine brave African American high school students in Little Rock, Arkansas that foreshadowed the movement's future and would attract public support of well-known jazz artists. Their direct action, orchestrated by the daring and determined Daisy Bates, expanded the movement's strategy and tactics, with even the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. taking note. In his preface to his 1958 book chronicling the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *Stride Toward Freedom*, King proclaimed Montgomery had stirred courage in Negroes throughout the South. Still, he recognized the Little Rock Nine had shown a youthful fortitude and commitment which presaged the future. King wrote "...how much Montgomery and Little Rock and Tallahassee were results of all the same causes, is a matter for future historians. Whatever the final assessment, it is already clear that Montgomery was a part of something much larger than itself."² The Little Rock Nine controversy was a part of that larger something. How it unfolded, in ways expected and

¹ "Satch Blast Echoed by Top Performers: Nixes Tour, Raps Ike and Faubus," *Chicago Defender* 53 (Sept. 28, 1957), pp.1-2. See also Terry Teachout, *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong*, 234.

² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958/1986), xxx. King mentions Tallahassee because black college students at Florida A & M University, inspired by Montgomery, had launched a bus boycott in that city in May 1956. See also Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 602.

unexpected, became a primer for civil rights activists planning to confront Jim Crow institutions and practice.

With the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the *Brown* decision before it, civil rights activists had appealed first and foremost to the courts for succor. The Arkansas branch of the NAACP, of which Daisy Bates served as president, wielded the *Brown II* decision in suing the Little Rock School Board. The NAACP demanded the Little Rock school system comply with the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown II*. This second Brown ruling declared local authorities were bound to end racially segregated schools “with all deliberate speed.”³ When the United States District Court approved the Little Rock School District desegregation plan, the Board reluctantly acceded to the court’s order to integrate starting in September 1957. Observing the Board’s lack of will, Bates devised a bold plan to force the issue by recruiting the brightest and most mature students from Little Rock’s all-black Dunbar High School to enroll in the all-white Central High School for the academic year beginning September 3rd. Her decision to directly challenge a segregated institution, to dare it to act out its illegal discrimination against blacks in full public view, marked a dramatic shift in tactics from the earlier and less confrontational bus boycotts in Montgomery and Tallahassee.

³ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (2)*, Decided by Unanimous Decision on May 31, 1955. “The U.S. Supreme Court held that the problems identified in *Brown I* required varied local solutions. Chief Justice Warren conferred much responsibility on local school authorities and the courts which originally heard school desegregation cases. They were to implement the principles which the Supreme Court embraced in its first Brown decision. Warren urged the localities to act on the new principles promptly and move toward full compliance with them ‘with all deliberate speed.’ ” <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/349us294> [Accessed May 30, 2017].

Daisy Bates's action also sparked the first wave of unabashed political protest by jazz artists during the modern civil rights movement. To understand the boldness of their support for the local campaign she and other activists launched, one must first appreciate the Little Rock Nine episode for what it was: a crisis which convinced observers across the nation that the battle to end racial segregation in the South was escalating; would be met with violent resistance by white southerners determined to keep it; and, thus, would explode into confrontations for years to come.

When Governor Faubus took preemptive action by calling out the Arkansas National Guard to cordon Central High, he inadvertently opened a new channel of assistance to Bates and the local Little Rock Nine supporters: the U.S. government's executive branch. The Little Rock Nine activists' aim was to compel federal intervention. They proved executive action could be effective, especially when directed by the President of the United States. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who viewed the "Negro unrest" in the South as a nuisance to his administration, loathed the prospect of federal intervention. However, only he had the power to countermand Governor Faubus's orders to the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine black students from entering Central High School. One can argue the primary reason Eisenhower finally did act to protect the Little Rock Nine was the power of spectacle, amplified by national newspaper syndicates, radio and the then new and powerful medium: television. Whether Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine local supporters had anticipated the national and international media attention they would attract is a moot point. Once they realized the world was watching and television's power to fixate audiences, they capitalized on the coverage with adroitness – a remarkable feat given the uncharted territory they were navigating.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott received scant television coverage in comparison to the Little Rock Nine's initiative to integrate Central High School. National evening news programs had yet to gain widespread distribution in 1955. Local news programming dominated the fifty-six percent of U.S. households that owned a television set. The owners of local television stations in the South were members of the pro-segregation business and social elites. They had every motivation to ignore racial injustice and ban coverage of blacks protesting disenfranchisement, segregated schools or hate crimes by white supremacists. Two years later in 1957, over eighty three percent of U.S. households owned a television set. National "evening news" broadcasts, with the Huntley-Brinkley Report and CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite leading the way, had become regular viewing for most American adults.⁴ Thus, Little Rock "happened" when national television news viewers were skyrocketing in number. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed national media's power, especially television, to focus and frame public opinion in the Little Rock Nine crisis. A few years later, King would lead a series of direct action campaigns against discrimination and voter disenfranchisement which were devised to attract reporters from the major television news networks.

Another factor in the spectacle that favored the Little Rock Nine was the fact they were all minors, children really. As Branch Rickey had done when selecting Jack Roosevelt "Jackie" Robinson to break the color line in professional baseball, Daisy Bates had recruited empathetic teenagers who had the disposition and strength of character to

⁴ James L. Baughman, "Television Comes to America, 1947-1957," an essay, University of Wisconsin, Madison. <http://www.lib.niu.edu/1993/ihy930341.html> [Accessed June 10, 2017].

endure the racial hostility they knew they would encounter in their integration of Central High. The recruitment of children as ground troops in the civil rights campaign would draw scathing criticism from faith-based organizations and disapproving intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt. Yet, the telegenic appeal of these crusading children helped focus national attention on their quest to attain an equal education. The NAACP held fundraisers for them and Lena Horne flew members of the Little Rock Nine, all expenses paid, to her Broadway play to thank them for their courage. Bates improvised and then mastered the tactic of portraying the valiant underdog in televised news features. The tactic would be used in the 1960s by adult civil rights leaders and by African American teenagers and college students in directly confronting segregated institutions and defying racist practices and policies.

To recap, taking its inspiration from the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Little Rock Nine campaign directly challenged local school systems to abide by the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. It introduced federal executive intervention as a corrective force to local racial injustice and pioneered the controversial deployment of teenagers as foot soldiers in the war against segregated institutions. Supporters of the Little Rock Nine were also the first to benefit from and exploit national television coverage as “spectacle” to benefit their cause. These tactics would come to characterize milestone civil rights campaigns in the early 1960s and beyond. Yet, there was one aspect of the Little Rock Nine campaign that was atypical in the modern civil rights movement: it was led by a woman.

Ernest Green, who was a senior entering the 1957-58 school year and the first of the three Little Rock Nine students who eventually graduated from Central High, in a 50th anniversary NPR feature on the Little Rock Nine remembered Daisy Bates as the “poster child of black resistance in Arkansas.” Green said, “She was the quarterback, the coach. We were the players.” Other members of Little Rock’s black community in the 1950s referred to her as “their Lena Horne.” Horne, a singer and actress born in 1917, had been the most glamorous African American entertainer since 1943 when her film and its title song, *Stormy Weather*, catapulted her to fame. Horne appeared on the cover of national black magazines *Jet* and *Ebony* over a dozen times during the 1950s.⁵ Like Horne, Bates was fair-skinned, attractive and always fashionably attired in public. To black families straining against segregation in Little Rock, Bates was “larger than life” and the woman “who drove the movement.”⁶

Daisy Bates was born in 1914 but looked much younger than her 43 years when the Little Rock Nine crisis erupted. Tragedy scarred her childhood. Her mother was raped and murdered by three white men. Her grieving father left his daughter with friends, the Gatsons, who raised her as a foster child. Lucious Christopher “L.C.” Bates was a successful insurance agent and aspiring journalist when he met the teen-aged Daisy in their rural hometown of Hutting, Arkansas. They married and moved to Little Rock in the early 1940s. Together, they launched and operated the *Arkansas State Press*, a weekly newspaper

⁵ See “Explore Lena Horne, Jet Magazine and More.” www.pinterest.com [Accessed June 5, 2017].

⁶ Williams, “Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine, NPR *Morning Edition*.”

distributed to black communities throughout the state. He was its publisher and she was the paper's star reporter. The couple also became involved in the civil rights movement in the late 1940s. The Arkansas chapter of the NAACP elected Daisy Bates as its state president in 1952. She was in addition an active member of the Little Rock Urban League and the National Council of Negro Women. By the mid-1950s, L.C. Bates joined his wife as a leader of the Arkansas NAACP. He won the post of NAACP regional director for the jurisdiction that included Little Rock.⁷

This influential husband and wife team challenged Jim Crow practices throughout the city and used their newspaper to air their protestations. The May 31, 1955 *Brown II* ruling galvanized Daisy Bates. Childless herself but convinced African American youth were poised to advance the race further than ever before, Bates helped craft a strategy to force the Little Rock School District to integrate. By year's end, she had convinced thirty-three sets of parents, parents of the most academically successful and well-rounded black students in the city, to join the NAACP's legal action. Their suit demanded the district to put forward a plan to dismantle its segregated system and fully integrate the schools. The United States District Court approved the Little Rock plan in August 1956. Returning to the same group of parents and children, Bates personally selected the teenagers who would be the first over the battlements. With help from the NAACP's national headquarters, including advice from attorneys Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Mitchell, Jr., Daisy Bates and her local network of supporters prepared Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest

⁷ "Daisy Bates – Publisher, Civil Rights Activist, Journalist," *Biography.com*.
<https://www.biography.com/people/daisy-bates-206524> [Accessed June 2, 2017].

Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas and Carlotta Walls for the racist slurs and physical intimidation they were certain to face.⁸

Daisy Bates is significant in the history of the modern civil rights movement because she masterminded an unprecedented public assault on Jim Crow in its southern stronghold. She was the epitome of 1950s black middle-class female dignity: fair-skinned, confident, well-spoken and fashionably attired⁹ in all her televised appearances during the Little Rock Nine crisis. Compare her to Governor Faubus. When the Arkansas chief executive appeared on national television on September 15, 1957 in an interview with ABC news personality Mike Wallace, he struck all but the most pro-segregationist viewers as droll and duplicitous. As his wounds mounted from Wallace's knife-edged questioning, Governor Faubus's veiled fury bled through his veneer of collegiality. He could not hide his contempt for the integrationist outsiders who were insisting Arkansas change its culture and who had also questioned his probity.¹⁰ Daisy Bates, on the other hand, maintained an elegant composure in all her public appearances during the crisis, even when delivering passionate speeches in favor for racial justice. In her bold use of public space and political spectacle, Bates resurrected the tactics of early Twentieth Century radical suffragists such

⁸ Daisy Bates Papers, 1946-1966, "Biography/History." Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. <http://digicoll.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=wiarchives> [Accessed June 12, 2017]

⁹ Robert E. Weems, Jr., "Consumerism and the Construction of Black Female Identity," in Jennifer Scanlon, ed., *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 166-171.

¹⁰ "Mike Wallace Interview with Governor Orval Faubus," C-SPAN3 History. <https://c-span.org/video/?288553-1/mike-wallace-interview-governor-orval-faubus> [Accessed June 13, 2017]

as Alice Paul.¹¹ Her tactic, again, would become an essential element of future civil rights activism.

With the new medium of television as her vehicle, Daisy Bates was one of the first woman civil rights leaders to become a celebrity, albeit a temporary one. Bates appeared in the national black news magazines, *Ebony* and *Jet*. Lena Horne underwrote a visit by Bates, the Little Rock Nine and their families to her hit Broadway musical, *Jamaica*, in June 1958.¹² Yet, Bates is not named as a pivotal figure in most contemporary accounts of the modern civil rights movement. In the years that followed the Little Rock Nine crisis, some of her contemporaries complained Daisy Bates took too much credit for the milestone event and exploited the crisis to advance her own ambitions. Little Rock Nine student Minnijean Brown-Trickey stated that Bates expanded her importance and impact on the crisis as time wore on. Brown-Trickey reminded an interviewer that the families of the Little Rock Nine were the true heroes of the crisis and suffered economic reprisals from the white community. Her father lost his job.¹³ All the students' families endured public slurs, physical abuse and vandalism to their automobiles and homes. Still, historical evidence shows the Bateses paid a psychological and financial price at least commensurate with that absorbed by the Little Rock Nine families and supporters.

Although national television coverage evaporated after Ernest Green graduated in May 1958, the racial hostility against the remaining students and their support network

¹¹ Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture & Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 27.

¹² See "Lena Horne and Ricardo Montalban with civil rights heroine Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine..." Vintage Black Glamour by Nichelle Gainer <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/316448311288992950> [Accessed July 10, 2017].

¹³ Williams, "Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine," NPR *Morning Edition*.

raged on two more years. Governor Faubus ordered all Little Rock high schools to be closed for the entire 1958-1959 school year. After the “Lost Year,” on the day before the Little Rock schools were scheduled to reopen with a court-ordered integrated student population, a coordinated series of bombings rocked the mayor’s office and the school board building. During this same period, a sustained boycott against the Bateses crushed their newspaper. White advertisers canceled their accounts with the *Arkansas State Press* and L.C. Bates had to suspend publication of the weekly paper – the couple’s chief source of income. Escalating death threats from the Ku Klux Klan forced L.C. and Daisy Bates to flee Little Rock in late 1959.

After relocating to New York City, Daisy Bates spent the next two years supporting herself with speaking engagements. Bates also used this time to write her memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, which was published in 1962. Her husband took a job working in the NAACP’s Louisiana field office. Daisy Bates later moved to Washington, D.C., where she took a position as a staffer with the Democratic National Committee. President Lyndon B. Johnson subsequently assigned Bates to work on antipoverty projects during the early years of his administration. She and her husband were finally able to return to Little Rock in the mid-1960s, where they resumed their roles as community leaders and lived out the remainder of their lives in relative obscurity.¹⁴

¹⁴ Daisy Bates Papers, 1946-1966. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. See also Daisy Bates, *Biography.com*.

Although tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins did not specifically mention the Little Rock Nine crisis in the liner notes of his groundbreaking album, *Freedom Suite*, he made plain his indignation over the social and economic injustices wrought upon African Americans by including a powerful passage from W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Rollins, paraphrasing Du Bois, wrote: "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."¹⁵

Rollins released his *Freedom Suite* album in 1958. Rollins had been born in Harlem in 1930 to parents who had immigrated from the U.S. Virgin Islands. His grandmother had been a follower of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association. She was an activist who took her young grandson to Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.'s Abyssinian Baptist Church to hear the elder Powell's sermons on black pride and self-help.¹⁶ Exhibiting exceptional musical talent before he entered grade school, Rollins learned piano and initially played alto saxophone, seeking to emulate his hero, Charlie Parker. Rollins became an innovative tenor player with a powerful and caustic tone. By the late 1940s, he had

¹⁵ Theodore Walter "Sonny" Rollins, liner notes to *Freedom Suite*, Riverside OJCCD-067-2 (RLP-258).

¹⁶ George W. Goodman, "Sonny Rollins at Sixty-Eight: Reformed, redeemed and ready for reincarnation," *The Atlantic* (July 1999) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/07/sonny-rollins-at-sixty-eight-9907/377697> [Accessed June 20, 2017].

logged dozens of studio sessions with bebop piano luminaries Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell and trumpeter Miles Davis.

On the New York jazz scene, Rollins was known to be a dapper dresser. However, on *Freedom Suite*, Rollins discarded sartorial elegance. He appeared shirtless on the album cover. He wore hair long and wooly, a style that would soon be known as a “natural” and later, in the 1960s, as an “afro.” Other black jazz artists at that time, including Miles Davis, were chemically straightening their hair. These were acts of conscious by Rollins to identify with his African ancestry. He also supported the young civil rights movement. Rollins insisted on adding Du Bois’s commentary on the irony that the Negro, America’s most “American” citizen, was perpetually persecuted by the same society shaped by black cultural contributions.

Riverside, Rollins’s record label, was alarmed by a potential negative critical and commercial backlash to a “political” album and compelled the producer Orrin Keepnews to add a disclaimer to the liner notes. Keepnews reassured buyers that the jazz saxophonist was referring only to “artistic” freedom. Keepnews was blatant in his attempt to calm jazz fans: “It [Freedom Suite] is not a piece about Emmett Till, or Little Rock, or Harlem, or the peculiar local election laws of Georgia or Louisiana...”¹⁷ Still worried about the minor sensation Rollins’s declaration had caused in the wake of the Little Rock Nine debacle, Riverside retitled the album *Shadow Waltz*, the name of a ballad on the original release, and reissued it without Rollins’s commentary on the mistreatment of Negroes. The saxophonist later insisted that the album was indeed advocacy for racial justice through his

¹⁷ Orrin Keepnews, liner notes to *Freedom Suite*, Riverside OJCCD-067-2 (RLP-258).

artistic expression. In a 2009 interview with 21st century tenor saxophone standout Joshua Redman, Rollins had this to say when asked about *Freedom Suite*: “I think W.E.B. Du Bois and some other people said that it was the duty of an artist to express social opinions through his work, right? So, in a sense, I think it is.”¹⁸

Rollins recalled that, in 1958, despite his critical acclaim and substantial earnings (he had two top selling jazz albums, *Tenor Madness* and *Saxophone Colossus*, in the preceding two years), he had been refused the opportunity to rent a New York City apartment for his wife and himself. The rejection occurred just weeks before Rollins was scheduled to record what would become *Freedom Suite*. Rollins bitterly observed he was “still a nigger” in the eyes of the owners and they did not want him in their apartment building simply because of his race. Rollins recruited Max Roach to play drums on *Freedom Suite*. A few years earlier, Rollins and Roach had formed an ill-fated quintet with the gifted trumpeter Clifford Brown, bassist George Morrow and pianist Richie Powell. A grisly June 1956 automobile accident, in which Brown, Powell and his wife perished, ripped the promising quintet asunder. Roach and Rollins continued to become not just friends but ideological allies who shared a growing impatience with the slow progress of the civil rights movement in the late 1950s.

The segregationist resistance Governor Faubus revealed in his brazen campaign to delay and deny compliance with the *Brown II* exasperated Rollins. He recorded *Freedom Suite* on two dates in early February and March 1958, a period when the Little Rock Nine

¹⁸ Joshua Redman, “The Sonny Rollins Interview: Newk’s Time,” originally published August 1, 2009 in *Jazz Times* magazine, <https://jazztimes.com/features/sonny-rollins-interviewed-by-joshua-redman-newks-time.html> [accessed March 11, 2017].

crisis was still on the front pages of black newspapers, including the Harlem resident's *Amsterdam News*.¹⁹ To Rollins and Roach, African anticolonial leaders demonstrated the dauntlessness necessary for their people to reclaim their full humanity. The Africans set an example Rollins and Roach hoped black American leaders would emulate.²⁰ Considering his activist upbringing, Rollins's impatience with U.S. civil rights leaders by 1958 was inevitable and he expressed it with *Freedom Suite*.

On Tuesday, May 5, 1959, Charles Mingus entered Columbia's New York City studios to lead the first of two recording sessions, the second would occur on May 12th, which would produce his breakout album, *Mingus Ah Um*. The album, the first for his new label, would become Mingus's best-selling and is widely hailed as one of his best. It was among the several post-bop masterpieces released by jazz artists in that watershed year, including *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis, *Time Out* by Dave Brubeck, *Giant Steps* by John Coltrane and *The Shape of Jazz to Come* by Ornette Coleman. Mingus had displayed flashes of compositional brilliance on his first major album, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, released on Atlantic Records in 1956. The bassist-composer unleashed a flurry of new music in 1957, recording three albums that year: *A Modern Jazz Symposium of Music and Poetry*, *Tijuana Moods* and *The Clown*. During this prolific period, Mingus grew in artistic confidence, honing his unique approach to studio session work in which he would have the

¹⁹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 181.

²⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2, 15-19.

assembled musicians sight-read his original compositions and then compel them to add improvisational passages to the written music.

In the years preceding the release of his 1959 tour-de-force, Mingus on several occasions decried the race-based economic discrimination he had experienced in his efforts to support himself as a full-time musician. Like his hero Duke Ellington, Mingus despised the entertainment industry's pernicious Jim Crow practices, especially those enforced by the booking agents and unions. In his hometown of Los Angeles during the early 1950s, Mingus led the fight against the white Local 767 union which barred black musicians from lucrative session work in movies and television.²¹ Mingus gave a hint of what was to come from him, in terms of advocacy for racial justice in his music, in his liner notes with *Pithecanthropus Erectus*. He alluded to the arrogance and hypocrisy of western society, built around the primacy of the upright ape-man, who was doomed to fall by "his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation of those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempt to stand on a false security."²²

Mingus did not seek to intellectualize his indignation with "Fables of Faubus." The lyrics eviscerate Faubus as a semi-literate, third rate politician who enabled the bloody terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan:

Name me someone who's ridiculous, Dannie.
Governor Faubus!
Why is he so sick and ridiculous?
He won't permit integrated schools.
Then he's a fool! Boo! Nazi Fascist supremists!

²¹ Monson, "Desegregating Los Angeles" in *Freedom Sounds*, 42-49. For more information on economic discrimination in the music industry, see the chapter "Race" by Leonard Feather in *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 115-126.

²² Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Atlantic -1237 (1956). See also Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971/1991), 180-208.

Boo! Ku Klux Klan (with your Jim Crow plan)! ²³

Columbia Records, an established label with extensive nationwide distribution, had signed Mingus based on the strength and quality of his prodigious output for Atlantic in the preceding years. Their executives were expecting another great album of instrumental jazz from the bassist-composer. They were appalled when he presented them with an unabashed protest song, which he wanted to sing. Columbia rejected the vocal version of “Fables of Faubus.” Not wanting to jeopardize his new recording contract, Mingus relented and withdrew the vocal version.

Columbia achieved only a pyrrhic victory. The instrumental version of “Fables of Faubus” is a tour de force of sonic caricature. Its loping, calliope-esque chorus conjures the image of an overconfident buffoon and is unmistakably intended to represent Faubus. The song then transitions into an urbane flowing refrain that Mingus uses to capture the dignified determination of the resolute Little Rock Nine students, Daisy Bates and their NAACP support network. Its horn solos are sharp-edged and confident. The recorded composition fades on a reprise of the Little Rock Nine chord progression, reflecting Mingus’s belief that their courageous stand has advanced the cause of civil rights for African Americans. Jazz critics have opined that the magnificent instrumental version of “Fables of Faubus” mocks the Arkansas Governor more effectively than the inelegant vocal

²³ Lyric excerpt from “Fables of Faubus,” written by Charles Mingus for his 1959 album, *Mingus Ah Um*. The lyric was censored and removed by Mingus’s record label, Columbia, which released an instrumental only version of the song.

version,²⁴ which Mingus released on the small, independent label Candid a little over a year later.

The contretemps surrounding “Fables of Faubus” and Mingus’s explosive temper – on multiple occasions he punched under-performing sidemen and critics with whom he did not agree in the face – earned him the reputation of being a volatile and difficult artist. Yet, this complex, gifted and opinionated artist who would become known as jazz’s “angry man” saw himself as a Romantic. Mingus cast a bilious eye at the coming wave of avant-garde jazz players, epitomized by Ornette Coleman in 1959. Mingus was a modernist, ravenous in his search for new forms of artistic expression, who at the same time treasured black musical traditions. In addition, he adored classical music and held its composers in the highest esteem. He regarded their music as visionary thought which laid the foundation for civilization’s advance.²⁵ His first ambition was to become a composer. As a child, he learned solfege and played cello with the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic. In 1958, during one of his self-imposed stays at New York City’s Bellevue mental hospital, Mingus wrote a letter to Nat Hentoff in which he revealed that listening to a Julliard String Quartet recording of Bartok reawakened his sense of artistic purpose. He marveled the musicians could “transform in a second a listener’s soul and make it throb with love and beauty—just by following the scratches of a pen on a scroll.”²⁶

²⁴ Sean Murphy, “Charles Mingus: Mingus Ah Um 50th Anniversary (Legacy Edition)” *Pop Matters* (8 July 2009) <http://www.popmatters.com/feature/92653-charles-mingus-mingus-ah-um-50th-anniversary-legacy-edition.html> [Accessed June 17, 2017]

²⁵ John Goodman, *Mingus Speaks* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 23-25.

²⁶ Adam Shatz, “An Argument with Instruments: On Charles Mingus,” *The Nation*, September 17, 2013. <https://thenation.com/article-argument-instruments-charles-mingus.html> [Accessed January 8, 2018].

Mingus spoke out against injustice wherever he encountered it, but he sought to transcend racial categorization, in his music and his life. Unlike his contemporary Miles Davis and his musical hero Duke Ellington, Mingus had been psychologically scarred by institutional racism as a child. White Los Angeles school teachers labeled the brilliant future bassist and composer as an “exceedingly slow learner.” One especially racist teacher repeatedly called him “yellow nigger” and slapped Mingus in front of classmates when he answered questions incorrectly. What the teacher did not know was that Mingus, who was large for his age, was only four years old when he entered elementary school. Learning of this mistreatment, his father intervened and requested the principal have his young son sit for an I.Q. test after the teacher threatened to send him to “dumb school.” The young Mingus tested at genius level. He soon flourished in music, moving from trombone to piano to double-bass, under private instruction.

Social critic and music producer Nat Hentoff was one of the few notable jazz writers who understood and defended Mingus. In his book, *The Jazz Life*, Hentoff shared Mingus’s recollections of his unpleasant early years in school to jazz music lovers so they might better understand the adult Mingus’s hair trigger reactions to perceived insults and threats.²⁷ Mingus had a far thinner skin when it came to institutional racism and individual prejudice than Davis, whose privileged middle-class background armored him against white prejudice. In comparison, Mingus would retaliate, lashing out verbally and sometimes with physical violence at racial slights, real or imagined. Jazz aficionados, in Hentoff’s opinion, would have to tolerate Mingus’s volatile temperament because the

²⁷ Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1961/1975), 160-167

music he had given them and would create in the future was more than worth their trouble. Said Hentoff, “Charles Mingus...is the most astonishing virtuoso on the double bass that jazz has ever known. He is also a disturbing, uneven, unyieldingly original composer who tries for a wider range of mood than any other modern writer so far.”²⁸ Hentoff infers this point, but others have openly argued that Mingus’s artistic expression was rooted in his inner tumult. “He needed something to fight against; his anger...was a ‘form of energy, part of the fire sweeping through him.’”²⁹

With *Mingus Ah Um*, Mingus created a musical work of enduring quality. It is regarded by critics as one of the best jazz albums of all time.³⁰ “Fables of Faubus” stands out on the album because most of the nation in the late 1950s recognized the Arkansas Governor’s unique surname. Mingus wanted the listener to associate the song with Faubus’s segregationist-coddling obstructionism and serial prevarication about his motives; hence, Mingus’s use of the word “Fables.” Mingus penned other political compositions corresponding to epochal episodes of the civil rights movement, such as “Pithecanthropus Erectus,” a jazz tone poem written just weeks after the 1955 launch of the Montgomery Bus Boycott,³¹ “Prayer for Peaceful Resistance” for the sit-ins of the early 1960s and the majestic long-form composition “Meditations on Integration” in 1964.

Yet, “Fables of Faubus” remains his best-known work of advocacy in artistic expression. The song itself is an exemplar of Mingus’s “jump cut” compositional style and

²⁸ Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, 159-160.

²⁹ Shatz, “An Argument with Instruments.”

³⁰ David Remnick, “100 Essential Jazz Albums,” *The New Yorker* (Online Only- May 19, 2008 Issue) <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/19/100-essential-jazz-albums> [Accessed June 30, 2017]

³¹ Scott Saul, “Outrageous Freedom: Charles Mingus and the Invention of the Jazz Workshop,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 3 (September 2001), pp. 387-389.

jarring tempo changes. It opens with a clownish but instantly memorable chorus, then slides into a sophisticated refrain, fractures into inspired solos, returns to the loping chorus, and fades on the urban cool of the refrain. Mingus, ever clever with words, captured the contempt in which pro-civil rights citizens held Orval Faubus with the title of the song. The originality of the composition and its inspired performances, preserved by exceptional audio engineering, made Mingus's message memorable.

The television age captured a milestone episode in the civil rights movement with its news coverage of fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford on the morning of September 4, 1957. Miss Eckford was being harangued by dozens of wild-eyed, raging whites who spat on her and shouted racial epithets as she attempted to enter Little Rock's segregated Central High School. A National Guardsman standing at the main entrance would not look her in the eye but blocked her advance. Wearing owlsh sunglasses, clad in a crisp black-and-white print dress and cradling her new notebook in her left arm, the teenager turned and walked away briskly. She remained erect in posture and did not cower as the jeering mob pursued her. The televised images of her travail were seen by millions of viewers in the United States, Europe and the rest of the modern world. The news features and photographs triggered outrage in most observers, particularly African Americans, including jazz luminaries Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Lena Horne and, most infamously, Louis Armstrong, who disparaged President Eisenhower for failing to protect her.³²

³² Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 3.

Eckford facing the angry mob all by herself, as contingency would have it, was an unfortunate happenstance. Eckford's parents did not own a telephone. Daisy Bates had called the parents of the other eight students the night before Central's opening day and informed them that they would meet off site and then be escorted to the school by a retinue of black ministers and NAACP officials. Bates remembered the Eckfords did not have a telephone and planned to contact Eckford's father at his night job at Little Rock's Union Station railroad terminal. Citing tiredness and stress as the reasons in her memoir, Bates admitted she forgot to inform Mr. Eckford of the change in plans. His daughter arrived at the school the next morning, a lone black girl facing a hateful horde. Elizabeth Eckford's recollections of that fateful day are as riveting as the memorable images:

They came closer, shouting 'no nigger bitch is going to get in our school. Get out of here!' "I turned back to the guards but their faces told me I wouldn't get any help from them. Then I looked down the block and saw a bench at the bus stop. I thought, 'If I can only get there I will be safe.'³³

Eckford made it to the bus bench that historic morning. A white woman, who ignored the jeering crowd, helped the shaken teenaged girl onto the bus. The woman rode with her to the stop where Eckford disembarked to walk dazed into her mother's workplace, the Little Rock School for the Blind.³⁴

Writer James Baldwin was living in Paris when Elizabeth Eckford suffered her ordeal and there is no record of him having seen the news feature on television there. In a curious turn of events, he was galvanized to action by another lesser known black teenaged

³³ Elizabeth Eckford, in her own words, from an excerpt of "The Long Shadow of Little Rock" by Daisy Bates in *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

schoolgirl who, in circumstances like Eckford, confronted a crazed white crowd when she entered a previously all white school in Charlotte, North Carolina. On September 4, 1957 – the same date the National Guard refused Elizabeth Eckford entry to Central High in Little Rock – four black students integrated Harding High School in Charlotte. Three of the students made it in peacefully. Pro-segregation protesters had whipped themselves into a frenzy by the time Dorothy Counts arrived. She had been delayed by mob members who had surrounded her parents' car and refused to let her exit.³⁵ Thus, she made the long, intimidating walk, as had Eckford, alone. There were no national television film crews on scene, but several striking photographs were taken of Counts. Tall and regal, the fifteen-year-old towered over the hostile crowd, comprised mostly of white Harding High students, as she strode purposefully toward the school's front door. She wore a flowing red-and-yellow dress her grandmother had made for her first day of school. Hecklers had covered it with spit by the time she reached the school's entrance. In his unfinished manuscript, *Remember This House*, Baldwin recalled how he learned of the gauntlet Dorothy Counts had to endure and his reaction:

That's when I saw the photograph. Facing us, on every newspaper kiosk on that wide tree-shaped boulevard in France, were photographs of fifteen-year-old Dorothy Counts being reviled and spat upon by a mob as she was making her way to school in Charlotte, North Carolina. It made me furious, it filled me with both hatred and pity. And it made me ashamed. Some one of us should have been there with her!³⁶

³⁵ Tommy Tomlinson, "Dorothy Counts at Harding High: A Story of Pride, Prejudice," *Charlotte Observer*, September 2, 2007. <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article66900492.html> [Accessed July 1, 2017].

³⁶ James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*, Raoul Peck, ed. (New York: Vintage International, 2017), 12-13.

A few months later, Baldwin returned to the United States and secured an apartment in New York City. During his nine previous years in Paris, Baldwin had considered himself a modernist. Influenced by such literary figures as Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, Baldwin subscribed to the idea that reality was subjective, that the artist must be self-aware and free of narrative strictures and willing to expound on the sensibilities of their time, not the past. Baldwin was seeking new ways of expressing himself in literature, especially the usage of internal dialogue and stream-of-consciousness exposition.³⁷ He haunted the same cafes as Hemingway. He conferred on many occasions with fellow black American expatriate writer Richard Wright and author Henry Miller.³⁸ Like Ellison, he rejected the notion that he was a “Negro” writer. Instead, also like Ellison, he saw himself as a writer who happened to be black and could use that experience in his art but was not bound by it. Up to that point in time, as Langston Hughes had observed, Baldwin, with his novel *Giovanni’s Room*, seemed far more interested in using his gifts to explore the literary dimensions of homosexuality than blackness.³⁹ Never one to ignore a slight, Baldwin had mocked the sexually ambiguous Hughes’s racial chauvinism and linked it to the older writer’s paucity of noteworthy literary works since his Harlem Renaissance heyday.⁴⁰

³⁷ Cyraina Johnson-Roullier, “(An)Other Modernism: James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, and the Flight of Rhetoric,” *Project MUSE*, Volume 45, Number 4 (Winter 1999). <https://muse.jhu.article/21432.html> [Accessed January 6, 2018].

³⁸ “Novelist James Baldwin Dies in France at 63,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1987. http://articles.latimes.com/1987-12-01/mn-26007_1_james-baldwin

³⁹ See James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room* (New York: Dial Press, 1956).

⁴⁰ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967*, 295-296.

After his 1957 epiphany, Baldwin did not abandon his previous perspectives and self-image. He sublimated them to a new calling: to confront and defeat racial injustice in the United States. A righteous fury is evident in Baldwin's essays. In readings and interviews, Baldwin's voice recalled the cadence and certainty of a well-read, indignant black minister. The "sinner" Baldwin chastises in the following excerpt is a society whose privileged members have blinded themselves to its terrible history:

For a very long time, America prospered: this prosperity cost millions of people their lives. Now, not even the people who are the most spectacular recipients of the benefits of this prosperity are able to ... understand them or do without them. Above all, they cannot imagine the price paid by their victims for this way of life, and so they cannot afford to know why the victims are revolting.⁴¹

That his presentation reminded one of a secular sermon was ironic considering the contempt and anger Baldwin held for his preacher step-father.⁴² Nonetheless, from his pulpit of poetic prose, Baldwin sought to uplift his people and "save America from itself," an objective he voiced again and again in his warnings to a nation quick to excuse or ignore its own flaws.⁴³

Baldwin's shift to political activism appears at odds with his contempt for writers who built their artistic expression around "causes." In his 1949 *Partisan Review* essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," published while he was in France, Baldwin chastised both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Wright for the oversimplification of their lead

⁴¹ James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*, 90.

⁴² James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 579-591.

⁴³ James Miller, "What Does It Mean to Be an American? The Dialectics of Self-Discovery in Baldwin's 'Paris Essays' (1950-1961)" *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 42, No. 1, Twentieth Century American Literature (April 2008), pp. 51-66.

characters, Uncle Tom and Bigger Thomas. He accused them of dishonesty and further entrenching negative stereotypes of African Americans. Condemning the lead characters of both novels, Baldwin wrote: “They emerge for what they are: a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty and panic and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream.”⁴⁴ Despite their avowed intention of opposing slavery (Beecher Stowe) and exposing black urban despair in a capitalist system (Wright), by focusing on a cause, they had both diminished the complexity and thus the humanity of their fictional creations.⁴⁵ How was Baldwin, now galvanized to action by images of white mob violence against black school children in the South, in 1957 and afterwards any different from Beecher Stowe or Wright if he chose to write about his new-found “cause,” the civil rights movement? Baldwin saw his political activism as his right to freedom of expression. In his subsequent writing, he did not create one-dimensional black characters to advance a political view, but he did comment on the larger issues of racism, sexism and homophobia and how these institutionalized biases were ruining American society.

As he heeded his own conscience to speak out against racial injustice when he returned to the United States in late 1957, Baldwin adopted a more studied interest in jazz. In 1958, he joined Langston Hughes and the also recently repatriated Ralph Ellison in attending the Newport Jazz Festival and its roundtable discussions.⁴⁶ Over the next few years, Baldwin frequented the jazz clubs in New York City. He competed with Langston

⁴⁴ Baldwin, “Everyone’s Protest Novel,” in *Collected Essays*, 586.

⁴⁵ James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” *Partisan Review* Vol. XVI, No. 6 (June 6, 1949), pp.578-585. See also Kevin Mattson, *Rebels All: A Short History of the Conservative Mind in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 52-54.

⁴⁶ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1976*, 286.

Hughes in seeking to mentor a charismatic new jazz pianist and vocalist who had created a sensation with her Greenwich Village nightclub performances in early 1959. Her name was Nina Simone.⁴⁷ One of Baldwin's best known short stories is "Sonny's Blues," first published before Baldwin returned to the United States.⁴⁸ In the short story, Baldwin uses "jazz" metaphorically to examine the stresses that existed in that era between community, family obligation and the desire for individuality among black people. The character of Sonny – the narrator's brother who finally achieves catharsis as a jazz pianist in a Greenwich Village club after serving in the Navy and then going to prison for selling and using heroin – offers a lens through which Baldwin examines urban black travails. However, the jazz-blues theme⁴⁹ of "Sonny's Blues" was a rarity in Baldwin's oeuvre. He seldom declared, as did Ellison and Hughes on many occasions, a deep affection for the music.

Nonetheless, Baldwin recognized the power of jazz to reveal a person's character and the challenges they had faced in life by how they responded to it: "In all jazz, and especially the blues, there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged. Only people who have been 'down the line,' as the song puts it, know what this music is about."⁵⁰ Baldwin's newfound appreciation for jazz artists in the late 1950s reflected his recognition that several of these artists were more than entertainers. They were aware

⁴⁷ Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put A Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 67-69.

⁴⁸ James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" in *Partisan Review*, XXIV (Summer, 1957), pp. 327-358

⁴⁹ Richard N. Albert, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues'," in *College Literature*, Vol.11, No. 2 (Spring 1984), pp.178-185.

⁵⁰ Erin Overbey, "Eighty-Five from the Archive: James Baldwin," *The New Yorker* (February 11, 2010). <https://www.newyorker.com/books/double-take/eighty-five-from-the-archive-james-baldwin.html> [Accessed January 6, 2018].

thinkers who, like him, had chosen to use their gifts to advocate for African Americans' full and equal citizenship in the country they helped build, defend and define.

The growing momentum of the civil rights movement also had drawn Ralph Ellison's keen interest, although he was not as outspoken in public as Baldwin. Ellison, however, was unguarded in his thoughts about the movement in communicating with his friend, Albert Murray. Ellison's surprised delight at the cunning and courage shown by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and his cadre of black ministers in waging the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott was evident in this excerpt from a letter to Murray that Ellison wrote while he was still in Rome: "But, hell, they forgot to bribe the preachers! I saw some of them look like the old, steady, mush-mouthed chicken-hawk variety; real wrinkle-headed bible pounders...But they're talking sense and acting!"⁵¹ Ellison and his wife Fanny lived in Rome as guests of the American Academy from 1955 to 1957. The overseas residency, referred to as the Rome Prize, was another one of the literary spoils the author had won for his acclaimed novel, *The Invisible Man*. Like Baldwin, Ellison returned to the United States in 1957, arriving in New York in late October. Within weeks of his return, Ellison complained the racial tumult in the country had given him a gaseous stomach and he worried about having an ulcer.

He seethed over the Little Rock crisis. Albert Murray was one of the few people with whom Ellison felt uninhibited in venting his fury over America's racist practices. He

⁵¹ Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, edited by Albert Murray and John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 80.

condemned Northern white tolerance of defiant white Southern segregation. The tepid response among Northern white elites to the Southern white officials and Congressmen's brazen refusal to abide by the *Brown II* decision appalled Ellison. In a letter to Murray and among colleagues at Bard College, which hired him to teach in 1958, Ellison called for the Southern Congressional delegation to be charged with treason. "Tolerating these guys is as bad as tolerating communist subversion, for they are just as damaging." Though he did not protest publicly, Ellison maintained "a hard anger about the circumstances surrounding the plight of Negroes in Harlem and across the South."⁵² Yet, Ellison remained aloof, even condescending toward African American leaders for complex reasons, several of which can be traced to his own fraught personal relationships with the black middle class during his formative years.⁵³ In addition, he disparaged black writers whom he felt soiled their prose or poetry with polemics. Langston Hughes was often a target of Ellison on this point.

Uncomfortable with champions of his own race because he refused to be defined by race, Ellison luxuriated in his ascension to the white literary elite. He cited T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway as "ancestors" whom he had chosen and dismissed Hughes and Richard Wright as "relatives" with whom he had no choice to be linked because of their skin color.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, or perhaps *not* so because he suppressed his rage over racism, Ellison saved his harshest attacks for high-handed white intellectuals who elected to diagnose black social and political ills and then prescribe remedies. The Little Rock Nine

⁵² Ralph Ellison in Walton M. Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 82-84.

⁵³ Hilton Als, "In the Territory: A Look at the Life of Ralph Ellison" *The New Yorker* (May 7, 2009) <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007.05/07/in-the-territory.html> [Accessed July 3, 2017].

⁵⁴ Hinton Als, "In the Territory," *New Yorker* (May 7, 2007) <https://newyorker.com/magazine/2007/05/07/in-the-territory.html> [Accessed August 16, 2017].

crisis ignited a fiery dispute over the role of children in the civil rights movement between ostensibly empathetic white supporters and black civil rights leaders. Hannah Arendt inveighed against using children as cannon fodder in her “Reflections on Little Rock.” Arendt wrote the controversial essay in 1958, but the editors of the magazine which originally commissioned the piece, *Commentary*, balked at publishing it because they supported the tactics of the Little Rock Nine activists. Arendt revealed *Commentary*’s trepidation in her preliminary remarks to the article, which was published by *Dissent* magazine in 1959.⁵⁵ Confirming the *Commentary* editors’ fears, Arendt’s criticisms of black familial and social mores drew howls from the black press and activists. It reverberated for years, drawing robust rebuttals from no less than King and, surprisingly, Hannah Arendt’s fellow existentialist-leaning intellectual, Ralph Ellison.

Arendt attempted to assuage readers’ misperception of her motives in the preface of her 1959 essay. She stated: “as a Jew I take my sympathy for the cause of the Negroes as for all oppressed or underprivileged peoples for granted and should appreciate it if the reader did likewise.”⁵⁶ Arendt also pointed out that the “Negro problem” existed throughout the country and should be confronted nationwide and not solely in the South. She concluded all aggrieved races and ethnic groups were susceptible to the same mob hysteria that had seized white Southerners, and presciently warned of riots in northern cities by their growing populations of poor blacks. Her reassurances did little to quell liberal intellectual complaints Arendt had applied cold reductionist analysis to the terrorism white

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” *Dissent* (Winter 1959), p. 45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46.

segregationists were willing to wage against black efforts to integrate Southern schools. Black civil rights leaders vented umbrage at Arendt because her essay impugned them as poor parents who were willing to put their children in harm's way for a battle the adults alone should be fighting.

Adding to their anger was Arendt's argument that civil rights leaders made a grave strategic miscalculation and were fighting the wrong battle in pursuing public school integration: "Because the many different factors involved in public education can quickly be set at cross purposes, government intervention, even at its best, will always be rather controversial. Hence it seems highly questionable whether it was wise to begin enforcement of civil rights in a domain where no basic human and no basic political right is at stake, and where other rights – social and private – whose protection is no less vital, can be so easily hurt."⁵⁷ She advised that blacks should be attacking laws against miscegenation or voting prohibitions instead. In fact, African Americans for decades had mounted dozens of campaigns to overcome the sundry obstacles blocking them from their right to vote.⁵⁸ Her failure to acknowledge these efforts was a clear indication of Arendt's thin knowledge of the breadth of the modern civil rights movement in the South.

In "Reflections on Little Rock," Arendt asserted all human activity within society could be categorized as belonging to three distinct spheres: the political, the social and the private. Only in the political sphere – the public domain, including public spaces and accommodations – were citizens all equal and only in that realm did government have the

⁵⁷ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," p.56.

⁵⁸ "Black Citizens Boycott White Merchants for U.S. Voting Rights, Tuskegee, Alabama, 1957-1961." <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/black-citizens-boycott-white-merchants-us-voting-rights-tuskegee-alabama-1957-1961.html> [Accessed August 16, 2017].

responsibility to enforce equality, according to Arendt's theoretical construct. She further asserted the social sphere was ruled by the right to free association and thus people were entitled to discriminate: to associate with those of like kind, status and interests and shun those with whom they did not share any social ties or history. Arendt used the tradition of Jews vacationing with other Jews in the Catskills as an example of acceptable discrimination in the social realm. The private sphere of human activity included people others loved, including family and personal friends. It is a realm, Arendt proclaimed, that demanded exclusiveness and no intrusion from external society. People had to be free to choose whom they loved and befriended in their private sphere. The uniqueness of the included person, a subjective assessment, governed decisions regarding with whom one shared their private lives.⁵⁹

Arendt criticized the Little Rock Nine campaign because the parents and the supporting black community network because public education was the worst possible target for black activism. By seeking to desegregate a white school, Arendt asserted the black leaders had tangled the political, social and private spheres, thereby creating a morass in which their objectives would struggle, sink and suffocate. Black parents had forced themselves into the social sphere of white parents who had the right, in Arendt's thinking, to have their children attend school with only white children. Most damaged in the Little Rock Nine campaign were the black students, according to Arendt. Their parents and campaign leaders had forced them, minors who did not yet have full rights as citizens, into a political battle. Arendt declared, "Children are first of all part of family and home, and

⁵⁹ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent*, pp.50-53.

this means they are, or should be, brought up in an atmosphere of idiosyncratic exclusiveness which alone makes a home a home, strong and secure enough to shield its young against the demands of the social and the responsibilities of the political realm.”⁶⁰ She infers had they remained in a segregated black school, they would have benefitted from positive social associations with their own kind, and they would have avoided suffering the traumatic confrontations that drew worldwide news coverage.⁶¹

Aside from Ellison’s earlier referenced letters to Murray, it appears he offered few contemporaneous written retorts to Arendt’s essay. Yet, Arendt was on still his mind when Ellison penned his essay, “The World and the Jug,” in which he eviscerated Irving Howe and his article, “Black Boys and Native Sons,” published in the Autumn 1963 issue of *Dissent* magazine. Ellison blasted Howe in the very first paragraph, asking the reader the following question: “Finally, why is it that so many who would tell us the meaning of Negro life never bother to learn how varied it really is?”⁶² Ellison, in the second paragraph of his essay assails Arendt, by comparing Howe’s uninformed high-handedness in regard to blacks to that exhibited by her: “‘Black Boys and Native Sons’...is a lively piece, written with something of the Olympian authority that characterized Hannah Arendt’s ‘Reflections on Little Rock’ in the Winter 1959 *Dissent* ...”.⁶³

Ellison continued to vent his anger at Arendt. In an interview he did with Robert Penn Warren for *Who Speaks for the Negro*, Ellison remarked that Arendt’s criticisms of

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.55.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁶² Ralph Ellison, “The World and the Jug,” in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club/Random House, 1964), 108.

⁶³ Ellison, “The World and the Jug,” in *Shadow and Act*, 108.

black mothers had overlooked the way in which the black parents in Little Rock were instilling in their children an “‘ideal of sacrifice’ necessary to move the nation forward on its quest for true democracy.”⁶⁴ Ellison continued by stating that what Arendt did not understand was the Little Rock parents had asked their children to endure this ordeal because the parents knew “the overtones of a rite of initiation which such events constitute for a child, a confrontation of the terrors of social life with all the mysteries stripped away. And in the outlook of many of these parents (who wish the problem didn’t exist), the child is expected to face the terror and contain his fear and anger precisely because he is a Negro American.”⁶⁵

Ellison had valorized the intrepid teenagers of Little Rock before, in a 1961 *December* magazine interview with Richard Stern, entitled “That Same Pleasure, that Same Pain.” Ellison, in closing, stated what he believed his role as a writer and novelist was in the civil rights movement:

I speak of the faith, the patience, the humor, the sense of timing, the rugged sense of life and the manner of expressing it which all go to define the American Negro. Times change but these possessions must endure forever – not simply because they define us as a group, but because they represent a further instance of man’s triumph over chaos. You know, the skins of those thin-legged little girls who faced the mob in Little Rock marked them as Negro but the spirit that directed their feet is the old universal urge toward freedom.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Kenneth W. Warren, “Ralph Ellison and the Problem of Cultural Authority,” *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture*, Volume 30, Number 2 (Summer 2003), p. 159.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ralph Ellison, in Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), 343-344.

⁶⁶ Ralph Ellison, “That Same Pleasure, That Same Pain,” in *Shadow and Act*, 21-22.

Ellison's emphatic opinion on the Little Rock Nine and its implications regarding black identity in the United States is remarkable because it is atypical. The writer, in general, avoided involvement in the public debates of the modern civil rights movement. He believed his highest and best contribution to the advancement of humankind was to be the best and most honest writer he could be. Existentialism, the philosophy that the individual person is a free and responsible agent for her or his own development through acts of the will,⁶⁷ influenced Ellison's approach to writing and how he perceived himself. He saw himself, again, not as a "black" writer but simply as a writer. Ellison's aloofness has drawn negative assessments from several scholars, especially African American intellectuals, including the late Jerry Gafio Watts⁶⁸ and Hilton Als, in recent decades.

After Little Rock

I arrived a long time ago at the place they now claim they want to reach!
And as far as using what comes out of our particular experience and treating
it with what I thought was dignity, and certainly with love, I did that.

Ralph Ellison, interviewed by Robert G. O'Meally⁶⁹

Decades after he wrote *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison still bristled at Amiri Baraka's assessment of him and his writing as "anti-black." Ralph Ellison was annoyed with those who believed he lacked racial pride and held no special affection for black people. Yet, Ellison brought these criticisms upon himself with his public speeches and written work. He amplified suspicion among racial justice advocates by his decision to refrain from

⁶⁷ Hanna Arendt, "What is This New Philosophy They Call 'Existentialism'?", *The Nation*, February 23, 1946 <https://www.thenation.com/article/french-existentialism.html> [Accessed June 20, 2017]

⁶⁸ See Jerry Gafio Watts, *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics and the Afro-American Intellectual* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁶⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Living With Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*, Robert G. O'Meally, ed. (New York: Modern Library/Random House, 2002), 285,

making any major statement in support of the civil rights movement and his disdain of those African Americans who did use their art to proclaim a political position.

Langston Hughes, who once thought of himself as a mentor to Ellison, fired a stinging barb at his protégé in 1959, a white-hot cauldron year of Klan violence against blacks attempting to register to vote in the South. Hughes had encountered Ellison at a Newport Jazz Festival seminar in 1958 and was flabbergasted Ellison said nothing about the civil rights tumult. Ellison instead used his Newport platform to voice his alarm over the global threat posed by the USSR's invasion of Hungary. Hughes, speaking through his folksy black alter ego Jesse B. Semple, mocked Ellison's recent outspokenness against Communist aggression. "With all this talking about the Free World," quipped Semple, "and ain't-it-a-shame about the Hungarians, there is nary a word about ain't-it-a-shame about the Negroes that cannot vote in Mississippi."⁷⁰

What Hughes, Baraka, and all the critics of his racial politics who followed them did not realize or want to admit was Ellison believed, like Alain Locke, propagandistic motives doomed the artist's work to mediocrity. Ellison's stance was that great art had to be above politics, even when the invalidation and material obliteration of racism was the artist's goal. Further, Ellison was convinced he personally was "beyond" the fray because his blackness, with all its laudable aspects, had been fused into his "American" identity. He preferred for the world to see him as an American, not a Negro American or Afro-American. Ellison consistently argued throughout his adult life it was the "Negro-ness" of

⁷⁰ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967, I Dream a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 296.

American culture and its people that made the nation exceptional. A one-time cornet player in his youth, Ellison was most proud of the contributions jazz musicians had made to the racially polyglot American identity. He saw himself as part of the process that created the best attributes of the national character: “My strength comes from Louis Armstrong and Jimmy Rushing, Hot Lips Page and people on that level, Duke Ellington, Mrs. Breaux, Mark Twain – all kinds of American figures who have been influenced by and contributed to that complex interaction of backgrounds and cultures which is specifically *American*.”⁷¹

Whether one agrees with Ellison’s stance on advocacy via artistic expression or not, any credible historical interpretation of jazz’s influence on American culture and politics must acknowledge and address the declarations the acclaimed novelist, essayist and critic made on the subject. Ellison was also a musician, albeit not a professional one, with the cornet and trumpet being his preferred instruments. He had been enthralled by both classical music and jazz since his boyhood in Oklahoma City and attended Tuskegee Institute, studying music for three years before moving to New York City to look for work. Born in 1914, Ellison came of age during the same era that the dance hall friendly big bands of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, Jimmie Lunceford and, especially, William “Count” Basie were rising in popularity and artistic power. Nearby Kansas City was the epicenter of the “Southwestern” jazz sound. The Kansas City scene generated national and ultimately international jazz stars, including Charlie Parker, Mr. Basie, and Lester “Prez” Young. Ellison’s hometown of Oklahoma City spawned the first important jazz guitarist, Charlie

⁷¹ Ralph Ellison, in *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 286.

Christian, and vocalist Jimmy “Mr. Five-by-Five” Rushing, an Oklahoma City local and favorite of Ellison.⁷²

Ellison demonstrated great affection for jazz in general throughout his relatively long life. Sly, blues-based jazz, the kind he first experienced as a young man, remained his preferred style and was a key factor in why he so admired Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, jazz greats whose compositions and musical expressions were rooted in the blues. The preceding brief biographical background was included to make the case that there are few, if any, American writers of Ellison’s caliber who knew more about jazz, who possessed the societal vantage point and who had the personal experience to make more useful observations about its impact on American culture. Ellison was an authoritative voice who framed the conversation about jazz and its value to American culture. His jazz writing was as prolific as his civil rights commentary was sparse.

Ellison grappled with the mutable “American identity”⁷³ in his written works, especially in his essays on jazz. Robert O’Meally, Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, has drawn from Ellison’s many commentaries that 20th Century African Americans, unburdened by a direct European or non-U.S. immediate heritage, were in a unique position to define who they were in a fundamentally new or American way. O’Meally used a metaphorical comparison between classical and jazz musicians: “Unlike the classical artist, the jazz artist must achieve a technique that uncovers the self, that answers the question that Ellison says is *the* question

⁷² Ralph Ellison, “Remembering Jimmy,” *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964; reprinted 1994), 241-246.

⁷³ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1964), xxi-xxii.

of American art: who am I?”⁷⁴ This question of “what is the essential character of an American, of what is the American identity?” has not been resolved by passage of time.

Ellison argued that white *Americans*, all *Americans*, have been indelibly imprinted by their fellow African *Americans*’ much travailed but frequently triumphal sojourn through the country’s history. Ellison did not proclaim America’s jazz-shaped Negro-ness to ridicule or condemn non-black Americans. He believed that it carried within it admirable and even heroic characteristics, such as optimism, self-invention, courageous perseverance in the face of daunting challenges and the possibility for transcendence. Ellison’s positive, pro-America *writ large* outlook can be traced to his relatively “racial prejudice free” upbringing in Oklahoma City, where as a boy, he aspired to be a “Renaissance Man” and had mutually beneficial relationships with white friends and mentors.⁷⁵ However, Ellison did not romanticize his community, or the limitations often violently imposed on African Americans during the era: “We were pushed off to what seemed the least desirable side of the city (but which some years later was found to contain one of the state’s richest pools of oil), and our system of justice was based on Texas law, yet there was an optimism within the Negro community and a sense of possibility which, despite our awareness of limitation (dramatized so brutally by the Tulsa riot of 1921), transcended all of this.”⁷⁶

Ellison continued to proclaim the optimism and transcendence embodied in jazz, especially as practiced by his two heroes, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. Ellison

⁷⁴ Robert O’Meally, “Introduction: Jazz Shapes,” *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*; Robert O’Meally, ed. (New York: Random House/Modern Library Edition, 2001), xix.

⁷⁵ Ralph Ellison, “That Same Pleasure, That Same Pain: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House/Quality Paperback Book Club, 2001), 3-12.

⁷⁶ Ellison, “Remembering Jimmy,” *Shadow and Act*, 242.

applauded their achievement in the earlier referenced “Homage to Duke Ellington on His Birthday.”

Even though few recognized it, such artists as Ellington and Louis Armstrong were the stewards of our vaunted American optimism. Their music was a rejection of the chaos and license that characterized the so-called Jazz Age, and which has returned once more to haunt the nation. Place Ellington with Hemingway, they are both masters of that which is most enduring in the human enterprise: the power of man to define himself against the ravages of time through artistic style.⁷⁷

Heroism was another consistent theme and to-be-desired trait in Ellison’s jazz-shaped America. In his novel, *Invisible Man*, Ellison admitted he was leveling heavy criticism against the black leaders of the period in which he wrote it: “This was the late forties and I kept trying to account for the fact that when the chips were down, Negro leaders did not represent the Negro community.”⁷⁸ However, Ellison chafed at the notion African Americans in general lacked courage and only found their resolve after the civil rights movement gained momentum. He observed that the “fairest thing to say about it is that the predicament of Negroes in the United States rendered these leaders automatically impotent, until they recognized the true source of power – which lies, as Martin Luther King perceived, in the Negro’s ability to suffer even death for the attainment of our beliefs.”⁷⁹ This last observation highlights the “resiliency” characteristic Ellison asserts Negro-ness has distinctively woven into America’s cultural fabric.

In Ellison’s view, jazz artists also became exemplars of another trait that is widely regarded as central to the American character: self-invention. Ellison frequently mentioned

⁷⁷ Ellison, “Homage to Duke Ellington on His Birthday,” *Living with Music*, 80.

⁷⁸ Ellison, “That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act*, 18.

⁷⁹ Ellison, “That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act*, 19.

Ellington as the paragon of jazz-shaped American self-invention. The jazz maestro married the creative gift with resiliency and transcendent style. Ellington avoided many of the indignities heaped upon Billie Holliday in accommodations and dining by traveling in his own handsomely appointed rail car, thereby avoiding most of the ugly Jim Crow practices intended to remind Negroes, especially the uppity jazz musicians among them, that their skin color made them second-class citizens. Ellison marveled at Ellington's savoir faire when the bandleader played Oklahoma City while Ellison was still in high school:

And then Ellington and the great orchestra came to town; came with their golden uniforms, their sophistication, their skills; their golden horns, their flights of controlled and disciplined fantasy; came with their art, their special sound...They were news from a great wide world, an example and a goal; and I wish that all those who write so knowledgeably of Negro boys having no masculine figures with whom to identify would consider the long national and international career of Ellington and his band. Who were so worldly, who so elegant, who so mockingly creative? Who so skilled at their given trade and who treated the social limitations placed in their paths with greater disdain? ⁸⁰

As for Ellison and his own self-invention, he apparently subjugated his anger in response to racism in his personal life and refused to see himself and his art only as "black." On this matter, Ellison stated: "When I began writing in earnest I was forced, thus, to relate myself consciously and imaginatively as American, as Negro American, and as a Negro from what in its own belated way was a pioneer background...This was no matter of sudden insight but of slow and blundering discovery, of a struggle to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ellison, "Homage to Duke Ellington on His Birthday," *Living With Music*, 81.

⁸¹ Ralph Ellison, "Introduction," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House/Quality Paperback Books, 2001), xix.

What *is* clear is that Ellison's world view was in large part driven by his patriotism. He believed in the greatness of America, despite its flaws. In the comments he made to his literary colleague and friend, Robert Penn Warren, in February 1964, Ellison supported early 20th Century scholar W.E.B DuBois's theory that African Americans possess a "double consciousness," one consciousness steeped in their black experience and the other rooted in their perception of themselves as "American." Ellison suggests in his conversation with Warren that it is indeed possible for blacks to be proud of their African American heritage and still press for "full absorption" into American culture.⁸² This declaration is consistent with Ellison's writings up to that point. Full participation in American culture was more desirable than ever, given his long-held belief that African Americans had made American culture, by their jazz-shaping of it, more vibrant, rewarding and pregnant with possibility than it was at the dawn of the 20th Century.

One last aspect of Ellison's thinking on the jazz-shape of the American identity was his rejection of efforts by social scientists, polemicists and even other African American artists to wield black art, and specifically his beloved jazz and blues, as a weapon in conflicts with the broader white American culture. Ellison was briefly drawn into American Communist Party politics when he arrived in New York City during the latter half of the "Red Decade" of the 1930s. He found himself soon alienated from the Communist Party and how it characterized African Americans as victims. Ellison infers that he was "under

⁸² Ralph Ellison Interview, Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965) <https://who.library.vanderbilt.edu/media/ralph-ellison.html> [12/04/2013]

the influence” of one of his literary heroes, Ernest Hemingway, and his book, *Death in the Afternoon*, which he said fostered his naïve “attraction (soon discarded) to Marxist political theory, which was my response to the inferior status which society sought to impose upon me (I did not then, now, or ever *consider* myself inferior). I did not know my true relationship to America – what citizen of the United States really does? – but I did know and accept how I felt inside.”⁸³ Thus, despite Richard Wright’s pivotal role in helping Ellison launch his own writing career a few years later, Ellison distanced himself from the depiction of the black experience that Richard Wright created with his work, *Native Son*. Ellison, in fact, was condemnatory of Wright’s Bigger Thomas character, noting that he “felt Wright was overcommitted to ideology.”⁸⁴

Finally, in a narrative that focuses on racial justice advocacy by jazz artists during the civil rights movement, one can easily cast the iconoclastic Ellison in a negative light. Yet, he was one who genuinely believed he had transcended any racial identity the world sought to impose on him. As did Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr., Ellison believed he, and those people with whom he shared African descent, should be judged not by their physical attributes but their abilities and characters. No group had greater claim to being American than its black citizens in Ellison’s judgment and he was convinced that was a trait of which blacks should be proud.⁸⁵ Ellison scoffed at the often-bellicose black nationalism, such as that practiced by Amiri Baraka, as accepting a position of inferiority as its starting point. After all, if one’s antagonist is “the man,” what does that make the protagonist? As John

⁸³ Ellison, “Introduction,” *Shadow and Act*, xxi.

⁸⁴ Ellison, “That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act*, 15-16.

⁸⁵ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 16-21.

Gennari observed in his important work on jazz and jazz critics: “Ellison refused to accept a view of American culture that ceded dominance to whites and that remained blind to the interconnectedness of the races.”⁸⁶ Yet, Gennari continued by acknowledging there remains one troubling aspect to Ellison’s position. It offers “little help in understanding why whites remained so willfully blind to their cultural Negro-ness, so resistant to residential and educational integration, and so wary of political equality.”⁸⁷ Ellison’s embrace of American exceptionalism made him too willing to deny or minimize the nation’s determination to preserve the political, social and economic advantages centuries of racism had given to whites. Nonetheless, while the more activist-minded jazz artists and writers of his generation dismissed him as aloof and disengaged, Ellison’s belief in the redeeming promise of America’s ideals reflected a similar conviction which animated the efforts of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

While dozens of African campaigns for independent nationhood surged forward in the late 1950s, the U.S. civil rights movement stalled after the dramatic Little Rock Nine events of 1957. A series of developments had removed King, the leader who is now synonymous with the modern civil rights movement, from the forefront of the campaign for full equality. After being stabbed by a troubled woman at a September 1958 New York City book signing event for his *Stride Toward Freedom*, King retreated to Atlanta to convalesce until early 1959. He then left for India where he studied the philosophy and

⁸⁶ Gennari, *Blowin Hot and Cool*, 277.

⁸⁷ Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 278-279.

practices of Gandhian non-violent resistance. Upon his return in the spring, King spent the rest of the year moving his family and ministry from Montgomery to his hometown of Atlanta.

Further paralyzing progress for the civil rights movement at the time was the intense behind-the-scenes battle among Roy Wilkins and the National Urban League (NUL), the Thurgood Marshall-dominated NAACP and King's upstart Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) over the future direction of the national campaign. King and his brotherhood of southern preachers, with their economic boycotts and other confrontational campaigns, alarmed the pro-black middle class and staid NUL. The SCLC also threatened the legalistic approach of the NAACP's leadership, which preferred to fight for civil rights in the courtrooms, not with spectacles on the streets. King's meteoric rise as the new face of the civil rights movement in the eyes of the international media and local black communities left a bitter taste in the mouths of Marshall and Wilkins, as they both viewed themselves as successful, experienced leaders of the Negro race. To add financial injury to psychological insult, King's SCLC had begun to compete successfully with the NAACP and NUL for donations from wealthy white liberals, philanthropic organizations and Hollywood celebrities.⁸⁸ During the same period, white violence against blacks exploded in the South. "State rights" became the battle cry of white southern government officials determined to preserve the social, political and economic privileges built upon racial oppression.

⁸⁸ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 206-222. See also Myrlie Evers with William Peters, *For Us, The Living* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 260-265.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that politically aware jazz artists such as Sonny Rollins, Max Roach and Randy Weston and writers such as Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansberry identified with the frustrated black college students who were joining the civil rights movement as the 1950s ended. To them, African anticolonial leaders demonstrated the dauntlessness necessary for their people to reclaim their full humanity. They believed black American leaders should emulate the African freedom fighters. Jazz artists shared the surging student movement's impatience with the cautious U.S. civil rights leaders. Annoyance and indignation were giving way to anger and an eagerness to confront the leaders and institutions determined to keep black people relegated to "second class citizenship." These writers and jazz artists would draw fresh artistic inspiration and political courage from the intrepid leaders of the African nations fighting to regain their independence.

A key objective of this narrative is the identification of superior works by jazz artists and allied writers whose artistic expression was inspired by the landmark civil rights developments of the period. The determined efforts of local black activists, supported by the NAACP, to desegregate white schools in Little Rock, Charlotte and other cities across the South ignited a furor that burned itself into the American public's consciousness. Mob violence by Southern whites, as well as brazen obstructionism and snide excuses from their elected politicians, provoked the combustible Charles Mingus to compose and record his post-bop masterpiece, *Fables of Faubus*. His song forever mocks the Little Rock Nine nemesis, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, with its clownish refrain. Mingus's memorable composition was noted earlier in this chapter. However, three other artists

stepped forward during this period to produce works that contained political themes but also stand on their own as superior art. In a curious coincidence, the three well-known artists, Duke Ellington, Sonny Rollins and Langston Hughes (assisted by Charles Mingus), recorded their songs within weeks of each other in February and March of 1958.

Ellington was first, entering Columbia's Los Angeles studios on February 4th to lay down tracks for his second and, by wide critical acclaim, best version of his *Black, Brown and Beige*. He had re-imagined and refined his 1943 long-form composition, which chronicled African Americans' journey from slavery to freedom. Ellington wanted to take advantage of modern stereophonic technology and his own growth as a composer. With the civil rights movement gaining momentum, the observant Ellington likely concluded it was time to revisit his triumphal tale of African Americans' sojourn from slavery to freedom. According to Irving Townsend, the Columbia producer who worked with Ellington on his late 1950s sessions, no artist with whom he worked approached recording with more seriousness than Ellington.⁸⁹ The jazz maestro knew he was creating music which could conceivably be heard forever. Thus, he invested considerable time and energy into preparing for the *Black, Brown and Beige* sessions.

Ellington had seen firsthand the strength of the black church in the preceding years. This faith-based resolve manifested itself in the church support given to King and the other African American ministers as they led the direct-action campaigns to desegregate schools and other public institutions across the South. Ellington also had been an admirer of Mahalia Jackson for years, having first become acquainted with her and her famed cooking

⁸⁹ Hasse, *Beyond Category*, 333-334.

in Chicago during the 1940s. Ellington had been struggling to reclaim his own Christian faith. He strayed away from it after the death of first his mother and then his father within a few years of each in the late 1930s.⁹⁰

Ellington had pursued Mahalia Jackson since mid-1957 with the intent of having her perform a vocal version of “Come Sunday,” an instrumental song whose melody line had been played by renowned Ellington saxophonist Johnny Hodges in *Black, Brown and Beige*’s 1943 Carnegie Hall debut. Jackson had balked. She was wary of performing with a jazz band. But, the charming Ellington reassured her that he would not ask her to sing anything that would make her uncomfortable or offend her gospel fan base. She acquiesced. Jackson arrived by train at Los Angeles Union Station in early February 1958. After a few rehearsals with gospel’s greatest individual performer,⁹¹ Ellington absorbed the nuances of Jackson’s intonation, timing and phrasing. Keeping the word selection simple and straightforward, Ellington wrote the now-famous lyrics sung with such profound devotion by Jackson during the February 11th recording session. The majestic refrain is a plea for Divine intervention.

Ellington craftily avoids references to Jesus and instead alludes to a universal Deity. Still, the song can be interpreted as a direct entreaty to God to help African Americans endure and prevail over racially motivated violence and deprivation. There is grave

⁹⁰ Diane Howard and Tom Snyder, “Duke Ellington and the Christian Origins of Jazz,” *Guideposts* (February 1971) <http://guideposts.org/faith-and-prayer/power-of-prayer/guideposts-classics-duke-ellington-on-his-path.html> [Accessed October 26, 2017]

⁹¹ Ralph Ellison, “As the Spirit Moves Mahalia,” *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 87-94. Ellison’s essay first appeared in the *Saturday Review* (September 27, 1958).

earnestness in Jackson's voice as she sings her opening appeal: "Lord, dear Lord above, God Almighty, God of Love, please look down and see my people through."⁹² The title "Come Sunday" is a historical reference to the day that blacks, when they were held as slaves, treasured weekly. It was the only day they were not forced to labor. It was also the only day on which they could gather apart from their white captors and pray.⁹³

Often, when lyrics are added to an existing well-regarded instrumental composition, the resulting product is not as engaging as the original. This complaint can be leveled against no less a jazz icon than Charles Mingus and his addition of lyrics to the 1960 version of "Fables of Faubus" on Candid Records. The banal invective of the later vocal version undercuts the witty mockery conveyed by the earlier instrumental. "Come Sunday" soars above this pitfall. As noted by Columbia producer Townsend, Ellington's updated version of the song is "remarkable in that when the words came they fit it so beautifully; they complemented the melody. The words and music became partners."⁹⁴ The song became one of Ellington's most popular, ranking behind in sheet music sales only such American Songbook standards as "Sophisticated Lady," "Take the 'A' Train," and "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't got That Swing)."⁹⁵ In addition, the 1958 version of the song is the composer's most enduring link to the black church and is performed by African American congregations of all denominations. As for Ellington, he claimed the experience of creating the vocal version of "Come Sunday" helped rekindle his faith. Recalled Ellington, in the year before his death: "This encounter with Mahalia Jackson had a strong

⁹² "Come Sunday" lyric excerpt. Duke Ellington © 1958, 1999 Sony Music Entertainment.

⁹³ Irving Townsend, *Black, Brown and Beige* liner notes, Columbia Legacy re-issue (1999), 14

⁹⁴ Townsend, *Black, Brown and Beige* liner notes, 15.

⁹⁵ *The Great American Songbook, Volume Two*. (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Company, 2010.)

influence on me and my sacred music, and also made me a much handsomer kid in the Right Light.”⁹⁶

Like “Fables of Faubus,” Sonny Rollins’s opus, “Freedom Suite,” was recognized earlier in this chapter. Rollins recorded the entire album in two sessions, one on February 11th and the second on March 7th, 1958. The title track is an unprecedented tour-de-force. With no piano and just his warm, mahogany toned tenor saxophone and masterful accompaniment by bassist Oscar Pettiford and drummer Max Roach, Rollins mesmerizes the listener with inventive chord progressions, masterful soloing and a fluid arrangement that makes this nineteen-minute opus fly by. The composition is presented undivided, taking up the entire Side 1 of the album. No jazz artist except Duke Ellington had recorded a multi-movement instrumental that matched the length of Rollins’s “Freedom Suite.”

The refrain of “Freedom Suite” is insistent. It brims with impatience and resentment but resolves into hope and joy. Playing the song in the ear-friendly key of G, Rollins hammers the melody line into the listener’s memory by repeating it three times before stretching out for minutes in an extended but accessible solo. The song’s jagged rhythms reflect the lessons learned by Rollins as a sideman to Thelonious Monk, a pianist-composer famed for his unorthodox tempos. Rollins also had absorbed Charlie Parker’s speed demon technique. With *Freedom Suite*, his original style was on display, muscular but less dependent on frenetic speed and more centered on motivic improvisation. Despite his reference to Du Bois in the liner notes and the composition’s association with the erupting

⁹⁶ Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*, 256.

civil rights movement, “Freedom Suite” was a highly personal work for Rollins. It was about his freedom, as an artist and a human being.⁹⁷

The third and least-known effort at noteworthy advocacy in artistic expression which was created during the Little Rock Nine crisis years is “Dream Montage,” a collaboration between Langston Hughes and Charles Mingus. To his close friends, Hughes had shared his disdain for the “Beats” fad of poetry recitation over bongos or jazz records in the Greenwich Village scene in 1957. He felt the white appropriation “parodied modern urban black culture.”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Hughes wanted to be recognized as a pioneer of this art form because he had given poetry readings over jazz and blues music as earlier as 1926. Hoping to take advantage of the popularity of the genre, Hughes urged Alfred A. Knopf to refer to him as the “original jazz poet” on the cover of the soon to be published *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Hughes sought to remind the Beats of his primacy by giving a high-profile poetry reading at the Village Vanguard in early 1958 with bassist Charles Mingus and pianist Phineas Newborn accompanying him. The performance drew raves from the black newsweekly the *New York Age* and the attention of jazz critic and songwriter/producer Leonard Feather.⁹⁹

Feather offered to produce an entire album of jazz poetry by Hughes, which they agreed would be entitled *The Weary Blues*, in tribute to one of Hughes’s first acclaimed poems during his Harlem Renaissance ascension. The Joplin, Missouri-born poet and writer requested Charles Mingus to assemble his backing band for the recording session,

⁹⁷ Orin Keepnews, *Freedom Suite*, original liner notes. Riverside Records Re-issue ©2008, RCD-30507.

⁹⁸ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 280.

⁹⁹ Ibid. See also the *New York Age*, March 8, 1958 and the *New York Daily News*, March 6, 1958.

which occurred on March 18, 1958. Feather had suggested the Modern Jazz Quartet, but Hughes preferred Mingus. Although Mingus also was modernist, Hughes said the bassist had more of a blues core to his music, which provided “more beat to my ear,”¹⁰⁰ a judgment Hughes had shared with Ellison after assessing Mingus in 1956.

In his recitation of “Dream Montage,” Hughes’s narration fixates the listener on his words despite his flat, unremarkable Midwestern speaking voice. He does so without falling into the traps of being melodramatic or mimicking the chord progressions of a reed instrument. Mingus’s accompaniment is spare but arresting. Drummer Kenny Dennis provides deft percussive accents and pianist Horace Parlan adds understated tone shifts. Mingus showcases his preference for using trombone and tenor saxophone without trumpet in his horn arrangements. The relaxed, urbane feel of trombonist Jimmy Knepper and tenor saxophonist Shafi Hadi’s refrain is like a gentle breeze under Hughes’s words, buoying them above the music like an updraft ridden by a raptor over Central Park. As for Hughes, he splices together segments from some of his best-known poetry to give the listener an insightful historical overview of how hopeful blacks flocked to Harlem from the South and the Caribbean. He uses the voice of a native Harlemit to tell the story:

“I was born here,” he said
 Watched Harlem grow
 Until colored folks spread from river to river
 Across the middle of Manhattan
 Up from Penn Station
 Dark tenth of a nation
 Planes from Puerto Rico
 Boats with holds full of Chico
 Up from Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica

¹⁰⁰ August 23, 1956 letter from Langston Hughes to Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes Papers (Correspondence), Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

And busses marked “New York” from
 Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Arkansas...
 I’ve seen them coming, dark, wide-eyed, dreaming...¹⁰¹

Hughes next interjects a line of verse from his 1951 poem “Harlem,” best recognized by its signature rhetorical question of “what happens to a raisin in the sun?” With crisp couplets that create vivid vignettes, Hughes conveys the despair of working poor blacks who have had their “dreams deferred” by the economic inequality and institutional racism rampant in New York City and other northern metropolises. Infusing his voice with a weary resignation, Hughes observes that there is a certain amount of “waiting, impotence and confusion...when a dream is kicked around.”¹⁰² These observant, empathetic lines of verse, ensconced in an album of otherwise ordinary jazz poetry from 1958, may not be well-known. Yet, the eloquence of Hughes’s rumination on the lives of common blacks in urban America makes “Dream Montage” noteworthy to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the perspectives of African American jazz artists and writers on the social conditions faced by black people during mid-1950s era of the modern civil rights movement.

¹⁰¹ Langston Hughes, excerpt from “Dream Montage,” *Weary Blues*, MGM Records ©1958 E 3697.

¹⁰² Hughes, “Dream Montage.”

CHAPTER 4: AFRICAN ANTICOLONIALISM AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 1960S

What came new out of Africa in the late 1950s for a great many Negro Americans was indeed the chance for the first time to identify in a positive way with the continent of their black ancestors.

Harold Isaacs¹

Social historian Robin D.G. Kelley observed that Malcolm X described the extraordinary decade between 1945 and 1955, during which subjugated people in colonized nations revolted against their colonizers, as a “tidal wave of color.”² African peoples, by the sheer magnitude of their lands seized by Western European nations during the Scramble for Africa in the late Nineteenth Century, were center stage in this global revolt against imperialism. The ravages of World War Two had weakened the economic and political stranglehold the colonial metropolises once had on their African “possessions.” The possessed demanded their freedom and the return of their native lands.

By the mid-1950s, African Americans, who had once cheered the improbable white hero of Tarzan and jeered the grotesque caricatures of Africans in movies, rebuked Hollywood studio executives and their distorted portrayal of African peoples. African ancestry, among college-educated African Americans, became an attribute that stirred pride and not shame. In her 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry built a key subplot around the romance between two characters: black American college co-ed Beneatha Younger and Nigerian transfer student Joseph Asagai. Hansberry, through

¹ Harold Isaacs, *The New World of Negro Americans* (New York: John Day, 1963), 288-289

² Robin D.G. Kelley, “A Poetics of Anticolonialism,” *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, Volume 51, Number 6 (November 1999), 8.

Beneatha, reflected the affection young blacks had discovered for their African heritage. Hansberry's theatrical construct also symbolized young blacks' decision to ally themselves with an ascendant Pan-African community rather than confine themselves to an American consumer capitalist society that kept them at its lowest rung.³ In the real world, this new generation joined ranks with geopolitically aware black leaders who recognized that, in the real world, Africans were demanding the ouster of plundering white imperialists from their respective homelands and would take up arms if necessary to expel them.⁴

A cadre of black American activists, led by firebrands such as Malcolm X, James Farmer and a young Stokely Carmichael, aspired to emulate Africans' forcefulness in pressing an allied fight against Jim Crow in the United States. The anticolonial and civil rights movements were allied because they had an ideological common enemy: pseudo-scientific racism. Defenders of colonialism justified their repression of Africans based on the "view that Africans were permanently inferior to Europeans and could never successfully adopt the 'civilization' of Europe."⁵ In the United States, political leaders used this permanent inferiority myth, from the collapse of Reconstruction until the mid-1960s, to erect and enforce segregationist institutions, policies and social norms designed to bar rights and privileges equal to whites. Since it first had been promulgated, pseudo-scientific racism, in all its heinous manifestations, had been under furious assault by Pan-

³ Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun: with Connections* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2000), 87-91 and 101-102.

⁴ Robert F. Williams, "Is Violence Necessary to Combat Injustice? For the Positive: We Must Fight Back," *Liberation* (September 1959) in *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, Clayborne Carson, et. al., eds. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 110-112. See also Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 107-108.

⁵ Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin, *Africa & Africans*, Fourth Edition (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995), 231.

African intellectuals such as George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois. What turned the tide in their favor in the 1950s and early 1960s was the rise of an internationally connected network of resourceful, charismatic African leaders determined to cast out colonialism.⁶

In their supreme arrogance, the colonizers had allowed intelligent, upper caste Africans to acquire Western educations in some of their most elite institutions. Several of these educated Africans became the most eloquent and outspoken opponents of colonialism in the mid- twentieth Century. Francophone intellectual-activists Franz Fanon, Leopold Senghor, Sekou Toure, Leon Damas, Alioune Diop and Aime Cesaire were especially effective in swaying liberal white opinion in Western countries to support the independence movements in their respective homelands. In the years from World War Two to the conflagration of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s, a torrent of anticolonial literature flowed from writer-activists, most of whom are now seen as the founding members of Pan Africanism. These works included W.E.B. Du Bois's *Color and Democracy* (1945) and *The World and Africa* (1947), Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), George Padmore's *Pan Africanism or Communism?: The Coming Struggle for Africa* (1956), and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957). There were also several powerful essays presented in journals such as *Presence Africaine* and *African Revolution*.⁷

⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53-54. See also Robin Hayes, "The Dialogic Relationship Between Black Power and African Independence: A Case Study of SNCC's Role, 1960-1970," *Post Identity* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 10-15.

⁷ Kelley, *A Poetics of Anticolonialism*, 8.

In 1955, the year that witnessed Emmett Till's brutal murder and Rosa Parks' Montgomery Boycott-sparking defiance, Aime Césaire also re-published his searing 1950 denunciation of imperialism and its racist underpinnings, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Césaire's passionate denunciation of the immorality, the intimidation and the barbaric violence of the colonizers resonated with his discontented countrymen of Martinique and Africans straining to throw off colonialism's cruel yoke. It also reached young African Americans impatient with the slight progress against legal segregation and outraged by the general public's tolerance of white supremacist violence against them in the United States. Césaire's argument that colonialism *decivilized* the colonizer anticipated Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s warning, to those who supported or tolerated it, that racism *degraded* American society and its white citizens. Césaire makes his case in the first three sentences of his essay:

A civilization that proves incapable of solving problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.⁸

In addition to the younger generation of black Americans, Africa's self-exiled Francophone intellectuals reinvigorated veteran racial justice advocates in the United States. In September 1956, Alioune Diop, the editor of *Presence Africaine*, convened the First International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris. Césaire, Cheikh Anta Diop, Fanon and Senghor gathered in the Sorbonne to deliver treatises on African independence movements and how to preserve the indigenous cultures of African peoples.

⁸ Aime Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism," *Presence Africaine* (1955): 23.

Richard Wright, esteemed historical black college & university (HBCU) educator Horace Mann Bond (father of Julian Bond), and James Ivy, civil rights activist and editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, presented essays on the African diaspora from their U.S.-based vantage point. The conference's central theme was how "Negro men of culture" could constructively use their talents to achieve liberty for African descended people throughout the world. Their lofty goal was "through their work and reflections" to reconstruct a modern world in which no person of color had to "thirst for justice, love and peace." Their task, as Alioune Diop himself wrote in the special issue of *Presence Africaine* that gave a full account of the conference, was "to make our culture into a force of liberation and solidarity, and at the same time the hymn of our innermost personality."⁹

Alioune Diop channeled the inaugural conference's energy to form the *Societe Africaine de Culture* (SAC). Dr. Bond agreed to launch an American affiliate, the American Society for African Culture (AMSAC) in December of 1956. The original founders included formidable NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall and the indefatigable Duke Ellington. The AMSAC board appointed Lincoln University professor John A. Davis, who taught both Ghana's Nkrumah and Nigeria's Azikiwe while they were students at the eastern Pennsylvania HBCU, as its first executive director.¹⁰ AMSAC would play a central role maintaining cultural and political dialogues between African American artists and writers and the intellectual elites of new African nations for the next decade.

⁹ Alioune Diop, "Modern Culture and Our Destiny," *Presence Africaine (Special Issue)*, "The 1st International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists – Full Account (Paris –Sorbonne, 19th-22nd September 1956): 4-5.

¹⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 64-65.

Cesaire decried European colonialism as indefensible. One can easily envision a teenaged Julian Bond paraphrasing that “Jim Crow is indefensible” in his Morehouse College dormitory room just a few years later. The young African American civil rights activists coming of age in the late 1950s, who would lead a more confrontational phase of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, drew direct inspiration from the revolutionary rhetoric of writers such as Cesaire. Recognizing the potential synergy between the young leaders of the African anticolonial campaigns and the black American college students eager to advance racial justice in the United States, Kenyan nationalist leader Tom Mboya, Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier formed the African-American Student Foundation (AASF) in 1959.¹¹ The organization’s chief purpose was to raise scholarship money for African students to attend American colleges, especially historically black colleges and universities such as Howard University, Lincoln and Morehouse. In 1960 the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation, with the tacit support of Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, donated \$100,000 to the AASF. Over 770 students from east and central Africa received financial support from AASF to attend U.S. postsecondary institutions between 1959 and 1963, including Barack Obama, Sr.¹²

Stokely Carmichael, another one of the new generation of activists in the late 1950s and himself an immigrant to America from Trinidad, embraced the African National Congress’ anti-apartheid campaign when he was still in high school in New York City. He had seen Miriam Makeba perform on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1959 and was so mesmerized

¹¹ Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55

¹² “African American Students Foundation,” <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php> [Accessed May 6, 2017].

by her that he made a quick study of the oppressive racial politics of South Africa.¹³ He brought his admiration of Nkrumah, Makeba and the many African anticolonial movements with him when he enrolled in Howard University in 1960. “Howard’s contingent of international students provided tangible cultural and diplomatic links with newly emerging African and Caribbean nations,”¹⁴ of which ambitious young leaders like Carmichael took advantage. He infused the student activist group he joined and soon led, the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), with an assertiveness and pride drawn from the growing wave of independent African nations. NAG soon joined forces with SNCC and CORE. Carmichael, not yet twenty, would escort John Lewis and the eleven other volunteers to the Washington, D.C. Greyhound terminal where they boarded busses on the fateful May 4th launch of Project Freedom Ride 1961.¹⁵

The black students who would go on to form SNCC, stage sit-ins and risk injury and death as freedom riders were also captivated by the writings of Francophone Pan-Africanist Frantz Fanon. Fanon, born into a privileged Creole family on the Caribbean island of Martinique, fought for the Free French in World War Two, was awarded a Croix de Guerre for bravery and after the war won a scholarship to study psychiatry at Lyon. However, after moving to Algiers to practice psychiatry in 1953, Fanon witnessed, first hand, the unspeakable cruelties perpetrated against the Algerians after they revolted against the French colonial government in 1954. The traumatic experience of treating victims and perpetrators radicalized him, and he became an eloquent advocate for the violent overthrow

¹³ Penial E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2014), 25-26.

¹⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁵ Joseph, *Stokely: A Life*, 29-31.

of colonialism.¹⁶ Fanon's book, *The Wretched of The Earth*, first published in 1961 and translated into English in 1963, became a manifesto for revolution against the racist institutional oppression of African descended peoples throughout the Diaspora.

Fanon, with cold-blooded logic, declared retaliatory violence against a violent oppressor was not only justified but necessary if the oppressor was to be driven out or forced to relent. He called for African natives to engage in determined guerilla warfare against European colonialists. Fanon noted guerilla tactics had been proven to be effective for rebels overmatched against formidable opponents, citing the American revolutionary army's effectiveness against the British Empire as an early example. Fanon was convinced history confirmed the potency of such methods. He observed that the Spaniards, in defeating Napoleon's troops, "rediscovered the famous methods of guerilla warfare, which twenty-five years before, the American militia had tried out on the English forces."¹⁷ In 1963, SNCC staff members questioned the nonviolent tactics and integrationist objectives they had adopted from the SCLC. SNCC leadership, inspired by Fanon and the new emerging African nations, began to view themselves as part of wave of anti-colonialism washing over the globe.¹⁸ Fanon died of leukemia while under medical care in New York City in 1961. Nonetheless, the two remaining Francophone stalwarts, Toure and Senghor, would join Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in leading the formation of the Pan-Africanist body, the Organization for African

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). See also Adam Shatz, "'Frantz Fanon': The Doctor Prescribed Violence," *The New York Times* (September 2, 2001), <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/02/books/review/02SHATZTW.html> [accessed November 10, 2014].

¹⁷ Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 64.

¹⁸ Hayes, "The Dialogic Relationship Between Black Power and African Independence: A Case Study of SNCC's Role, 1960-1970", *Post Identity*, p.11.

Unity (OAU), which convened its first meeting in Addis Ababa in May 1963. To paraphrase Nkrumah, this gathering of 32 African heads of states was an announcement to the world that Pan-Africanism had to first be accepted by all African nations for it to be an effective political and economic bulwark against exploitative outside powers.¹⁹

Blacks in America were not only reading the African leaders and intellectuals' speeches, essays and poetry, they were exchanging ideas with the Continent's emerging statesmen and cultural elites. Much has been written about Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s pilgrimage to India to study Gandhian non-violence following his ascent to prominence in leading the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. However, King's very first *international* trip after Montgomery was to Accra, Ghana. He was one of Kwame Nkrumah's special guests, in addition to A. Philip Randolph, Ralph Bunche and Adam Clayton Powell, invited to witness the Lincoln University alumnus's installation as Prime Minister of the newly independent African nation of Ghana on March 6, 1957. King encountered Trinidadian historian and socialist C.L.R. James at a stopover in London on his way to Nkrumah's ceremony. The chance meeting with King prompted James to contextualize the Montgomery bus boycott as a part of a global revolt by people of color against their Western subjugators:

This determination of Negro Americans to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world. The rumblings of discontent in Asia and Africa are expressions of a quest for freedom and human dignity by people who had long been the victims of colonialism and imperialism. So, in a real sense the racial crisis in America is part of a larger world crisis.²⁰

¹⁹ Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa, Third Edition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 473-474.

²⁰ C.L.R. James quote in *Stride Toward Freedom* by Martin Luther King, Jr., Introduction by Clayborne Carson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958/1986), xxvi.

As for King, he realized the latent power ascendant African nations held on the Cold War global stage, a power that could be leveraged to the benefit of blacks in America. He had been trying for months to meet with the Eisenhower administration and had been rebuffed. However, when Vice President Richard Nixon, who was also in attendance at the Ghanaian ceremony, observed the esteem in which Prime Minister Nkrumah held King, Nixon in Taylor Branch's words "invited King to come to Washington for private talks on civil rights. Having traveled halfway around the world to secure the audience that had eluded him at home, King did not miss the political lesson. The logic of diplomacy gave him a stature that he lacked as a political nonentity in the South."²¹ The Ghanaian encounter helped King realize the President of the United States was waging a Cold War with Communist China and the U.S.S.R. to win the favor of non-aligned nations. Thus, the Eisenhower Administration was sensitive to world opinion regarding its "Negro problem."²² King and his SCLC lieutenants thereafter would mount *local* civil rights campaigns with the objective of gaining *international* attention, thereby forcing the federal executive branch to be a part of the conflict's resolution. King knew the world was watching and any Presidential administration could ill afford to do nothing or, more damning still, side with local segregationists.

King, like Malcolm X, sensed the *zeitgeist* of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Around the world, oppressed peoples of color were revolting against their Western

²¹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster Inc., 1988), 214.

²² Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 109-116 and 137.

oppressors. Nowhere was this phenomenon more evident than on the African continent. Prior to Ghana winning its independence in 1957, Sudan and Morocco had gained nationhood in 1956. Between 1957 and 1965, thirty African nations (including Ghana) won independence from their old colonial masters Britain, France, Portugal and Belgium. The year 1960 ushered in the largest wave of new nations in recorded history, with almost all but Cyprus located on the African continent. The list included Benin, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo DR, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, and Togo. In 1960, King again found himself invited to witness the official installation of a new African nation's leader. Benjamin Nnamdi "Zik" Azikiwe requested the American civil rights activist to be his honored guest at his inauguration as Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria. Joining King were Ralph Bunche, W.E.B. Du Bois and his wife Shirley (both of whom had immigrated to Ghana by this time) and Azikiwe's literature professor from Lincoln University, Langston Hughes.²³

A leading cultural Pan-Africanist, Langston Hughes, from the mid-1950s on, corresponded regularly with prominent anticolonial African writers. Hughes exchanged letters with the Continent's leading literary figures, including future Guinean President Leopold Sedar Senghor, Alioune Diop, South African anti-apartheid writers Nadine Gordimer and Peter Abrahams and Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka of Nigeria. In addition, Hughes often joined black writers and performing artists who traveled to the Continent in touring groups such as those organized by the American Society of African

²³ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 236-238.

Culture (AMSAC) to participate in concerts and seminars with their African counterparts. Hughes and his cohorts realized “cultural” Pan Africanism had become “political.” Hughes, Hansberry, Baldwin, Harry Belafonte, choreographer-dancer Geoffrey Holder and newcomer Nina Simone all believed Pan African solidarity fostered a synergy that benefitted the American civil rights movement and the anticolonial campaigns for African nationhood.²⁴

Among the major African American writers, only Richard Wright sounded a discordant note. Wright, self-exiled in Paris until his death in November 1960, drew the ire of new and soon-to-be leaders of African nations with the 1954 publication of his book *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*. The book compiled his observations during an extended tour of West Africa, especially the new Africa-led governments coming to power on the Gold Coast. In it Wright criticized what he believed to be a problematic mix of tribalism and adopted Western practices, inferring African culture made its emerging leaders ill-suited to govern in the modern world. Wright concluded that American Negroes and Africans only shared a “common heritage of suffering and hungering for freedom.”²⁵ The new African heads of state leaders and intellectuals never forgave Wright for this perceived slight. Shortly before he died, Wright admitted he had been wrong about the African anticolonial movement. In a letter to

²⁴ Ibid., 234-240.

²⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reaction in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 77. See also Joan Urban, *Richard Wright* (New York: Chelsea, 1989), 163.

Hughes, he acknowledged the “sweep forward of Africa and our people in general” and added “I’m hankering to get back to Africa. The place haunts me.”²⁶

Before chronicling the several African-themed major works created by leading jazz artists from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, it must be noted trailblazing West African artists had imposed themselves and their culture into black American music and dance during the latter years of the Harlem Renaissance. Asadata Dafora, a dancer choreographer and drummer born in 1890 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, arrived in Harlem in 1929 and had an immediate impact on its black performing arts scene. His dance-dramas employed both African and African American dancers. Dafora’s influence widened and deepened in the 1940s when Kingsley Ozuombo Mdabiwe, a high-born Igbo, the founder of the African Academy of Arts and Research (AAAR) and future cabinet member of the Nigerian government, agreed to stage Dafora’s works in annual African music and dance showcases. Mdabiwe’s showcases brought together music from Haiti, Cuba, Brazil and Trinidad and included black American notables such as dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson and pianist-composer Mary Lou Williams. The AAAR festivals fascinated dancer-choreographer Katherine Dunham, alto saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie.²⁷ Gillespie would marry Bebop to African diaspora rhythms by collaborating with Chano

²⁶ October 8, 1960 letter from Richard Wright to Langston Hughes, The Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, comprising mainly Correspondence (General, Family, Fan Mail, Miscellaneous, etc.).

²⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 13-15.

Pozo, a Cuban dancer-drummer of African descent, to write the jazz classic “Manteca” in 1947 and the lesser-known “Cubano Be, Cubano Bop,” in 1948.

However, Duke Ellington was the first African American artist to compose and present a major jazz composition whose direct theme was an African nation. In 1947, on the occasion of his sixth Carnegie Hall concert, Ellington debuted an extended work, *Liberian Suite*. Ellington had received a commission to produce the twenty-seven-minute, six movement work to celebrate the centennial of Liberia’s founding. The 1947 long-form composition, as had *Black, Brown and Beige*, received mixed reviews from critics.²⁸ *Liberian Suite* reflected Ellington’s pride in the African nation founded by emancipated slaves from the United States. It is unclear whether Ellington, at the time, viewed *Liberian Suite* as symbolic support for the nascent African independent movements stirring across the Continent after World War Two. Whether intended or not, the piece fit the theme of ascendant African nations.

Less than ten years later, Africans’ determined campaigns to cast off the shackles of colonialism had won the respect of several prominent jazz modernists. Sonny Rollins, Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Dizzy Gillespie and his talented young trombonist Melba Liston were all cognizant of African peoples’ quest for independence. Pianist Randy Weston, a relative newcomer to the ranks of politically vocal jazz musicians, looked to Africa as well for musical inspiration. Weston publicly exhorted the anticolonial movement

²⁸ John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 287.

leaders onward and declared he viewed himself as not simply American but African.²⁹ The wave of independent African nations which came into existence in 1960 instilled acclaimed saxophonist John Coltrane with pride and hopefulness. Coltrane followed Rollins, Roach, Lincoln, Weston and Liston in recording sweeping extended compositions in 1961 that celebrated a new era on the Continent. Duke Ellington, who had demonstrated an affection for a romanticized Africa in the 1943 version of *Black, Brown and Beige* and again in 1947 with *Liberian Suite*, did not write another grand long-form composition lauding the ascendance of African nations. Instead, he wrote a spare, haunting ballad that presaged the Cold War-motivated economic interference and covert political destabilization the new African nations would face as the 1960s wore on. Ellington's 1962 composition, "Fleurette Africaine," was his musical metaphor for the beauty and fragility of the African nations which were struggling to take root.

African Drumming Meets Jazz: Art Blakey, Guy Warren and Michael Babatunde Olatunji

Art Blakey, who had established himself as one of jazz's preeminent drummers and one of the few drummers to lead a jazz band, collaborated with Puerto Rican conga player Sabu Martinez to record an all-percussion track in 1953. They entitled it "Message to Kenya." Blakey, a consummate self-promoter, sought to draw attention to the track by referencing the recent uprising of the Kikuyu Land and Freedom Army in Kenya. What became known as the Mau Mau rebellion against British colonial rule had seized global attention. One must give Blakey the benefit of the doubt when he said the valor of the Mau

²⁹ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out of Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147-151.

Mau freedom fighters had sparked his desire to honor them with the song's title. Yet, Blakey's song included no derivations of Kenyan or East African drumming patterns. Later, Blakey admitted he had learned the African drumming patterns he used in "Message from Kenya" during a visit to Nigeria in the late 1940s. The drumming style he employs confirms his recollection because it approximated a style favored by the Ijaw people of Nigeria.³⁰

Blakey's cavalier co-mingling of different cultures and traditions among African peoples incensed Ghanaian master drummer Guy Warren. Warren was a longstanding admirer of Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. He came to the United States in 1954 and settled in Chicago. Warren believed his calling was to infuse modern jazz with authentic African music. He was contemptuous of Blakey, whom he accused of profiting from "faux African" drumming. Born in Accra in 1923, Warren's talents as a percussionist and actor bloomed in his teens. Smitten with American culture, he learned jazz drumming by listening to Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa. In an interview with historian Robin D.G. Kelley, Warren recalled his impression of GI's on the Gold Coast during World War Two. "I looked at what the Americans were doing and would go out there and imitate them. How they spoke, their movements, how they walked, how they did everything. I wanted to be like them, you dig."³¹ Warren's zeal for the United States drew the attention of the Gold Coast-based U.S. Army Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA. Accepting an offer from one its recruiters, he dropped out of school and received

³⁰ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 16.

³¹ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 19.

intelligence training from the OSS. After a globe-trotting series of OSS assignments, including one in New York City's Greenwich Village, Warren returned to Accra. After WWII, he worked as a journalist and disc jockey while continuing to perform jazz and highlife music in nightclubs.

By 1950, Warren was a fervent supporter of the Convention People's Party, led by Kwame Nkrumah. That same year Warren was a combatant in a bar brawl during which he flattened a white Canadian who had called him an "American nigger" (testament to how convincingly Warren affected black jazz musicians' mannerisms and accent). The skirmish made the headlines of the Accra newspapers, earning Warren the admiration of the African locals and the enmity of British colonial administrators. Warren fled the Gold Coast for London and continued to work as a musician, journalist and occasionally as a BBC jazz program radio host until late 1951. He next traveled to Monrovia where he became assistant director for Liberia's national radio network. He used his access to the network's vast catalogue of albums to study the most acclaimed classical composers and jazz artists. While in Monrovia, Warren also began a fateful romantic relationship with an African American woman from Chicago. He followed her there in 1954.³² His romance with her soon ended. It could not compete with his ardor for jazz and his goal of becoming one of the music's new stars.

Warren surveyed the Chicago scene and soon found work as a drummer. The Afro-Cuban and other African diaspora-influenced percussion in jazz popularized by Gillespie and Pozo made Warren an in-demand performer. Within two years, he had built a solid

³² Ibid., 20-22.

reputation in Chicago and secured a recording contract with Decca. Warren seized this opportunity to show American music fans how authentic African drumming could invigorate and advance jazz. In 1956, he released *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, an album that featured traditional and sacred music from the Gold Coast, Cameroon and Liberia. Historian Kelley, who interviewed Warren in Accra just a year before the African drumming legend died, observed, “It was arguably the first LP in history that fused jazz and African music – a feat even more astounding from a group whose principal members bear such names as Tony Naponelli, Johnny Frigo, Johnny Lamonica, and Jerry Friedman.”³³ Warren’s album received lukewarm critical reviews. Decca executives offered it miniscule marketing support. Despite Warren’s Herculean efforts to promote it in the United States and in Ghana, *Africa Speaks, America Listens* was a commercial flop. Nonetheless, his reputation as a powerful, accomplished drummer remained intact and Warren even earned the privilege of sitting on drums for one of his heroes, Duke Ellington, when the jazz maestro played Chicago. Warren moved to New York and became a fixture in the African Room, a leading diaspora-themed nightclub. He produced three more albums while in the United States, but the sales of all three releases were dismal.

Heightening Warren’s frustration was the fact that African drum-centered albums had become vogue among jazz album buyers in the late 1950s. Art Blakey, whom Warren had publicly derided as a boring, bombastic drummer, released two African-themed albums, *Drum Suite* and *Orgy in Rhythms*, which crossed over to register handsome sales with popular music listeners. The runaway success that Nigerian Michael Babatunde

³³ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 23-24.

Olatunji enjoyed with his 1959 album, *Drums of Passion*, sounded the death knell for Warren's dream of making authentic African drumming the rhythmic foundation of jazz. Olatunji had come to the United States in 1950 to study at Morehouse College. His personal story exemplifies the cultural and political synergies that had flourished between African exchange students and HBCU educators and students during the 1950s.

Olatunji was a self-taught percussionist. He had developed a hybrid style that sounded "African" to untrained ears but which would seem amateurish to master drummers from the Continent. Famed music professor and African American folklorist Dr. Willis James of Spelman College noticed Olatunji and became a mentor to the young Nigerian. Olatunji aspired to attain an American college degree and then return to Nigeria to help govern his homeland when it wrested itself free of its colonial occupiers. After arriving in Atlanta, he formed an African drum, dance and song ensemble. When he graduated from Morehouse and won admission to New York University's doctoral program, Olatunji formed another African-themed performing group, comprised of mostly African American dancers and Afro-Cuban and Jamaican drummers. He named the ensemble "Drums of Passion" and in 1956 they began performing around New York City as well as touring Howard University and other HBCUs.

The ensemble's performances caught the eyes and ears of John Hammond, who convinced Radio City Music Hall owners to book the group to appear on its famed stage. A series of 1958 performances at Radio City by Olatunji and his Drums of Passion group stirred the mostly white audiences, resulting in the group appearing on national television broadcasts of the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the *Today* show. Olatunji, whom Warren had derided as a "complete fraud" and "traitor to Africa," recorded his debut album, *Drums of*

Passion, in 1959. It was released in February 1960 and, by the end of 1961, *Drums of Passion* had sold a jaw-dropping five million copies. This sales total is even more astounding when one considers that it took until 2008 for *Kind of Blue*, Miles Davis's best-known album which was also recorded in 1959, to sell *four* million copies.³⁴ The former doctoral candidate Michael Babatunde Olatunji had by then become, far and away, the preferred African percussionist among jazz artists in the New York recording scene. The embittered Guy Warren returned to his homeland, the newly independent African nation of Ghana. His demonstrated commitment to Ghanaian culture won him the friendship of its President Kwame Nkrumah. Warren served as a confidant to Nkrumah until the leader was overthrown in 1966. Warren later changed his name to Kofi Ghanabi.³⁵

Miriam Makeba Sings Pan-African Solidarity and Max Roach Insists

Another African musician came to the United States in the 1950s seeking success in the entertainment industry. Where Ghanaian Guy Warren met frustration and failure, South African Zenzile Miriam Makeba met good fortune and fame. Born March 4, 1932 to a Swazi mother and Xhosa father in Prospect Township near Johannesburg,³⁶ Makeba was the generational peer of her American contemporaries Nina Simone (born February 21, 1933) and Abbey Lincoln (August 6, 1930).

Makeba knew she possessed an extraordinary voice before she reached her teens. She entertained family members and neighbors in her hardscrabble township by singing

³⁴ "*Kind of Blue* certified quadruple platinum, October 7, 2008" (Recording Industry Association of America) <https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/kind-of-blue.html> [Accessed March 30, 2017]

³⁵ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 32-40.

³⁶ "Miriam Makeba," <https://biography.com/people/miriam-makeba-9395996> [accessed May 1, 2017]

along to the records of Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald a friend would play on his wind-up record Victrola. Her father died around the time she entered secondary school and she was forced to find work to survive, a daunting challenge for a black girl in apartheid South Africa. She dropped out of school and found employment as a domestic servant for a white family in Durban, a job in which she suffered verbal and physical abuse from both the father and mother of the household. Having endured as much mistreatment as she could stand, Makeba returned to her township and secured a low paying job as a laundress. The attractive teenager drew the attention of an older man who seduced and impregnated her. During her pregnancy, Makeba discovered a painful tumor in her breast. After a white doctor in Pretoria immediately prescribed a mastectomy, Makeba turned to her mother Christina, whom Makeba believed to be an *isangoma*. Her mother used a cactus and charcoal remedy to heal what Makeba later claimed to be breast cancer.³⁷ Black, female and poor in mid-Twentieth Century apartheid South Africa, an unmarried mother and a cancer survivor, she was only twenty. But, Makeba's fortunes were about to take an upward turn.

Although travails racked her personal life, Miriam Makeba's reputation as a superb soprano singer had spread beyond her township to Johannesburg. Her older brother, Joseph, was a saxophone player and encouraged his sister to join a local band called the Cuban Brothers. They were eager to have her out front. With her lilting voice and emotive stage presence, Makeba drew the attention of the Manhattan Brothers, a popular band who played a combination of jazz, rhythm & blues and South African songs. They hired her as

³⁷ Miriam Makeba with James Hall, *Makeba: My Story* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 29-37.

their female lead singer. She toured the country with them and – when the Manhattan Brothers were performing outside South Africa – with another group called the Skylarks for the next several years.³⁸

In 1959, a small role in which she sang the title song of an independent anti-apartheid movie *Come Back, Africa* rocketed Makeba out of South Africa. Her filmed performance positioned Makeba in an international orbit in which she met Harry Belafonte. Her *Come Back, Africa* performance had created a sensation in Europe and Britain. The movie's producer, Lionel Rogosin, flew Makeba to London in late 1959 to appear at a screening of the documentary. Rogosin also arranged for Makeba to sing on the BBC's *In Town Tonight* television program. The BBC program was not the only western television variety show anxious to broadcast Makeba. Steve Allen had seen the documentary and wanted Makeba to come to the United States to appear on his popular program, which had gained a reputation for being more topical than the top-rated but predictable *Ed Sullivan Show*. Makeba had never even seen a television set until she flew into London. Yet, television was the medium that was ultimately responsible for her ascension to international stardom.

Providence had it that Harry Belafonte (born March 1, 1927), the dashing black entertainer-activist and “first generation” American son of Jamaicans who had immigrated to New York City, was in London to film a segment for an upcoming BBC Christmas program. Belafonte saw Makeba's *In Town Tonight* rendition of “Back of the Moon” and made sure he met her at a screening of *Come Back, Africa* just days later. Belafonte

³⁸ Makeba, Makeba: *My Story*, 58-69.

lavished praise on Makeba and insisted that she appear at the famed New York City jazz club, The Village Vanguard.³⁹ Rogosin agreed to delegate management of Makeba to Belafonte for her U.S. appearances. This arrangement marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship between Makeba and Belafonte based on a mutual respect, shared artistic values and a deep commitment to Pan African solidarity on matters of racial and economic justice. Before he left London, Belafonte helped secure a visa for Makeba. She was on her way to a country she had only dreamed about, the United States of America, courtesy of a career benefactor she soon referred to as “Big Brother.”

Miriam Makeba appeared on *The Steve Allen Show* Sunday evening, November 30, 1959. Dressed in a simple silk dress with a cape over one shoulder and her hair natural, she delivered arresting performances of two songs, the ballad “Lovely Eyes” and a Xhosa folk song “Intoyam.”⁴⁰ An estimated sixty million viewers watched, including a smitten eighteen-year-old Stokely Carmichael who sat in front of his family’s television set three thousand miles away in Brooklyn.⁴¹ American audiences had never seen an “African” singer, male or female, on a national television broadcast. Makeba literally became an overnight sensation. When she arrived in New York City to prepare for her Belafonte-orchestrated Village Vanguard performances later that week, passers-by stopped her on the street and asked if she was that “African girl” they saw on the *Steve Allen Show*. She remarked that she signed her first autograph on her way to being fitted for a dress for her

³⁹ *Sing Your Song: Harry Belafonte, the Music, Hope and Vision of a Man and an Era*. Director, Susan Rostock. New York: Docudrama Films, 2012. DVD

⁴⁰ Makeba, *Makeba: My Story*, 82-85.

⁴¹ Joseph, *Stokely: A Life*, 15-16.

Village Vanguard debut. Belafonte's assistants directed Makeba to chemically straighten her hair into a short pageboy for the performance. Fearful she would offend "Big Brother," she reluctantly consented. When Makeba returned to her apartment after enduring the painful "permanent," she was so taken aback by how alien she looked that she washed her hair again and again until it returned to its natural state.

In early December 1959, Makeba walked onstage at the Village Vanguard with her natural and no makeup save for modest lipstick to a packed house filled with celebrities and New York's cultural elite. Belafonte had invited Duke Ellington, Sidney Poitier, Diahann Carroll, Nina Simone and Miles Davis. Her concert marked the beginning of a four-week run that would endear Makeba to the Pan-African minded black artists, writers and activists of the city. The cultural cognoscenti's praise bemused Makeba. She did not consider herself a jazz singer. After attending one of her performances, Langston Hughes was so enthralled by Makeba that he gave her a copy of his anthology, *The Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, which had just been published a few weeks prior to Makeba's Vanguard debut.⁴²

Her "look" created the fashion template for black women in the United States who sought to identify through their dress and appearance with African women and ancestry. Makeba validated outspoken black women such as Abbey Lincoln, who had already jettisoned Western European standards of female beauty. The United Nations declared 1960 "The Year of Africa" in recognition of the seventeen African nations slated to attain sovereignty. In the United States, 1960 was also the year of Miriam Makeba. Once

⁴² Makeba, *Makeba: My Story*, 88-91.

referred to jokingly as the “click-click girl” because of that notable aspect of the Xhosa language, Makeba had become “Mama Africa.” She was a living symbol of the quest for freedom and self-determination by African peoples across the continent. The South African government took umbrage at Makeba’s star turn on the world stage and emergence as an inspirational figure for anti-apartheid activists.

As Makeba’s popularity soared in America, tragedy struck in her native land. When seven thousand black South Africans gathered in front of a Sharpeville police station to protest restrictive pass laws, the police opened fire, killing sixty-nine and wounding nearly two hundred more demonstrators. The grisly debacle resulted in the largest number of deaths in any South African protest to that date. The March 21, 1960 Sharpeville Massacre had become an international embarrassment for the South African government. Majority World countries, communist and even some European nations rained condemnation on the Apartheid regime. After the Sharpeville Massacre, Makeba made remarks to the American press, in which she expressed her sorrow at her two uncles being killed in the carnage. This act infuriated the South African authorities. Later that spring, when she attempted to return to Johannesburg for her mother’s funeral, Makeba discovered the South African government had revoked her passport. She knew her only way to return to South Africa was to consent to be jailed as an insurrectionist. Mama Africa had been exiled from the continent.

Makeba remained in New York sustained by a gifted and politically outspoken small circle of friends. The fiery Nina Simone inspired Makeba, who was mild-mannered and spoke in a small high-pitched voice, to deliver one of the most memorable speeches against Western racism to the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid in

1963. She addressed the full UN General Assembly in 1964, calling for international intervention to dismantle the South African apartheid regime:

I ask you and all the leaders of the world, would you act differently, would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the color of your skin is different from that of the rulers, and you were punished for even asking for equality, I appeal to you, and to all the countries of the world to do everything you can do to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should have never been there.⁴³

Makeba ended her remarks with this plea: “Therefore, I must urge the United Nations to impose a complete boycott of South Africa.”⁴⁴ This unprecedented demand from one of its internationally known artists further enraged the South African government. The regime had already revoked Makeba’s passport. After her speech at the United Nations, they revoked her citizenship. A woman without a country, she made the United States her new home, with the fear of being deported to South Africa never far from her mind. Makeba continued to be the most popular and commercially successful African singer of the civil rights era, creating empathy and solidarity for the many African campaigns for nationhood by her sheer image and artistry.

It is unsurprising that politically aware jazz artists such as Max Roach identified with the frustrated black college students who joined the struggle for civil rights in the

⁴³ “Miriam Makeba’s Historic Speech Remembered,” *The World - Public Radio International*, November 11, 2008. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2008-11-10/miriam-makeba-historic-speech-remembered.html> [Accessed January 10, 2018].

⁴⁴ Gail Hovey, “Miriam Makeba: ‘Mama Africa’,” in *No Easy Victories: African Liberation & American Activists Over a Half Century, 1950-2000*, eds. William, Minter, Gail Hovey and Charles Cobb, Jr. (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, Inc. 2007), 108.

early 1960s. Viewed by many jazz scholars as the most innovative drummer/percussionist of the 20th century, the North Carolina-born and New York-raised Roach put a lucrative jazz recording session career on hold to study classical percussion for three years at the Manhattan School of Music from 1950 to 1953. After graduating, he formed his own group and billed himself as its leader, a rare role for drummers. In 1954, Roach landed a high-profile engagement in Los Angeles and encountered that same subtle but impenetrable institutional racism that prompted his friend Charles Mingus to leave the city years earlier.

In blunt remarks made in a July 15, 1954 KABC radio interview entitled “Man of Color,” Roach condemned the passive-aggressive racism of Los Angeles. Roach remarked that, although he could afford it, realtors refused to allow him to lease a beachfront bungalow. He also noted that although he was classically trained he had been rejected repeatedly in his efforts to secure session work for movies and other “legitimate music.”⁴⁵ After his extended but unpleasant West Coast stay, Roach returned to New York City and formed the afore-mentioned quintet that featured Sonny Rollins and rising trumpeter, Clifford Brown. After Brown’s fatal car accident splintered their quintet, Rollins and Roach continued their musical collaboration. When Rollins proposed the then-radical idea of recording a “jazz trio” album which would have the instrumentation of saxophone, upright double bass and drums only, he called Roach in for the recording sessions that would produce *Freedom Suite*.

⁴⁵ “Man of Color,” July 15, 1954, Transcript from KABC Radio Los Angeles, Letters and Correspondence, Folder 2, Max Roach Collection, Library of Congress Music Division (hereinafter cited as MRC).

Riffing on the title of Rollins's 1958 album, *Freedom Suite*, Roach entitled his 1960 album, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*. On its cover, the North Carolina A & T students who came to be known as the Greensboro Four glare at the camera as they sit at a "whites only" Woolworth lunch counter. With his fiery album, Max Roach proclaimed the black South Africans' struggle against apartheid and the African nations' independence movements were one and the same as the black Americans' struggle against Jim Crow in the U.S. civil rights movement. *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, dismissed as agitprop when it was first released, is now considered by many social critics as a masterwork of Pan-African advocacy.⁴⁶ To personify the African diaspora, Roach included Nigerian percussionist Michael Babatunde Olatunji and Afro-Cubans Ray Mantilla and Tomas DuVall in his band. The song list included works with titles such as "All Africa" and "Tears for Johannesburg." The album, the tour he mounted to promote it and his attendance at Malcolm X's Harlem speeches earned Roach a place on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Administrator J. Edgar Hoover's "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups" watch list.⁴⁷

Roach had become an outspoken opponent of racial injustice by the late 1950s. In 1959, he began collaborating with vocalist and songwriter Oscar Brown, Jr. on an extended musical work that would express the aspirations and frustrations of African Americans.

⁴⁶ Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 167, 172. See also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002),

⁴⁷ Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991), 25-26. See also Andrew W. Lehren, "Jazz and the FBI: Guilty Until Proven Innocent," *JazzTimes* (April 1, 2009). <https://jazztimes.com/features/jazz-and-the-fbi-guilty-until-proven-innocent.html> [Accessed January 10, 2018].

Brown and Roach envisioned the long-form composition being presented at the Emancipation Proclamation Centennial set to be staged in Chicago in 1963.⁴⁸ The emergence of a new, more confrontational group of young black activists and the surging anticolonial movement compelled Roach to abort that plan and use the songs he had been working on with Brown, such as “Freedom Day” and “Driva’ Man,” as the foundation for *We Insist!* Roach felt the same outrage and impatience as the members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which a young John Lewis, Diane Nash and other black student activists at HBCUs founded in Nashville in early 1960. SNCC planned to confront segregation with direct action. Such daring direct action, epitomized by the lunch counter sit-ins that swept across the South after Greensboro, thrilled Roach.

Roach also paid close attention to the many African anticolonial campaigns being waged at the time. The Sharpeville Massacre enraged Roach and spurred him to add the composition “Tears for Johannesburg,” to the album. The song would prompt the South African government to ban the album just weeks after its release. Roach decided, without Brown’s assent, to change the name of their work from *The Beat* to *We Insist! The Freedom Now Suite*. He recruited the afore-mentioned Nigerian and Afro-Cuban musicians plus veteran tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins to play on the late August-early September 1960 recording sessions that would produce the tracks included on the final album. Roach, however noble his intentions, estranged himself from Oscar Brown, Jr., who had co-written “Freedom Day” and “Driva’ Man,” by not informing the jazz singer/songwriter of the

⁴⁸ Nat Hentoff, *We Insist! Max Roach and Oscar Brown, Jr.’s Freedom Now Suite*, liner notes (London, England: Candid Records 9002, 1961).

album until after it had been recorded. He further insulted Brown by letting him know via post card. Brown's political views aligned more with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s idealistic vision of a "beloved community." He believed Malcolm X's harsh denunciations would generate a white backlash that could undermine the civil rights movement's modest gains to date. In an interview with Harvard African and African American Studies Professor Ingrid Monson, Roach admitted that he and Brown had often argued over what was the best way forward for blacks in America.⁴⁹

Roach tapped his paramour, actress and vocalist Abbey Lincoln, to sing on *We Insist!* Roach had been dating Lincoln since 1957. Lincoln, like Roach, had progressed in her political views along a path that paralleled the bold and defiant journey of Malcolm X. She admired King's direct action against Southern segregationists but agreed with Malcolm X's rejection of white social and cultural norms. Born in rural Michigan, Lincoln's show business aspirations compelled her to seek success in Los Angeles. She was in her mid-twenties by the time she earned her first major movie role in the film *The Girl Can't Help It*. The studios were seeking the next Dorothy Dandridge. Dandridge had proven an alluring black woman who could become a pin-up girl and sell movie tickets. Studio executives saw Lincoln as someone who could follow the path Dandridge had blazed. The film industry had marketed Dandridge as a sepia version of Marilyn Monroe. The Cleveland-born beauty was the first African American woman to be nominated for Best Actress by the Motion Picture Academy. Dandridge earned the nomination for her convincing turn as a temptress to the male lead character portrayed by Harry Belafonte in the 1954 movie,

⁴⁹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 171-174.

Carmen Jones, an all-black cast version of the opera “Carmen.” In winning the role of Carmen Jones, the stunning Dandridge bested Lena Horne, who also had screen tested for the part. The movie was the apex of Dandridge’s career. A destructive affair with the film’s producer, Otto Preminger, hurled her fortunes into a downspin from which she never recovered.⁵⁰

Lincoln was aware of how powerful white Hollywood men used black women, even those as attractive and talented as Dandridge. She resented the “Negro Hollywood starlet image” she said had been imposed upon her by managers and agents. “They put me,” she remembered in an interview with Nat Hentoff, “into a Marilyn Monroe-type dress and they coached me in dramatics, classical singing and diction. I was told not ‘to sound like a Negro’ when I spoke and sang the more titillating standards and phony folk tunes. They brainwashed me night after night but I knew this wasn’t me.”⁵¹ Thus, her romantic and ideological pairing with Roach did not so much change her direction as it did reinforce it. As early as 1960, Lincoln had taken to wearing African kaftans and kangas. She was among the first African American female jazz vocalists to perform in public with her hair “natural” and not chemically straightened. *We Insist!* was the musical debut of Abbey Lincoln’s proudly black image to the record-buying public, but it was one she had adopted in private for years.

⁵⁰ Earl Mills, *Dorothy Dandridge: An Intimate Biography* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1970), 171-187. See also “Dorothy Dandridge,” *Biography*. <https://www.biography.com/people-dorothy-dandridge-9542081.html> [Accessed January 10, 2018].

⁵¹ Nat Hentoff, “Abbey Lincoln Interview,” Original Liner Notes, *Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead*, Candid Records (1961)

Nat Hentoff: Jazz Writer and Recording Industry Rebel

Despite Roach and Lincoln's determination to link black Americans' civil rights struggle to African nations' anti-colonial campaigns, it can be argued that without Nat Hentoff's resourcefulness and lusty affection for free speech, *We Insist!* would have never been recorded. Nathan Irving Hentoff was born in Boston on June 10, 1925, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants. He grew up in the rough-and-tumble Roxbury neighborhood of the city and was an exceptional student. In a remembrance, eerily like the one recounted by Englishman Leonard Feather, Hentoff described how he was thunderstruck by jazz music at the age of thirteen. In Feather's case, it was his hearing Louis Armstrong's recording of "West End Blues" in a suburban London record shop. Nat Hentoff recalled that his "own introduction to the jazz life began with a record of Artie Shaw's *Nightmare*. I came from a home where any overt expression of emotion was calculated and measured lest it roar out of control. Standing in a record store, however, I shocked myself by yelling in pleasure at the first bars of *Nightmare*."⁵²

Hentoff continued his passionate love affair with jazz and began a new one with journalism when he entered college. A brilliant student, he graduated from Northeastern University with high honors in 1946. Hentoff was fond of saying that, after college, he went to jazz "night school" at the Savoy Café, a popular nightclub in one of Boston's toughest black neighborhoods. All the well-known jazz recording artists – Fats Waller, Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington – performed at

⁵² Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, 15.

the Savoy.⁵³ By the early 1950s, Hentoff had secured his dream job as a radio host for a weekly jazz program on WMEX Boston - 1510AM. On-air, Hentoff displayed an irreverent, educated wit and facile knowledge of the music's history and players. He soon became one of the most popular jazz deejays in the New England area. In 1953, *Down Beat* hired Hentoff to write reviews and essays on jazz.

Hentoff co-edited his first book on jazz, *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It*, with Nat Shapiro in 1955. The publisher, Rinehart and Company, rushed it into the bookstores, hoping to draft in the slipstream of Leonard Feather's commercial and critical success with his groundbreaking work, *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*. *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya* emulated Feather's "jazz primer" approach aimed at new enthusiasts of the music who wanted to learn its history, its main schools or forms and, of course, the most prominent musicians. Hentoff, in an early demonstration of his respect, some might even say reverence, for the musicians, did not write third person biographical portraits of the various jazz men, some of them famous but most of them obscure. He edited and presented the artists' first-hand recollections and comments – culled from scores of in-person interviews and personal correspondence – on their careers, performances, peers and the music business. The result was a tangle of anecdotes ensconced in contexts only jazz insiders would understand. Still, the comments from the artists, such as Milt Hinton on why Cab Calloway's firing of Dizzy Gillespie for his short-attention-span miscues freed Dizzy to help invent be bop⁵⁴ or Mary Lou Williams referring

⁵³ Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, 19-25

⁵⁴ Milt Hinton, *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro, eds. (New York: Dover Books, 1955/1966), 342-343.

to the New York City white studio session musicians as “leeches” who sat in the clubs to suck ideas out of the inventive music of the black jazz players,⁵⁵ are honest and informative. Hentoff and Shapiro’s book, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, was far from a best seller. Over the years, it did win recognition as a significant contribution to jazz’s oral history.

Hentoff’s popularity on the radio and confident writing attracted the attention of George Wein, a Boston jazz club owner who had convinced a wealthy couple to underwrite a daring “jazz festival” in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1954. Wein wanted Hentoff to write the opening remarks for the event, which would become the most prestigious and well-attended outdoor jazz festival for the remainder of the 1950s. Hentoff penned a dazzling, condensed history of jazz and Stan Kenton read the narrative on the first day of the festival. Wein retained Hentoff as an adviser for Newport several years in a row. More good fortune, jazz networking-wise, befell Hentoff when organizers of the Lenox (Massachusetts) School of Jazz, launched by yet another wealthy young couple, recruited him to participate in their roundtable discussions, workshops and seminars in the mid-1950s. Hentoff’s involvement with the Newport Jazz Festival and Lenox brought him into contact with a fraternity of jazz modernists and jazz writers who flocked to both venues in ever greater numbers. Thelonious Monk, John Lewis, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, Randy Weston, Melba Liston, Milt Jackson, Gunther Schuller, Langston Hughes, Marshall Stearns, Ornette Coleman and Dave Brubeck all took up residencies, lectured or taught seminars at the Lenox School of Jazz during the mid-to-late 1950s.

⁵⁵ Mary Lou Williams, *ibid*, 350-351.

Unlike Hentoff, Leonard Feather, felt alienated by the social consciousness evident in the new wave of jazz artists who emerged in the late fifties. His discomfort was directly connected to their independent and more assertive behavior, which Feather sensed they had adopted to arm themselves against white assaults on the civil rights movement. Feather painfully recalled his estrangement from Sonny Rollins and Charles Mingus in his last memoir.⁵⁶ Other established jazz critics, notably Ira Gitler,⁵⁷ voiced their outright disgust and disapproval of the modernists' music, their public image and the political statements. Hentoff was unperturbed by this new generation of jazz artists. He, in fact, defended Mingus and other modernists and assisted them in their outspokenness. To this end, he even risked offending Newport Jazz Festival founder Louis Lorillard, who had given his career a significant boost. When Charles Mingus and a group of several A list jazz artists, including Max Roach, Ornette Coleman and Randy Weston, decided to reject the paltry performance fees the Newport Festival producers offered them in 1960, Hentoff helped organize a competing "Newport Rebel Festival." The rebels next decided to form the Jazz Artists Guild, whose mission was to give the artists greater economic control over concert bookings. Hentoff supported that effort as well.⁵⁸

Hentoff's thorough disgust with music executives' "plantation owner mentality" toward their top black artists made him the ideal producer for the upstart jazz label, Candid Records. When the label owners hired Hentoff in early 1960, they gave him carte blanche

⁵⁶ Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era* (Cambridge, Ma: Da Capo Press, 1987), 205-206.

⁵⁷ Ira Gitler famously derided Abbey Lincoln as focused only on black economic suffering and of having become a "professional Negro" in his dismissive review of her 1961 album, *Straight Ahead*, in *Down Beat* 28. No. 23 (November 9, 1961), 35-36.

⁵⁸ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 183-184.

to sign and produce artists. Hentoff facilitated Jazz Artists Guild's release of two albums, *The Newport Rebels* and *The Jazz Life*.⁵⁹ Yet, Hentoff's most enduring legacy as a record label executive was to produce and distribute one of the most controversial, ardently pro-black, pro-Pan Africanist albums in music industry history: *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* in 1960. Before the critical outcry generated by *We Insist!* had subsided, Hentoff produced and Candid released Abbey Lincoln's controversial 1961 album, *Straight Ahead*. Lincoln's denunciations of race-based social and economic injustice in songs such as "In the Red" and "Retribution" provoked new howls of protest from critics. Ira Gitler, who apprenticed under Leonard Feather as a jazz critic in the early 1950s, infamously labeled Lincoln as a "professional Negro" in a November 1961 *Down Beat* magazine review.⁶⁰ Hentoff, Roach and Lincoln demanded and received a chance to respond to Gitler. They did so in ferocious exchanges with Gitler, Don DeMichael and other jazz critics opposed to the albums' respective African nationalist and black separatist themes, during a "Racial Prejudice in Jazz" panel discussion held in the magazine's New York offices in February 1962. *Down Beat* reported the tense debate *verbatim* in two successive issues.⁶¹

Hentoff never had been afraid of antagonizing white cultural or political elites. Again, his very first foray as a Candid executive producer was *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* in 1960. The album included Mingus's vocal version of "Fables of Faubus." It featured the infamous lyric that Columbia censored from Mingus's 1959 album,

⁵⁹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 183.

⁶⁰ Ira Gitler, "Review: Abbey Lincoln, *Straight Ahead*," *Down Beat* 28, No. 23 (November 9, 1961), 35-36.

⁶¹ "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part I," *Down Beat* 29, no. 3 (March 15, 1962): 20-26 and "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part 2," *Down Beat* 29, no. 6 (March 29, 1962): 23-26.

Mingus Ah Um. In the song, retitled the “Original Fables of Faubus” to avoid a lawsuit from Columbia Records, Mingus and his drummer Dannie Richmond take turns spouting insults at Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, seen by African Americans as the buffoonish villain in the Little Rock Nine’s courageous campaign to attend the all-white Central High School. Again, Columbia had refused to include the vocal version in the combustible bassist’s acclaimed *Mingus Ah Um*. Columbia’s distaste for the track made the song even more alluring to the free speech-loving, irascible Hentoff.

The song sparked anger among white middle brow jazz critics and liberals who perceived a militant, separatist wing of the civil rights movement reflected in certain outspoken jazz artists. The resentment increased from a simmer to a boil two years later when *Time* magazine lashed out in an uncredited editorial entitled “Crow Jim” in October 1962. The *Time* editorial staff directed their scorn at Mingus and other “angry” Negro jazz musicians such as Roach, Lincoln, Randy Weston, Art Blakey and, ironically, Guy Warren, for being biased against white professional musicians seeking careers in the genre. The article declared that many Negro jazz musicians held an anti-white prejudice “in a field they regard as their own. Its result is the regrettable kind of reverse discrimination known as Crow Jim – a feeling that the white man has no civil rights when it comes to jazz.”⁶² More damning, in *Time* editors’ opinion, were these artists’ embrace of Black Nationalism and support for the non-aligned new African nations.⁶³

⁶² Music: Crow Jim,” *Time* Vol. 80, No. 16 (October 19, 1962).

<http://content.time.com/article/0,9171,827882,00.html> [Accessed August 11, 2017]

⁶³ Ibid.

The *Time* editorial staff and other detractors' fulminations notwithstanding, no album was more emblematic of solidarity between the assertive young black activists of the U.S. civil rights movement and the anticolonial freedom fighters leading rebellions across the African continent – nor more threatening to a white elite alarmed by ascendant black militancy – than *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*.

Randy Weston and Melba Liston's *Uhuru Afrika*

Time magazine castigated Randy Weston for promoting “Crow Jim” with his African influenced music, specifically naming *Uhuru Afrika* as an example. The editors of *Time* either purposely distorted the work or were incapable of objectively assessing Weston's opus. *Uhuru Afrika* bore no overt political statements, strident or muted. It was a straightforward celebration of African culture and a love letter from Weston to his ancestors. *Uhuru Afrika*, recorded in 1960 and released in 1961, featured a dazzling array of jazz musicians, most of whom are considered legends today: Gigi Gryce, Yusef Lateef, Cecil Payne and Sahib Sahib on reeds and flutes; Clark Terry, Benny Bailey and Freddie Hubbard on trumpet and flugelhorn; Slide Hampton and Jimmy Cleveland on trombone; George Duvivier and Ron Carter on upright double-bass, Kenny Burrell on guitar, Babatunde Olatunji on African drum and percussion; Candido Camero and Armando Peraza on Afro-Cuban percussion; Max Roach on marimba and Charlie Persip on drums. Weston imposed another eligibility requirement for the artists he selected for the recording session. In his autobiography, *African Rhythms*, the pianist recalled: “I also wanted musicians that were in tune with our history; musicians who were aware, who took pride

in being black, pride in being African Americans. It was a combination of all those things and that's why we wound up with such a powerful lineup.”⁶⁴

To complete his vision, Weston hired African American classical singer Martha Flowers and the regal, baritone-voiced actor Brock Peters to perform poems penned for the album by Langston Hughes. The poet and the pianist first met in 1954 at the Music Inn, where Weston worked as a kitchen hand during the day and performed with his trio for seminar participants, such as Hughes, at night. In the intervening years, Weston had won Hughes's admiration with his jazz trio's performances at the Music Inn and his thoughtful contributions to the jazz workshops at Lenox School of Music. Hughes often requested Weston's trio to accompany him on the jazz poetry readings he performed in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s. *Uhuru Afrika* (Freedom Africa) was a “concept album,” as such thematic recorded works came to be known in later years, that had been gestating in the shared Pan-African idealism of pianist/composer Randy Weston and pioneering trombonist/arranger Melba Liston since they began *their* musical collaboration in 1957.

The Brooklyn-born Weston's career prospects were blooming. He had won an album deal from United Artists. A lifelong lover of music from the African diaspora, Weston seldom missed an opportunity to see Dizzy Gillespie's big band since Gillespie had begun to showcase his Afro-Cuban sound. Eager to hear Chano Pozo's percussion with Gillespie, Weston bought a ticket to the jazz orchestra's set at Birdland. But, instead of watching Pozo, his eyes locked on the trombone player, who was the only woman in

⁶⁴ Randy Weston, *African Rhythms: The Autobiography of Randy Weston*, Willard Jenkins, Arranger (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 94.

Gillespie's band. Tall and attractive, Liston wore her hair in a natural style, which was almost as shocking as her being a trombone player in an otherwise all-male jazz big band.

Her powerful trombone-playing and well-crafted solos impressed Weston. He made his way backstage after the last performance and introduced himself to Liston. He was flabbergasted when he discovered Liston had arranged several of the songs the Gillespie big band had performed that evening. Weston asked her to arrange the title song of the album he was recording for United Artists. "Little Niles" became a minor hit for Weston in 1958. It marked the beginning of a respectful and mutually rewarding musical partnership that would last forty years. Randy Weston receives the lion's share of credit for merging jazz and indigenous African musical forms on *Uhuru Afrika*. Yet, there is little doubt that Melba Liston, who wrote all the arrangements for *Uhuru Afrika*, is responsible for its enduring quality.

Melba Doretta Liston, born January 13, 1926 in Kansas City, Missouri, was the sole offspring to music-loving parents Frank and Lucille Liston. A lonely only child, she was drawn to music because it absorbed her active mind. By four years of age, Liston could play melodies of songs she heard on the radio on her grandparents' piano. Although there was some resistance among family members to a girl playing a "masculine" instrument like a trombone, Liston's grandfather encouraged the youngster. At eight years of age, she had mastered the instrument well enough to be featured on a local radio station in jazz-rich Kansas City. Depression-era hardship crushed the fragile economic stability of the working poor Liston family. Lucille Liston moved to Los Angeles with her daughter in 1937. It was a fortuitous development for young Melba. Liston's McKinley Junior High School teachers

recognized her extraordinary musical gifts and her exceptional intelligence, advancing her from the eighth grade to the tenth after testing her.⁶⁵

The influential African American music teacher Alma Hightower, who had instructed future jazz luminaries Dexter Gordon and Sonny Criss in her after-school advanced band and composition classes, became aware of Liston and recruited her into her program. Liston excelled, demonstrating a gift for sight reading and arranging. She also drew hostility from the boy students whom she regularly outshone. Liston took comfort in her growing prowess and refuge in her love of music. The “Swing Era,” which occurred during Liston’s teenaged years, was in large part a marketing campaign concocted by music industry executives who were intent on filling jukeboxes to overflowing with coins and selling millions of records to middle class white youth. Nonetheless, the era made the jazz musician a romantic and envied figure. However, the adored musician of the Swing Era was not a warbling *vocalist*. The idol of that era was a swinging jazz *instrumentalist*. Boys who possessed musical talent and ambition aspired to become jazz musicians. Girls aspired, too. Liston was determined to realize her dream. By sixteen she had earned a musician’s union card and graduated from high school. She won a regular job as the trombone player with Bardu Ali’s pit band at the Lincoln Theatre, one of the most popular venues in black Los Angeles’s thriving Central Avenue entertainment district.

Gerald Wilson, a trumpeter assembling a big band, heard Liston at the Lincoln and hired her. Only seventeen years old, she embarked on a cross-country tour with Wilson.

⁶⁵ Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 250-254. See also Katheryn Russell-Brown, *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* (New York: Lee & Low Books, 2014), Afterword.

Liston remained a mainstay of Wilson's band until it broke up in 1948. In the interim, she had become an in-demand studio musician and arranger, logging recording sessions with Dexter Gordon and Count Basie.⁶⁶ Dizzy Gillespie, always one with an ear for exceptional musicians, had been coveting Liston's trombone playing for his be-bop and Afro-Cuban experimentation. Gillespie came calling after the Wilson band's breakup left her without steady employment. Liston worked with the famed trumpeter only briefly in 1949, but in that time her skills as a musician and arranger won Gillespie's lasting respect. Liston returned to Los Angeles and worked as a music teacher for a few years. When Gillespie called for her to rejoin him with his new big band venture, he would not only offer her a well-paying extended engagement but a prominent role in an international tour.

Eisenhower's U.S. State Department, hoping to counter the propaganda platform the gruesome Emmett Till murder had given its Cold War adversaries, had decided to underwrite a goodwill tour by an interracial contingent of jazz musicians.⁶⁷ The itinerary included concerts in Lebanon, Syria, Pakistan, Turkey, Greece, Brazil, Uruguay and Ecuador. Selected by State Department officials to lead the tour, the wily Gillespie seized the opportunity to assemble a powerhouse big band. Gillespie hired Liston to play trombone, contribute original charts, and write arrangements, duties she would share with Gillespie's new protégé, Quincy Jones.⁶⁸ The 1956 overseas tour with Gillespie opened Liston's eyes to Cold War geopolitics and the thorough subjugation of women in

⁶⁶ "Gerald Wilson," *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles*, Clora Bryant, et.al, Eds. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 334-337.

⁶⁷ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3-7.

⁶⁸ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 114-119.

developing countries. Most significant to her future collaboration with Weston, the tour ignited her infatuation with the African cultural diaspora. Liston saw vivid evidence of the African diaspora while performing in Brazil and, to a lesser extent, in Ecuador. *Down Beat* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* provided breathless coverage of ecstatic audience reactions in exotic locales.⁶⁹ Gillespie rode the momentum of the positive publicity associated with the international concerts to secure domestic gigs for his big band after the State Department-sponsored tour ended. A version of the same big band was performing, with Melba Liston still featured on trombone, in 1957 when Randy Weston paid the cover charge on that fateful evening to hear them at Birdland.

The Jamaican-born Frank Weston inculcated an African identity into his son's consciousness from the boy's grade school years onward. Randy Weston believes he was fortunate to have such a Pan African-centered father. His upbringing explains much when one learns Weston made dozens of pilgrimages to Africa later in life, studied North African and West African cultural history, learned Kiswahili and married a Francophone African-descended woman from Martinique.

My dad was very much a follower of Marcus Garvey and his self-determination movement... Dad was unusual for his time in the level of pride he had for his African heritage...He also had many maps and portraits of African kings on the wall and was forever talking to me about Africa...He used to always stress to me that I was an African born in America. This was very a revolutionary identification to make at the time, but that's how he thought and what he taught me.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "Dizzy's Troupe Casts Spell over Mideast Audiences," *Down Beat* 23, no. 12 (June 13, 1956), p. 17. "Indians Dizzy over Gillespie's Jazz," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, no. 22 (June 2, 1956), p. 22.

⁷⁰ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 18.

Weston was born in Brooklyn, New York on April 6, 1926. Eighty-three days separate his birth from that of Liston's in Kansas City that same year. Unlike Liston, however, Weston was not a prodigy. At his mother Vivian's insistence, Weston started taking piano lessons when he was twelve and showed some promise. However, he was already six feet tall and was being pushed into athletic endeavors. His father was 6 feet 2 inches, quite tall for men of his generation. Weston would eventually grow to 6 feet 7 inches but did not seriously pursue a career in basketball or any other major professional sport. The music bug had bitten him in high school and he had set his sights on becoming a successful jazz pianist. World War Two intervened. Weston received his draft notice from the U.S. Army but was at first rejected as too tall (as easy target). An Army draft board medical examiner summoned Weston for another physical and measured his height again, entering on the official record that Weston not 6 feet 7 inches tall but 6 feet 5 inches tall – the maximum allowable height. The Army inducted Weston in 1944 and sent him to Fort Dix in New Jersey for basic training. He spent two years in the service, including a harrowing year-long deployment to Okinawa.⁷¹ He returned to his Brooklyn neighborhood after his honorable discharge in 1947 and took over management of his parents' restaurant.

Weston reveled in the beehive of bebop activity buzzing in and around his Bedford Stuyvesant stomping grounds. Max Roach lived just a few blocks away. Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Charlie Parker regularly dropped by Roach's home to rehearse or develop new song ideas, and, with Roach's consent, Weston would happily attend these sessions. Other prominent musicians would patronize the Weston family's restaurant. Inspired,

⁷¹ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 29-35.

Weston resumed rehearsing piano. He had hardly touched a keyboard during his Army service. Weston also exhibited a talent for marketing by turning his parents' restaurant, Trios, into a popular gathering place for black intellectuals and artists. Weston recalled: "Everybody would come by and we would discuss everything from communism in China to politics and racism, to whatever various musicians were doing." The scourge of heroin swept over the neighborhood in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁷² It killed Parker and addled Davis. The serpent's tooth of the heroin addiction dug deep into Weston. He dwindled to a mere 180 pounds, most of that weight being his 6' 7" frame.

He knew he had to distance himself from the narcotic habit enablers if he wanted to beat his heroin addiction. Weston closed Trios and, on the recommendation of a friend who had played semi-pro basketball in Lenox, Massachusetts, headed to the Berkshire Mountains. There he secured a series of jobs as a handyman and cook in the resort complexes dotting the forested suburb. Weston exercised, ate healthy food and overcame his drug addiction. Several months after he relocated to the Berkshires, Weston discovered that occasional jazz concerts were being staged at a new venue called the Music Inn. Intrigued, he walked across town and sat in on a lecture by writer and critic Marshall Stearns. Stearns's theories on how the elements of African culture were present in American performing arts fascinated Weston.

The writer noticed Weston in the audience and learned the very tall resort cook also played the piano. Stephanie Barber, one-half of the wealthy couple whose vision and

⁷² Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be or Not to Bop: Memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 283-284. See also *The Opium Kings: Opium Throughout History*. Television Documentary. Directed by Adrian Cowell. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting System, 1997.

sizable investment had created the Music Inn (see Chapter Two), heard Weston performing at a jam session with the Music Inn's manager. She offered him a position in which he would work as breakfast cook at her establishment in the morning and perform with his trio at night. Weston soon did not have to cook breakfast anymore. The Barbers promoted him to a position analogous to the "house band" leader for the Music Inn. Stearns made him a part of the jazz music presentations he would give. Weston would demonstrate the musical styles Stearns verbally referenced, for instance stride piano or the unorthodox rhythm patterns of Thelonious Monk. The Music Inn gave Weston invaluable access to scholars and music greats he would have likely never met on his own. He first met Langston Hughes at one of the workshops. He crossed paths with Mahalia Jackson, Cuban master drummer Candido Camero, Spelman scholar Dr. Willis James, actor Brock Peters and dancer/choreographer Geoffrey Holder. Weston would cultivate these relationships and involve several of the same writers and artists he encountered in his 1953 to 1959 tenure as a resident musician at the Music Inn in his eventual production of *Uhuru Afrika*.⁷³

Weston had composed the songs for *Uhuru Afrika*. Melba Liston had written the arrangements. Weston had assembled an amazing roster of artists to perform the work. All these resources were in hand by early 1960. All preparations had been made for Weston's opus. But, United Artists, Weston's label, balked at recording the album in the wake of the furor generated in the wake of Max Roach's *We Insist!* An improbable couple rescued the project. Sarah Vaughan and her husband, C.B. Atkins, enjoyed Weston's music and quietly

⁷³ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 53.

agreed with his Pan-African philosophy and political perspective. With Vaughan's support, Atkins called in a favor with Roulette Records.⁷⁴

With label financing secured for the ambitious recording, Weston again went to Langston Hughes. He wanted him to "write an invocation – a freedom poem" proclaiming a new era of African independence. Hughes thrilled Weston with what he delivered:

Africa, where the great Congo flows!
Africa, where the whole jungle knows
A new dawning breaks, Africa!
A young nation awakes! Africa!

The Freedom wind blows
Out of yesterday's night,
Uhuru/Freedom!
Freedom/Uhuru! ⁷⁵

Although Roulette Records executives had committed, again at Sarah Vaughan's urging, to Weston's project, they suspected it was a gamble. They sought to minimize their risk by marketing it as an "African drum" oriented album in a brazen attempt to capitalize on the stunning success of Babatunde Olatunji's *Drums of Passion*, which remained at the top of *Billboard* charts throughout 1960. Roulette emblazoned the top of the album cover art with the bold descriptor "In Front Center Row Stereo" and below it in even larger letters was the phrase "Afro-Percussion." A potential buyer could be excused if he or she thought that "Afro-Percussion" was the title of the album. The actual title appears in significantly smaller print. Langston Hughes's name appears in smaller print still and finally the album cover cites Weston's name in the smallest lettering, with him receiving bottom billing.

⁷⁴ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 94-95.

⁷⁵ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 54. Hughes's lyric excerpt used by permission.

Despite the label's efforts to link Weston's album to the record buying public's temporary infatuation with stereophonic African drum albums, the commercial sales of *Uhuru Afrika* were disappointing, especially given the runaway success of Olatunji's *Drums of Passion*.

Uhuru Afrika had been released in February 1961, just five months after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the leader of the newly independent Congolese nation. Worldwide protests were still erupting over the charismatic thirty-five-year old prime minister's murder. The album title appeared to confuse or alienate record buyers. Critics praised the innovative musicality of Weston's release. *Billboard* magazine gave it four stars out of five. Still, despite its celebratory, upbeat tone, *Uhuru Afrika* did not sell. After his long quest to bring his musical Pan-African musical opus to the world fell flat in terms of record sales, Weston was despondent. The album also strained his relationships with his colleagues in the music industry and in his personal life: "At the time it was a bit unpopular, especially with white people – even white people who were friendly to me. They would hear it once and they wouldn't want to hear it anymore. Especially the first part, where you have the poem."⁷⁶

Hughes's invocation, which generated so much optimism in Weston, provoked fear and anger among those uncomfortable with the prospect of dozens of new independent African nations. Weston's spirits rebounded when Langston Hughes suggested he join the American troupe scheduled to participate in the AMSAC Cultural Festival in Lagos, Nigeria in December 1961. It was the first visit the overjoyed Weston, who had extolled African culture all his adult life, had ever made to the Continent. The fact that he was a

⁷⁶ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 62.

last-minute substitute for the pianist, Billy Taylor, did not dampen Weston's enthusiasm. He quickly assembled a small combo that would perform on its own and back the vibraphonist Lionel Hampton. Besides Weston and Hampton, the impressive contingent of writers, dancers and artists included the new singing sensation, Nina Simone, who has been encouraged to participate by Hughes and her new friend, Lorraine Hansberry.

Despite the mixed reaction *Uhuru Afrika* received, other African American jazz artists, notably tenor saxophone legend John Coltrane, joined Weston in creating works that announced their affection for African Americans' ancestral homeland. In late 1961, Coltrane issued his only big band album, *Africa/Brass*. Its highlight was a 16 minute plus original composition a la Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite*. Coltrane simply entitled his opus "Africa."

The release of *Africa/Brass* represented a hard-fought victory for Coltrane. He had recorded at least two other Africa-themed works. Coltrane recorded "Dakar" in 1957 for Prestige Records at the Rudy Van Gelder Studio in Hackensack, New Jersey. It preceded Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite* by a year. In 1960, Coltrane recorded "Liberia" – which he also composed – for Atlantic Records at its New York City studio. Both labels refused to release the compositions. Coltrane had become one of the best-selling jazz saxophonists of the era with his hugely successful cover versions of Broadway hits, such as "My Favorite Things." The controversy ignited by *We Insist!* and *Uhuru Afrika* rattled Coltrane's major label, Atlantic. They again balked at releasing an "Africa-themed" composition. Atlantic did not want to alienate the legion of record buyers who enjoyed Coltrane's renditions of popular songs.

Good fortune intervened for Coltrane. Ambitious record producer Creed Taylor, eager to anchor his new label Impulse with a major star, bought Coltrane's contract from Atlantic and cleared the way for the saxophone legend to record his orchestral opus, "Africa." Coltrane returned the favor to Taylor. He made *Africa/Brass* more palatable to recreational jazz fans by recording a cover version of "Greensleeves." Coltrane also included a sizzling jazz quartet performance of an original composition, "Blues Minor," which became a popular jazz standard. The compromise satisfied both Taylor and Coltrane. Taylor landed one of jazz's pre-eminent artists and produced a well-received album. Coltrane, frustrated for years in seeking to do so, joined Blakey, Rollins, Roach, Lincoln, Weston and Liston in applauding the African anticolonial movements' growing number of victories over colonialism. They did so by recording and releasing bold, imaginative jazz inspired by the Continent's peoples and cultures.

Baldwin, Baraka and Hughes: A Troika of Social Critics Comment on Pan Africanism

On August 27, 1963, W.E.B. DuBois, the United States-born patriarch of Pan-Africanism, died at the age of 95 in Accra, Ghana, self-exiled and largely shunned by African American politicians and activists because of his unapologetic radical Pan-Africanism. "Radical" Pan-Africanism was even more repugnant to American and Western European leaders because it declared that replacing white faces with black faces in government, commerce and industry would not achieve true independence for the new African nations. The radical Pan-Africanists believed it was necessary to break from capitalism if the new nations were to achieve a more equitable distribution of the political power and wealth the colonial metropolises had concentrated in ruling elites. They

envisioned a non-aligned, socialist future for the young African governments. Further, the radical Pan-Africanists were wary of joining the global capitalist system of nation states dominated by their former oppressors. This stance antagonized the West and fueled suspicions these leaders were Communists or Communist-friendly. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau, Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, Malik el-Shabazz (Malcolm X) of the United States and, in the latter decades of his life, Du Bois all subscribed to radical Pan-Africanism.⁷⁷

DuBois passed away on the eve of the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Progress, the event that again catapulted the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the forefront of the modern American Civil Rights Movement. Seven months earlier in 1963, Dial Press published James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. In this prescient book of essays, James Baldwin disputed the progress credited to the affiliated African decolonization and the American civil rights movements. Baldwin's words stung because they rang true:

The word 'independence' in Africa and the word 'integration' here are almost equally meaningless; that is, Europe has not yet left Africa, and black men here are not yet free. And both of these last statements are undeniable facts, related facts, containing the gravest implications for us all.⁷⁸

Despite this bitter assessment, Baldwin continued to argue the goals of African nationalists and the civil rights movements were largely the same: freeing people of African descent from racially motivated social injustice and economic deprivation. He addressed the subject frequently, giving speeches at such New York City political forums as the

⁷⁷ Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 376-377.

⁷⁸ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House/Village International Books, 1963/1993), 87-88.

Carnegie Endowment International Center.⁷⁹ Baldwin first publicly declared the value he perceived in Pan-African identity in comments he made after Harlem blacks demonstrated in February 1961 outside the United Nations to protest Patrice Lumumba's assassination. The protestors, who were led by Abbey Lincoln and her friend Maya Angelou, made national news after they interrupted U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson's speech to the UN General Assembly. Reflecting on the protest and the bond socially aware blacks claimed with Africa, Baldwin stated: "The American Negro can no longer, nor will he ever again, be controlled by white America's image of him. This fact has everything to do with the rise of Africa in world affairs." Young African Americans, Baldwin argued, were no longer "merely the descendants of slaves," but were "also related to kings and princes in an ancestral homeland, far away. And this has proven to be a great antidote to the poison of self-hatred."⁸⁰

For Baldwin, it was Malcolm X who prompted him to consider the empowering perspective created by blacks not simply viewing themselves as "American Negroes" but as members of the African Diaspora. Baldwin began paying close attention to Malcolm X, his speeches and the rise of the Nation of Islam in the early 1960s. With his Muslim faith at his core, Malcolm X championed a new identity that linked blacks to Africa, where Islam was the dominant religion. He repudiated the Judeo-Christian white culture and expressed contempt for civil rights leaders eager to integrate into a society which refused to acknowledge their full humanity. He stressed racial pride and despised the word "Negro"

⁷⁹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, 245.

⁸⁰ Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties* (New York: Verso Books, 1999), 119-120.

because it identified the person as a descendant of a slave. Malcolm X urged blacks to reconnect to their African ancestry and to refer to themselves as black or better still, African. Baldwin's best-known debate with Malcolm X was on civil rights tactics on September 5, 1963, but the two men had been attending each other's lectures and speeches for at least two years prior to that point. Baldwin gives an example of one such encounter in *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin wryly notes that, after appearing on a television program in which both he and Malcolm X presented their views, an aide to Malcolm X predicted that Baldwin, given his contempt for white cultural condescension and impatience with the civil rights movement, would soon become a Black Muslim.⁸¹ The atheist Baldwin did not find religion and convert to Islam, but he and Malcolm X grew to respect each other and became collegial.

Malcolm X had begun to articulate a Pan-Islamic vision, as well. After changing his name to Malik el-Shabazz, he noted his pilgrimage to Mecca had changed his worldview forever. In August 1964, el-Shabazz wrote a "Letter from Cairo" in which he appealed to Muslim nations to recognize the plight of African Americans in the United States as a part of "an international system of racist exploitation"⁸² and that it would be in these Muslim-led nations' best interests, since many of them had significant populations "of color," to come to African Americans' assistance. Six months later, when an assassin's bullet felled Malcolm X in the Audubon Ballroom in February 1965, Baldwin lamented his death and referred to Malcolm X as his "friend." Baldwin's recognition of cultural Pan

⁸¹ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 59-60.

⁸² Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews and a Letter by Malcolm X*, George Breitman, ed. (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970), 110-111.

Africanism's importance to the U.S. civil rights struggle triggered his rapprochement, of sorts, with long-time champion of African literature, Langston Hughes. Baldwin joined Hughes, Duke Ellington and Katherine Dunham in traveling to Dakar, Senegal in 1966 for the First World Festival of Negro Arts, an event that dwarfed the 1961 AMSAC gathering in Nairobi.⁸³

Amiri Baraka was more interested in establishing institutions of Black Nationalism at home than he was in supporting African peoples' campaigns for nationhood on the Continent or spreading Islam. Baraka, like Harold Cruse, espoused cultural nationalism. He, Cruse and other cultural nationalists such as Karenga believed, with blithe grandiosity, that black *intellectuals* had to build autonomous cultural institutions. If black intellectuals did not, they warned the black movement within the United States would become a temporary domestic uprising rather than a revolution on par with the sovereignty won by the new African nations from their former Western colonizers.⁸⁴ Baraka practiced what he preached. In 1965, he published his incendiary poem, "Black Art": a manifesto declaring the arrival of the Black Arts Movement. Baraka founded the Black Arts Repertory/Theater School in Harlem and continued to promote political, cultural and self-help institutions in black neighborhoods when he returned to his hometown of Newark. Baraka organized the Newark Congress of African People. He even started an independent short-lived jazz label, which he named Jihad Records.⁸⁵

⁸³ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 82.

⁸⁴ Young, "Havana up in Harlem," *Science & Society*, 30.

⁸⁵ Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*, 370-374.

Baraka's Afrocentric activism had, at best, only conceptual ties to real world Pan-Africanism and the battle against the Western nations which opposed it. To quote African American political scholar Jerry Gafio Watts: "Baraka and other adherents to Karenga's Kawaida intentionally distorted and fictionalized an African past and then pretended to revive those distortions as if in doing so they were returning to their traditional African selves." They were interested in using the idea of Africa to advance their domestic political and cultural ambitions. Watts goes on to argue that if Baraka, Karenga and their comrades had truly respected authentic African cultures, they would have gone to Africa and studied its many peoples and their customs. Pianist Randy Weston epitomizes a jazz artist genuinely enraptured by Pan-Africanism. He can be characterized as someone who devoted his adult life to studying and absorbing African culture into his art.⁸⁶ Among the jazz writers, his peer is Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes's long love affair with Africa and cultural Pan-Africanism elevates him above the other admirable musicians and writers examined in this chapter. From his first tour to the Francophone Gold Coast nations in 1923 to his last visit as the leader of U.S. contingent to the First World Festival of Negro Arts, staged in Dakar in 1966, Hughes never wavered in his affection for African nations, the African Diaspora and his respect for their myriad cultures. Africa's leading literary figures, including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, revered him for it. Hughes was among the first to recognize the spirit of the "New Africa" awakening on the Continent in the late 1940s. For the better part of the 1950s, Hughes pressed American publishers to commercially release the works

⁸⁶ See Randy Weston, *African Rhythms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 103-119.

of promising African writers. He finally succeeded when he convinced Pyramid Books to publish *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories and Poems by Black Africans* in 1960.⁸⁷ Hughes edited the compilation and it is now considered one of the best American books on African culture and thought in that era. In addition, Hughes penned a children's book, *The First Book of Africa*, also published in 1960. Hughes was a proponent of liberal Pan Africanism, subscribers to which valorized figures such as Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta. Liberal Pan-Africanists strove to replace white colonialists in the seats of power, not remake the system that allowed the Westerners to pursue empires. They envisioned taking their long overdue rightful place as nation state leaders and full members of the global capitalist economy. Unlike the radical Pan Africanists, they did not seek to re-order their societies and national economies in accordance to socialist orthodoxies. In the years after his public disavowal of Communism during his McCarthy hearing, Hughes had purged the ideology from his writings and his world view, a world view in which he perceived Africa as an ancestral homeland more than worthy of his love and praise.

Coda: Two Noteworthy Songs and Why Cultural Pan Africanism among Jazz Artists is Important

A triumvirate of albums, *We Insist!: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* and Randy Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* and *The High Life: Music from the New African Nations*, allow the listener to travel back in time to hear music composed by jazz artists enthralled by the dozens of successful anticolonial movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s. However,

⁸⁷ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 235-240.

one well-known composition, not included in any of the three albums, perhaps best exemplifies the romantic interpretation of the Continent embraced by several leading jazz musicians of the day. The song is “Afro-Blue,” written by African-descended Cuban percussionist, Mongo Santamaria. Santamaria recorded it live with the Cal Tjader Sextet at a Concert -by-the-Sea jazz festival in Carmel, California on April 20, 1959.

“Afro-Blue” features a swaying, contemplative melody voiced on flute. The harmonic structure is a straightforward Bb pentatonic blues. But, it is likely the first jazz composition to be built upon an “African 3:2 cross-rhythm or hemiola.”⁸⁸ Shortly after the Carmel performance, Santamaria recorded the song with his own band. Oscar Brown, Jr., who worked with Max Roach on *We Insist!*, heard Santamaria’s instrumental and wrote lyrics to it. He then offered the song to Abbey Lincoln, who recorded and released, also in 1959, the first vocal version of it on her album, *Abbey Is Blue*. Three versions of the song were released in one year, which is an indication that jazz artists recognized it as a superior composition. John Coltrane covered “Afro-Blue” in 1963 and, in some critics’ opinion, improved the composition by adding several chords to the harmonic structure of Santamaria’s original. “Afro-Blue” is significant because Mongo Santamaria incorporated the major musical strands of the African Diaspora: African drumming, black American blues and Latin-inflected jazz. It is one of the few songs composed during the peak years of the anticolonial surge with an overt Pan-African theme that became a jazz standard.

⁸⁸ David Penalosa, *The Clave Matrix – Afro-Cuban Rhythm: Its Principles and African Origins* (Redway, CA: Bembe, Inc, 2010), 26.

The more obscure song worth noting which was created during this period comes from the album *Uhuru Afrika*, “4th Movement: Kucheza Blues,” written by Randy Weston and arranged by Melba Liston,. On most of the extended compositions of *Uhuru Afrika*, Weston sought to infuse profundity into his long-envisioned tribute to jazz’s cultural kinship with the African Continent. With “Kucheza Blues,” Weston transcends “fake African music,”⁸⁹ the term used to castigate most black jazz artists’ efforts at capturing the feel of the Continent. Instead, Randy Weston filters African influences through hard-charging post-bop. His piano playing is joyful and channels his two jazz keyboard heroes, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. Melba Liston’s horn arrangement is full of unexpected and satisfying chord sequences. She exhibits her trademark generosity by allowing ample space for the many already established and future jazz legends performing on the recording session – including Slide Hampton, Clark Terry, Freddie Hubbard, Yusef Lateef, Gigi Gryce, Ron Carter, George Duvivier, Kenny Burrell and Max Roach – to lay down sizzling solos inspired by Nigerian dance hall music.

Before closing this chapter, one critical question must be answered. Did jazz artists and jazz-affiliated writers’ celebration and adoption of African cultural influences matter in advancing the American civil rights movement and African anticolonial campaigns? If the mostly New York City-based jazz elite’s aim was to convince black American civil rights leaders to ally with African freedom fighters for their mutual benefit, they failed. However, their advocacy is still significant because it is evidence of an episode in which

⁸⁹ Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 9-10.

the jazz artists and writers sought to *advise* civil rights leaders rather than just *react* to the consequences of their desegregation and voter registration campaigns cross the South. On the cultural front, jazz artists and writers were successful in awakening curiosity and instilling a new pride among college-educated black Americans in their African ancestry. The robust exchange of artistic expression between African and African American writers and musicians fueled even greater university attendance by Africans in the United States, especially at HBCUs.⁹⁰ In addition, their dialogue laid the foundation for future commerce in African-themed products ranging from fashion and home furnishings to popular entertainment and the fine arts.

Further, black American jazz artists and writers offered tangible support to the new African nations by headlining fund-raising concerts for their independence movements in the early 1960s. Randy Weston, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, Gerry Mulligan and Charles Mingus, among others, performed dozens of benefits, again mostly in New York City, to help defray the expenses of exiled African freedom fighters and luminaries, including Miriam Makeba, who had taken refuge in the city.⁹¹ Historian Ingrid Monson has contributed informative accounts of the African Defense and Aid Fund concerts staged in 1960 and 1961. The artists included the Oscar Peterson Trio, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball

⁹⁰ Adell Patton, Jr. "Howard University and Meharry Medical Schools in the Training of African Physicians, 1868 to 1978," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington, DC.: Howard University Press, 1993), 115-125. See also Charles Cobb, Jr. "From Atlanta to East Africa," *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950- 2000* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007), 100-103.

⁹¹ Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 670-676.

Adderley and Billy Taylor. Kenneth Kaunda, Tom Mboya and Lorraine Hansberry delivered remarks on the importance of Pan-African solidarity.⁹²

Again, jazz artists were inspired to unleash a bevy of grand African-themed compositions. Unfortunately, most of them have been erased from contemporary memory by critical disdain or commercial failure. In addition, record companies purged several of these controversial releases by well-known artists from their catalogues, making the albums themselves difficult to access for those who wish to listen to the advocacy in the music. Nonetheless, the possibility of a “New Africa”⁹³ – one filled with proud new nations led by new daring leaders – stirred the imaginations and emboldened the political actions of jazz artists and writers such as Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Randy Weston, Melba Liston, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin. The ascendant African nations of the late 1950s and early 1960s validated what Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes had been preaching to the world, in both their art and public statements since the Harlem Renaissance: not only was the African Continent richly endowed and exceptional in its variety of attributes, so were its peoples and their cultures.

Langston Hughes, resigned to his impending demise after being hospitalized in early May 1967, requested Randy Weston to perform an upbeat jazz set at his funeral. Hughes specifically requested that Weston play a few of his African-influenced originals and the Ellington standard, “Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me.” The ageless and elegant

⁹² Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 156-159 and 222

⁹³ *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*. PBS Film documentary (2016).

Lena Horne was in attendance. Horne, like Weston, suffered a South African ban of her music – her album *Lena Horne-Now!* – in 1964. After Hughes’s funeral, Horne confessed to Weston: “O Lord, Randy, I was so confused. There I was tapping my toes and humming while y’all played, and I didn’t know whether to cry for Langston or clap my hands and laugh.”⁹⁴

The globe-trotting Ellington’s last international tour stops were in Africa, where he performed for Ethiopian Emperor Hailu Selassie in Addis Ababa and Mrs. Betty Kaunda in Lusaka.⁹⁵ The late November 1973 concerts in East Africa were Ellington’s last major appearances on the world stage before he died in New York City six months later in May 1974.

The Pan-African afterglow to both Hughes and Ellington’s deaths illuminates a serendipity seldom seen in the capricious contingency which shapes history. Yet, there is one unavoidably sour aspect of the conjoined Civil Rights-African Anticolonial Movements that cannot go without being mentioned in any honest historical narrative of the era: their misogyny. Brilliant, capable and courageous women clearly committed to realizing racial justice were ignored, pushed into low level support roles or patronized as symbols, with terms of praise such as “Nubian Queen” thrown their way to placate them. One shameful incident indicative of this misogynist behavior was the Nkrumah government’s naked intimidation of African American lawyer, poet, writer and activist

⁹⁴ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 423-425.

⁹⁵ John Edward Hasse Interview, April 24, 2017. See also “The Duke –Where and When: A Chronicle of Duke Ellington’s Working Life and Travels.” <http://tdwaw.ellingtonweb.ca/TDWAW.html#Yr1973>. [Accessed August 4, 2017].

Pauli Murray. The trailblazing Murray, who had been an outspoken supporter of civil and women's rights since she became a friend and advisor to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in the late 1930s, traveled in 1959 to Accra after receiving an offer to teach at the Ghana School of Law.

Murray's "American" perspective on how a constitutional democracy should work, combined with the male faculty's umbrage over this unmarried woman's assertiveness, soon drew the ire of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) leaders. Party operatives surveilled Murray and monitored her lectures. After a colleague with whom she had co-authored a book that Nkrumah found unflattering was jailed, Murray hurriedly left Ghana. The African American feminist feared she, too, would become a prisoner of the increasingly autocratic Nkrumah regime.⁹⁶ Murray had to abandon her dream of helping educate Ghanaians after a mere sixteen months. However, a small but powerful band of women, a whole generation younger than Murray, would not be deterred from making their voices heard as the early 1960s gave way to a more confrontational phase of the civil rights movement. Their story will be told in the next chapter.

⁹⁶ Pauli Murray, *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 328-332.

CHAPTER 5: MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD: WOMEN JAZZ ARTISTS AND WRITERS IN THE EARLY 1960S

Thus far this narrative has identified a recurring cast of artists and writers who distinguished themselves by decisions to marry their music, plays, poetry and prose to advocacy supporting the goals of the civil rights movement and the African nationalist campaigns. When one examines the political stances of the jazz artists and the writers who either wrote explicitly about jazz or who were inspired by it during the era, a “racial justice league of America” emerges. Its core members include Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Randy Weston, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Nat Hentoff and Amiri Baraka.

Other well-known artists and writers circled the perimeter of the fray, contributing isolated but significant acts of advocacy. Making cameo appearances were Dave Brubeck, who generated a storm of controversy in the entertainment industry by canceling a lucrative tour of southern and southwestern college campuses in late 1959 after the same colleges’ administrations demanded that Brubeck replace Eugene Wright, the black bassist in the group;¹ Charles Mingus, who released his scathing vocal version of “Fables of Faubus” in 1960; Miles Davis, who delivered an explosive concert performance for the African Research Foundation at Carnegie Hall in May 1961² and Leonard Feather, who consistently campaigned for equal pay for African American jazz artists.³

¹ October 6, 1959 letter from Bob Bundy, Associated Booking Company, to Dave Brubeck, “Correspondence,” Box 2 1957-1959, Brubeck Collection, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library.

² Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 158. See also Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 238 and 253.

³ Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years*, 167-175.

Although their numbers were few, women jazz artists and women writers were also powerful spokespeople for progressive social and racial change. As noted in the Introduction of this narrative, Billie Holiday and her masterwork, “Strange Fruit,” which was created in the pre-dawn years of the modern civil rights movement, have withstood the test of time as exemplars of racial justice advocacy in jazz and perhaps popular music world wide. Yet, after Holiday, women jazz artists and jazz-inspired women writers struggled to have their voices heard. They were speaking truth to power and almost always to the detriment of their careers, personal safety, and relationships. Many talented and courageous women had helped advance the civil rights movement by the late 1950s. Now iconic figures such as Dorothy Height, Ella Baker, Pauli Murray, Lena Horne, Daisy Bates, NAACP attorney Constance Motley and Coretta Scott King were among the women who did not receive commensurate recognition for their contributions at the time. Chauvinistic leaders within the male-dominated jazz industry and civil rights movement tended to relegate assertive women to supporting roles.⁴

Nonetheless, starting in the late 1950s, a select few women jazz musicians and writer Lorraine Hansberry, who identified with these women artists, exhibited an extraordinary outspokenness in support of the civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-colonial campaigns waged in the emerging African nations. Abbey Lincoln, Melba Liston and Miriam Makeba are artist-activists who have been mentioned thus far. By the early 1960s, a cadre of like-minded women, all of whom lived in the metropolitan

⁴ Dorothy I. Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, 140-141. See also Linda Dahl, “Breaking the Taboos,” Chapter Five in *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984; republished in 1996), 79-93.

New York City area, formed political alliances and friendships that revolved around the cause of racial justice. Their remarkable personal histories and the contingencies which interacted to create their comradery and collaboration merit specific assessment.

The women instrumentalists who did prevail against jazz industry prejudice were often assisted by enlightened males. An illustrative case-in-point is, again, Melba Liston. With the assistance of Dizzy Gillespie and then Randy Weston, Liston gained eminence both as a jazz arranger and as an advocate for Pan-Africanism. Ironically, Gillespie and Weston themselves were the artistic beneficiaries of a woman, Mary Lou Williams. She was perhaps the most important jazz instrumentalist of the Twentieth Century who happened to be a woman. Williams is one of the few women to escape the all-girl jazz band exploitation “ghetto” of the 1930s⁵ and establish herself as a solo songwriter, arranger and jazz pianist of the first order. A photo of a self-assured and hopeful Mary Lou Williams appears on the cover of writer and jazz critic Linda Dahl’s 1984 groundbreaking work, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. Linda Dahl examined Mary Lou Williams’s life story in more detail in 2000, when Pantheon Books published Dahl’s *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams*. Another addition to the scholarship on Williams appeared in 2004. Music historian Tammy Kernodle authored *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams*, published by Northeastern University Press that year.

⁵ Tammy L. Kernodle, *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 65.

Williams was born Mary Elfrieda Scruggs, one of eleven children, in Atlanta, Georgia on May 8, 1910. Mary Lou Williams's parents joined the World War One era northern migration of African Americans and settled in a black neighborhood of East Liberty, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. Williams, as a toddler, taught herself to play piano and by age 6 was helping support her parents and ten half-siblings by playing at parties in the Pittsburgh area.⁶ Before long even the wealthy Mellon family had heard of the "little piano girl of East Liberty" and invited her to play at their social gatherings.⁷ When she was thirteen years old Williams signed on to the Orpheum black vaudeville circuit and started touring nationally. At the age of 14, she met Duke Ellington in New York City. Ellington was so taken by her talent that he allowed her to sit in with his early band, the Washingtonians. She met her first husband John Williams in Cleveland then moved on to Kansas City. Williams impressed the soon-to-be-legends of the Kansas City jazz scene, including future big band leader Jimmie Lunceford. Williams, although she could not yet read or notate music, still composed and offered "head arrangements" to the Kansas City jazz bands. Head arrangements were unwritten musical directions that were hummed or demonstrated to the players, who then had to memorize them in order to play the song or score. Williams wrote one of Lunceford's first hits, "What's Your Story, Morning Glory?"⁸ Independent minded and confident in her musical abilities, Williams outgrew the Kansas City scene as the 1930s ended. She divorced her husband in the early 1940s and moved to New York City. Ellington hired her as a staff arranger for his band. Her fame grew. She

⁶ Kernodle, *Soul on Soul*, 19-24.

⁷ Kernodle, *Soul on Soul*, 26.

⁸ Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 59-65.

left the Ellington band and became a regular performer at the Café Society. WNEW signed Williams to perform a weekly radio show. Following in the footsteps of one of her heroes, Duke Ellington, she had written a long-form composition entitled *Zodiac Suite* and performed it at New York's Town Hall in 1945.

In the late 1940s Williams welcomed the young musicians experimenting with a new music they called "Be Bop." Williams mentored and encouraged jazz pianist-composers Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and relative novice Randy Weston, regularly inviting them to her Harlem apartment for after-hours jam sessions and tutorials.⁹ Williams's obvious talent and generous tutelage disarmed these jazz innovators of any gendered preconceptions they may have harbored about women instrumentalists. Gillespie hired Liston for his big band in the late 1940s. Weston in the late 1950s next enlisted the talents of the gifted trombonist to his great benefit, as her arrangements are the most arresting musical elements of his acclaimed African-themed albums of the early 1960s.

Liston was one of the rare women who overcame the challenges of being taken seriously as a jazz musician. Her ability to write complex but engaging horn arrangements in a short period of time helped Dizzy Gillespie dazzle Mediterranean, South Asian, Middle Eastern and South American audiences on the crowd-pleasing trumpeter's famed 1956 State Department tours. Quincy Jones recalled that he and Liston scrambled to write the charts for the tour's grueling slate of performances, often doing so on planes, busses and

⁹ Tammy L. Kernodle, *Soul to Soul*, 99-110.

in hotel rooms at the tour progressed.¹⁰ The two State Department sponsored excursions, one in the Spring and the next in the Summer of that year, put the bandleader and his musicians in front of thousands of so-called Third World peoples. Gillespie's big band, in which Liston was the only woman, brought jazz to fans in Greece, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.¹¹

As a trombonist in Gillespie's band, Liston realized by the surprised faces she saw in the crowds that she was breaking new ground for women, especially women of color. Recalling the amazed gawks from the overseas audiences in the mid-1950s, Liston suspected she was shattering stereotypes about women and African Americans: "That was strange to them because they had heard of blacks being lynched and burned, and here I come with half whites and blacks and a girl playing in the band. And everybody seemed to be getting along fine."¹² Gillespie, in his own memoir, reflected on the worldview changing impact Liston had on women who saw her perform. He was convinced she inspired "a bunch of sisters over there to demand a little more appreciation of their innate abilities."¹³

After she returned to the United States in the late 1950s, Liston aided the recording career and Pan African activism of Randy Weston. She arranged the music for his breakthrough composition "Little Niles," on which she also played trombone. Liston's arrangements for Weston's landmark musical homages to the Continent's many successful anticolonial campaigns, *Uhuru Afrika* (1961) and *Music from the New African Nations*

¹⁰ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 115.

¹¹ Ibid., 122.

¹² Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 119.

¹³ Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop: Memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), 421.

featuring The Highlife (1963) remain fresh. Her chart for “Blues for Africa,” featured on the *New African Nations* album, is cinematic in sweep. It foreshadowed the ambitious late-career orchestral arrangements of Duke Ellington.

Liston was shy in public and guarded in her private life. However, when asked, she castigated the sexism and racism which had robbed her of fair compensation and due recognition. Liston said that being African American, female and an instrumentalist had buried her “at the bottom of the heap.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, she amassed an astounding body of work over her fifty-seven years in the music industry and the most accomplished musicians respected her. When the demanding Charles Mingus assembled a jazz orchestra for his New York Town Hall concert in 1962, his first and only choice to arrange and conduct the music for the important performance was Melba Liston.¹⁵

Another unsung heroine of the late fifties/early sixties jazz explosion and its artists’ alignment with the Civil Rights Movement is Iola Brubeck. She adroitly positioned her talented husband to take maximum advantage of the surging white college student population’s infatuation with jazz. It was she who masterminded Dave Brubeck’s early fifties concerts at liberal universities in the Midwest and New England. The Brubeck “sound,” which came to epitomize West Coast jazz, combined classical motifs with flowing, unhurried solos. Although it was maligned as “dead” music by the fiery Mingus¹⁶ and other jazz progressives, Brubeck’s albums and performances constituted a jazz primer

¹⁴ Erica Kaplan, “Melba Liston: It’s All from My Soul,” *Antioch Review* 57, no.3 (Summer 1999): 425.

¹⁵ “Melba Doretta Liston,” <http://www.anb.org/articles/18-18-0309.html> [Accessed August 22, 2017].

¹⁶ John Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 77.

for the young audiences who would go on to comprise the music's adult consumer base in the late 1950s.

Iola Brubeck was Dave Brubeck's chief promoter. She was adept at stirring interest among concert producers and booking agents for her husband. Iola Brubeck knew he had recorded an exceptional album in *Time Out* and used it to generate excitement and secure lucrative engagements as can evidenced by in the opening to a brief letter meant to pave the way for a Polish tour: "Dave is quite excited about his new album, which is not yet available. It is called 'Time Out' and it has in it many different experiments in rhythm. I find it very exciting. I hope Willis Conover plays it for you on Voice of America." ¹⁷

Even Joe Glaser, the ruthless agent of Louis Armstrong, knew that to gain the assent of Dave Brubeck to any project or concert tour, he had to first win Iola's favor. An example of this dynamic can be seen in Mrs. Brubeck's resolute support of her husband, when at the peak of his popularity, he chose to remove the white bassist from his quartet and replace him with an African American, Eugene Wright. Mrs. Brubeck even arranged for Wright to relocate from Chicago to the West Coast to facilitate his integration into the group and its rehearsal schedule for recording dates and concert tours.¹⁸ Glaser, who booked tours for the increasingly popular pianist, was appalled. He used his proxy, Bob Bundy, to send Brubeck a letter warning him of the consequences of integrating his band. In an October 1959 letter, Bundy wrote:

The chairman of this organization just called me and wanted to know if you had any colored boys in your group, which you do. My propose (sic) in

¹⁷ October 7, 1959 letter from Iola Brubeck to Warsaw, Poland tour producers, Correspondence, 1958-1962, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific. Copyright Dave Brubeck.

¹⁸ December 26, 1959 letter from Iola Brubeck to Eugene Wright, Correspondence, 1958 to 1962, Brubeck Collection, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific.

writing you is to see if you could arrange to have an all white group play these colleges and universities, because they will not accept you as a mixed group.¹⁹

Iola Brubeck opened all her husband's business mail and was offended by Bundy's menacing comment that college concerts were the backbone of her husband's income. Bundy warned that his refusal to comply would cost him twenty-five engagements, each worth at least fifteen hundred dollars. Mrs. Brubeck managed the finances of her husband and their children, whose number had grown to five by the late 1950s. Fees from Dave Brubeck's college tours had been the family's main source of income. Joe Glaser was aware of this fact when he had Bundy send the threatening letter to Dave Brubeck via air mail-special delivery. Scrawled at the bottom of the letter were the underlined words "You Need This." Iola Brubeck knew Bundy's letter was a financial ultimatum aimed at forcing her husband to remove the unmistakably black Eugene Wright from his touring band. The aggregate income the Brubecks risked losing if the concert promoters canceled the tour was \$37,500. In 2018 dollars, that 1960 sum amounts to more than \$312,000.²⁰ For a family of seven living in Oakland, foregoing this income constituted a significant sacrifice. Nevertheless, Dave Brubeck, supported by his wife, refused to tour without Wright and accepted the cancellation of 22 of the 25 dates. Two colleges allowed Wright to perform with Brubeck, drummer Joe Morello and alto saxophonist Paul Desmond.²¹

His stance sparked controversy in the jazz world and in the popular media as well. During the early Winter months of 1960, dozens of major newspapers carried headlines

¹⁹ Bundy letter to Dave Brubeck, Brubeck Collection.

²⁰ FinanceRef Inflation Calculator, Alioth Finance. <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1960-dollars-in-2018/amount=37500.html> [Accessed February 10, 2018].

²¹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 62-63.

reporting Brubeck's refusal to capitulate to Jim Crow demands on touring. The national African American news weeklies applauded Brubeck. A February 13, 1960 byline by the *Pittsburgh Courier's* respected columnist George E. Pitts typified the response from the black press: "Give Brubeck Credit for a Slap at Bias."²² A few prominent social activists in jazz, such as Norman Granz, producer of the pioneering Jazz at the Philharmonic concert series, were underwhelmed by the Brubecks. Granz, who had been jailed in Houston in the 1950s for attempting to present an integrated jazz lineup featuring Ella Fitzgerald, scoffed that refusing to play Jim Crow venues was not heroic. He challenged Brubeck and other prominent jazz artists to force the issue by challenging intolerant concert hall owners to open their theaters to integrated bands and, more to the point of the matter, integrated audiences.²³

Granz's criticisms aside, Iola Brubeck was convinced she had helped her husband strike a blow against segregation on southern college campuses and in society overall. She kept dozens of plaudits mailed to her husband by racially progressive jazz fans from around the world and from front-line civil rights organizations. Black leaders likely agreed with Granz. Activists across the South had risked not only their economic well-being but also their lives in protesting segregation. Yet, they surmised having a prominent white jazz artist support their cause, given the racial hierarchy of celebrity culture, gave the cause itself more credibility and visibility among white audiences. A January 13, 1960 telegram from

²² Newspaper Clippings, Undated and 1948 to 1968, Box 1.E, Brubeck collection, Holt-Atherton Special collections, University of the Pacific.

²³ Norman Granz, "The Brubeck Stand: Divergent View by Norman Granz," *Down Beat* 27, no.15 (July 21, 1960), p.24.

Tarea Hall Pittman, Regional Secretary of the NAACP, to Dave Brubeck affirmed his wife's perception of his stand:

ON BEHALF ON THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE ON THE WEST COAST WE
ARE ANXIOUS TO EXPRESS OUR DEEP ADMIRATION OF YOUR
COURAGEOUS STAND AGAINST SUBMITTING YOUR BAND TO
THE PRESSURES OF IMMORAL RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WE DO
NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE FINANCIAL LOSS INCURRED NOT
(sic) DO WE OVERESTIMATE THE VERY VALUABLE AND
TANGIBLE CONTRIBUTION YOU HAVE MADE TO THE FIGHT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. AGAIN, WE COMMEND YOU FOR A VERY
INSPIRING STAND AND WE ECHO YOUR SENTIMENTS THAT
PREJUDICE IS INDEED "MORALLY, RELIGIOUSLY AND
POLITICALLY WRONG." ²⁴

Dave Brubeck, along with Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Goodman, had been in the first wave of jazz artists recruited by the State Department to headline overseas tour, starting in the late 1950s.²⁵ The Eisenhower Administration hoped to exploit the egalitarian essence of jazz to mask the stench of smoldering U.S. racial oppression wafting overseas during the Cold War. This transparent ploy aggravated the progressive Brubecks. They knew they and the other involved artists were being used. Iola Brubeck, a theater major at the University of the Pacific, decided to satirize the hypocrisy. She wrote the story line and song lyrics to twenty-five songs for a musical revue she and her husband conceived in 1959. They entitled it "The Real Ambassadors," a mocking reference to the State Department's deployment of jazz musicians in its cultural Cold War against Communist and non-aligned nations.

²⁴ January 13, 1960 telegram from Tarea Hall Pittman. Correspondence, 1958 to 1962, Brubeck Collection, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific.

²⁵ Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 64-65.

Despite the dispute with Joe Glaser over the ill-fated Winter 1960 college tour, Iola and Dave Brubeck convinced Glaser to allow his star client, Louis Armstrong, to be the lead performer in “Real Ambassadors.” Glaser gave his approval because the Brubecks agreed to pay Armstrong his top tier fee and all expenses. The couple also recruited Carmen McRae and the “hottest new group in jazz” at the time, Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, to complete the cast. Iola Brubeck envisioned her husband’s quartet, of course including Eugene Wright, as the band for the jazz revue. The “Real Ambassadors” plot, to the extent there was one, revolved around Armstrong’s character, a beloved jazz musician dispatched to a mythical African nation by a conniving government to quell unrest among the indigenous peoples there and win them over to the “American way of life.” The native peoples instead become convinced that Armstrong is a deity and anoint him as their king. Armstrong himself muses that God indeed might be black.²⁶ Iola Brubeck’s libretto bristled with barbs aimed to pierce U.S. institutional and cultural racism.

For two years, they pitched the musical to potential producers. Brubeck himself wrote a letter to Jerome Robbins, a socially aware Broadway producer whom they thought would be receptive to its pro-civil rights and human rights message. Despite having the popular Armstrong and ascendant jazz vocalist McRae committed to the project, the theme proved too controversial and thus unmarketable for Broadway, especially considering its “art-imitating-life” timing. Armstrong had performed in *The Congo* just days before Belgian and CIA-assisted assassins murdered Patrice Lumumba in January 1961, sparking

²⁶ “They Say I Look Like God,” lyric by Iola Brubeck, “The Real Ambassadors,” Digital Collection, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific.

worldwide outrage among leaders in the Black Atlantic diaspora and other developing nations. The Brubecks persevered, deciding to fund a West Coast production of the musical themselves. After convening the cast for rehearsals in San Francisco, in September 1961 and again in mid-September 1962, the full cast debuted a truncated version of “The Real Ambassadors” at the Monterey Jazz Festival on September 23, 1962.²⁷ This scaled-back version was the only time the original cast performed the musical. While the musical is an unsuccessful curiosity of social advocacy by jazz artists, it does corroborate Iola Brubeck’s influence on her husband’s growing outspokenness. The lessons learned from “The Real Ambassadors” inspired Dave Brubeck to compose, again with lyrics from his wife, some of the most powerful human rights-themed classical/jazz compositions of the late 1960s and early 1970s: “The Gates of Freedom” and “Truth Is Fallen.”

Iola Brubeck, despite her business acumen and creative contributions, lived in the shadow of her famous husband. This was not long the case for Abbey Lincoln. Although some doubters saw Lincoln as a creation of her paramour and future husband Max Roach, it was clear to any objective observer that Lincoln was her own person. She had established herself as an artist and entertainer before beginning her romantic relationship with Roach in the late 1950s. By 1960, Lincoln had become an outspoken woman advocate for racial justice, also vaulting to prominence and notoriety among those who believed jazz and politics did not mix. Still, she was seen by jazz critics and political activists as a protégé of

²⁷ “The Real Ambassadors,” Digital Collection, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific.

her husband Max Roach. However, Lincoln's role in inspiring other women social justice advocates was self-directed and will be examined later in this chapter.

Even future incendiary civil rights and women's rights advocate Nina Simone accepted help from established men to secure her place in elite cultural circles when she arrived in New York City from Philadelphia in the late 1950s. Her talent was so obvious it was one of the rare subjects upon which LeRoi Jones, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin could agree.²⁸ Baldwin and Hughes, after attending Simone's breakout concerts in Greenwich Village and at Town Hall in 1959, each offered his assistance to her and appointed themselves as Simone's unofficial mentors. Appreciative but fiercely independent, Simone chose her own mentor. It was Lorraine Hansberry, a brilliant woman who adored and carried on the legacy of Langston Hughes by putting a jazz feeling in her writing. She said the writers of her activist generation, like the best jazz musicians, had to "make new sounds" and re-introduce the element of surprise into what they wrote and dare to speak the truth, even if critics disparaged their work as "protest" and not art.²⁹

Hansberry Leads the Way

Obviously, the most oppressed group of any oppressed group will be its women...since women, period, are oppressed by society. And, if you've got an oppressed group, they're twice oppressed. So, I should imagine as oppression makes people more militant, then (women) become twice militant.

Lorraine Hansberry³⁰

²⁸ Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 66-71. See also Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II*, 330, 348.

²⁹ "Lorraine Hansberry Talks with Studs Terkel," WFMT AM Chicago, May 12, 1959. www.studsterkel.wmft.com/blog/tag/lorraine-hansberry [Accessed August 10, 2017].

³⁰ Ibid., "Lorraine Hansberry Talks with Studs Terkel."

Playwright Lorraine Hansberry gob smacked U.S. cultural critics and social commentators with the debut of her searing stage drama about the Youngers, a working class black Chicago family grappling with their conflicting views on the American Dream and their African ancestry. Upon its debut in 1959, *A Raisin in the Sun* became an instant success. It catapulted its male lead, Sidney Poitier, to Hollywood movie stardom. The play earned Hansberry the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award that year, making her at the age of twenty-nine the youngest person and first African American to ever win the theatrical recognition. Hansberry's sudden success also gave her a platform upon which she could launch her withering criticisms against racism and sexism. Hansberry, along with Baldwin and in fact before Baraka, was a leading voice in a new generation of socially aware writers who did not view "protest" or political commentary as antithetical to good art.

Hansberry excerpted the title of her play from the second line of verse in Langston Hughes's poem "Montage of a Dream Deferred." She, like Hughes, believed it was her responsibility to be a good writer first, but in so doing she did not have to lose her racial awareness. Hansberry subscribed to Hughes's vision that by becoming good writers, African Americans could transcend color and humanize their people to the larger, non-black world.³¹

Hansberry was the youngest of four children, born May 19, 1930 in Chicago to a successful real estate firm-owning father, Carl Hansberry, and homemaker mother Nanine

³¹ "Writers: Black and White." In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Volume 9, Essays on Art, Race, Politics and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2002), 380-383.

Perry Hansberry. Her father founded Lake Street Bank, one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago. An intelligent and self-possessed child, she watched eminent black entertainers and activists such as W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Jesse Owens and her literary hero Langston Hughes (who, again, wrote a weekly column for *The Chicago Defender*) visit her home. Hansberry herself noted that she “came from an extremely comfortable background, materially speaking,”³² but that she still had to endure the demeaning Up-South discrimination of Chicago when she traveled outside of the protective bubble of her black middle-class neighborhood and social circles. The Hansberrys attempted to crack Chicago’s restrictive racial housing covenants when they moved into an all-white neighborhood in 1937. White mobs attacked their home and a brick hurled into the living room narrowly missed a seven-year-old Lorraine Hansberry. The Illinois Supreme Court forced the Hansberrys out of the house, but the United States Supreme Court later overruled the lower court, which marked the beginning of the end of restrictive covenants in Chicago.³³

By the time *A Raisin in the Sun* had its Broadway opening at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on March 11, 1959 in New York City,³⁴ Lorraine Hansberry, had been in the city for nearly nine years. She moved there in 1950, after graduating high school, and then entering and dropping out of the University of Wisconsin as a theater major. Between leaving Wisconsin and moving to New York City, she studied painting in Chicago and

³² Ibid., “Lorraine Hansberry Talks with Studs Terkel.”

³³ *Hansberry v. Lee*, 311 U.S. 32. Supreme Court of the United States. Argued October 25, 1940. Decided November 12, 1940. See also Patricia C. McKissack and Frederick L. McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined: A Biography of Lorraine Hansberry* (Chicago: Holiday House, 1998), 23-26.

³⁴ Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun: with Connections* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1998), Preface.

Mexico. Once in New York City, she began her career as a writer by working for Paul Robeson's *Freedom*. A regular in socialist and progressive circles, Hansberry often participated in protests denouncing racial discrimination. At one such protest, she met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish writer who fell into a longstanding affair with Hansberry. They married in Hansberry's Chicago home in 1953 and returned to New York City.³⁵

Nemiroff struggled to build a career as a Broadway producer. He also wrote songs. In 1956, Nemiroff co-composed a novelty pop hit, "Cindy, Oh Cindy." The handsome royalty checks allowed Hansberry to put aside her journalist job and focus on writing a play that she tentatively entitled *The Crystal Stair*, a phrase taken from another Langston Hughes poem, "Mother to Son." The dramatic work evolved, and she retitled it *A Raisin in the Sun*. Before it did, Hansberry separated from Nemiroff. They still shared a passion for progressive politics. But, Hansberry had admitted something to herself in private that she could not divulge in Eisenhower-era America and still expect to win broad commercial success as a playwright: she was sexually and romantically drawn to other women.

Like her literary inspiration, Langston Hughes, Hansberry never publicly announced her sexuality. Yet, unlike Hughes, Hansberry left a trail of letters which reveal her tortured self-questioning over being heterosexually married. In 1957, Hansberry began writing letters to the editor of a San Francisco-based lesbian magazine called *The Ladder*. Identifying herself only by her initials "L.H.N.," Hansberry pondered the dilemma of "an individual who finds that, despite her conscious will oft-times, she is inclined to have her most intense emotional and physical reactions directed toward other women, quite beyond

³⁵ McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined: A Biography of Lorraine Hansberry*, 53-64.

any comparative thing she might have ever felt for her husband – whatever her sincere affection for him? And isn't that the problem? How one quite admits to oneself – and to one's husband?"³⁶

In a life cut short by cancer, Hansberry focused the lion's share of her mental and physical energy advocating for racial justice for African Americans. However, she believed the same malevolent forces in the dominant culture which denied blacks their civil rights likewise oppressed women and non-heterosexuals. Writing in a defiant voice, Hansberry castigated masculinist American society for its marginalization of women and non-heterosexuals. In her unpublished papers, she left this condemnation behind: "Men continue to mis-intepret the second-rate status of women as implying a privileged status for themselves; heterosexuals think the same way about homosexuals; gentiles about Jews; whites about blacks; haves about have-nots."³⁷

Hansberry was a protégé of Paul Robeson³⁸ and an admirer of W.E.B. Du Bois. She was an early supporter of the African anticolonial movement. In crafting the plot to *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry created a love triangle between Mama Younger's college-attending daughter, Beneatha (whom the playwright admitted was a younger version of herself), Joseph Asagai, a Nigerian collegiate exchange student and George Murchison, a young black American striving for material success. Beneatha rebels against the notion that the United States' Western consumer capitalism and culture make it superior to other

³⁶ John Schwartz, "A Concealed Voice Rings Loud and Clear," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2013 (New York edition), Page F30.

³⁷ Lorraine Hansberry, 1961 unpublished essay titled, "On Homophobia, The Intellectual Impoverishment of Women and a Homosexual 'Bill of Rights.'" <http://LorraineHansberryLiteraryTrust.org/quotes> [Accessed May 11, 2017]

³⁸ Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 153.

societies. Like Beneatha, Hansberry perceived a mutually beneficial synergy in linking African peoples' quest for nationhood to black Americans' quest for full citizenship. She believed that acknowledging her African ancestry helped her better define her identity in the United States and the world. Hansberry evidenced these beliefs by her actions. In January 1960, the first major public fundraiser in which she participated after becoming a national celebrity was "Africa at the Gate." She joined black blues/folk singer Josh White and Leon Bibb at the Village Gate in New York City to support the "Africa Defense and Aid Fund."³⁹

On the domestic front, the bold exploits of the black college students who formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) drew Hansberry's immediate attention and respect. Their daring willingness to confront Jim Crow customs with direct action reflected Hansberry's own intense desire to expose and attack racist institutions and practices. Coincidentally, it was another woman, Ella Baker, who encouraged young black activists, most of whom were college students at historically black colleges and universities, to create SNCC in 1960. Baker also challenged them to pursue more confrontational direct action. Baker rejected both hierarchical male leadership and elitism. Baker believed in the ability of ordinary, working class southern blacks to lead the fight for racial justice. She mentored several young future civil rights leaders and elected black politicians, including Bob Moses and Diane Nash, Marion Barry, Jr. and John Lewis.⁴⁰

³⁹ Alvin Hall, "'Africa at the Gate' Aided Africa Fund," *New Amsterdam News* 50, no. 5 (January 13, 1960), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 241-246.

Because SNCC members pressed their demands for civil rights with controversial tactics, starting with sit-ins and moving into the Freedom Rides, the organization was seen as impatient and truculent by more moderate supporters of the civil rights movement. Fundraising was difficult for SNCC, even with the tireless and resourceful Baker pleading their case among potential donors in New York City. Hansberry came to Baker and SNCC's aid. With Baker, Hansberry helped arrange and participated in a fundraiser at the home of actor and activist Theodore Bikel.⁴¹ She also lent her prestige to a SNCC fundraising effort by penning the text that accompanied a slim photobook that the organization sold to supporters. It was entitled *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*. Hansberry's words appear alongside dramatic images of middle-school-aged black children being choked by white police officers and photographs of grisly lynchings: "*The Movement* is a book born out of the Negro's struggle for dignity, citizenship, a decent life – various needs which have been wrapped up in one word. Freedom. It was assembled in the belief that this struggle is not a Southern problem, nor can it be called 'the Negro problem' nor is it simply concerned with civil rights. It is the struggle for the humanization of our country."⁴²

In the early 1960s, Hansberry perceived what others realized later about the pivotal role the young black activists played in advancing the cause of racial justice in America: their valiant vigor had recharged a flagging civil rights movement. They invented new

⁴¹ "Lorraine Hansberry at July 6, 1963 SNCC Fundraiser," Lorraine Hansberry Literary Trust. <https://www.lhlt.org/gallery/lorraine-hansberry-sncc-fundraiser> [Accessed January 13, 2018].

⁴² Lorraine Hansberry, *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality* (Atlanta: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1964), preface.

assaults on segregated businesses and public accommodations. College students at historically black colleges and universities, not the NAACP or even the recently formed SCLC, launched lunch counter sit-in campaigns. “Of all the tactics utilized during this period the one that most galvanized national attention was the Freedom Rides,” noted civil rights historian Clayborne Carson. “When the Freedom Riders were brutally attacked in Alabama, it initiated a new phase of the movement.”⁴³

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which formed in Hansberry’s city of Chicago when she was twelve years old to fight local job discrimination against blacks,⁴⁴ had conceived and organized the Freedom Rides campaign with the assistance of students from Howard University and other volunteers. After the shocking television news footage of the bus firebombing and savage beatings absorbed by Freedom Riders in Alabama, CORE executive director James Farmer wanted to suspend the effort and bring the activists back home. But, Diane Nash, a Fisk University student and leader of the Nashville contingent of Freedom Riders, convinced Farmer the rides should continue. The Nashville riders’ mistreatment and jailing in Mississippi “forced the federal government to protect the Freedom Riders, thus supporting desegregation. The Freedom Rides also solidified support for CORE, marked the emergence of SNCC, and caused the nation to focus on the civil rights movement.”⁴⁵

Hansberry identified with SNCC, CORE and the younger generation of activists who had joined the fight for the “humanization of our country.” She felt their fresh

⁴³ Clayborne Carson, “Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961),” in *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 109.

⁴⁴ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined*, 27.

⁴⁵ Carson, “Ain’t Scared of Your Jails,” *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, 109.

perspectives, idealism and youthful sense of invulnerability had to be encouraged and drawn upon if the movement was to succeed. In fact, Hansberry uttered her most famous phrase, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” while delivering a speech to the winners of a United Negro College Fund writing competition. In addressing the aspiring African American writers and poets, she shared these thoughts: “I wanted to be able to come here and speak with you on this occasion because you are young, gifted and black... I, for one, can think of no more dynamic combination a person might be... And that is why I say to you that, though it be thrilling and a marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic, to be young, gifted *and black!*”⁴⁶

Hansberry gave this speech to the UNCF competition winners on May 1, 1964, just eighteen days before her 34th birthday. What only her family and husband Robert knew then was that Hansberry had been battling cancer and had already undergone surgery in Spring 1963 to remove an intestinal tumor. Within months of her speech to the UNCF writing competition winners, her doctors hospitalized her again, this time with the dire diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. In poor spirits, she called a dear friend who lived just a few miles from her in Mount Vernon, New York to come talk with her. According to that close friend, Hansberry said: “Nina, I don’t know what’s happening to me. They say I’m not going to get better, but I must get well. I must go to the South. I’ve been a revolutionary all my life, but I’ve got to go down there to find out what kind of revolutionary I am.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Lorraine Hansberry speech, “The Nation Needs Your Gifts,” given to the Readers Digest/ United Negro College Fund creative writing contest winners, New York City, May 1, 1964. Lorraine Hansberry Literary Trust, <http://lhlt.org.html> [Accessed September 2, 2017]

⁴⁷ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*, 87.

Hansberry's desire to protest on the front lines of the civil rights movement revealed her tremendous respect for the courage demonstrated by the young black activists' direct action against segregation and voter disenfranchisement. She wanted to do more than write and speak truth to power in the relative safety of New York City's liberal and socialist circles. Nonetheless, Lorraine Hansberry inspired many young civil rights warriors and black artists of the early 1960s, including John Lewis, Bob Moses, Diane Nash, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez.⁴⁸ She wanted to test her own bravery when faced with the threat of physical injury or death. She never got the chance. Nonetheless, her cultivation of social awareness and activism in Nina Simone only added to the writer's legacy.

The Re-education of Nina Simone

She understood that I felt separated from what was going on but told me over and over that like it or not I was involved in the struggle by the fact of being black --- it made no difference whether I admitted it or not, the fact was still true. Lorraine started off my political education, and through her I started thinking of myself as a black person in a country run by white people and a woman in a world run by men.

Nina Simone ⁴⁹

Like Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone burst through to critical acclaim and commercial success in 1959. In Simone's case, she had dazzled audiences in person and record buyers on vinyl with her moving version of the Gershwin ballad, "I Loves You, Porgy." The song had been taken from Simone's album, recorded in late 1958 on Bethlehem Records, *Little Girl Blue*. Black radio station deejays in Chicago and

⁴⁸ *Lorraine Hansberry: with Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart*. Film Documentary. Public Broadcasting Service (2018).

⁴⁹ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 87.

Philadelphia – Simone had performed in the City of Brotherly Love on the club circuit before moving to New York – loved “Porgy” and aired it in high rotation, helping “break” the record, to use music industry parlance.⁵⁰ Nina Simone was a frustrated classical pianist, embittered by the racism she was convinced had robbed her of the opportunity to realize her dream. She had taken to performing as a singer-pianist in jazz nightclubs to make ends meet and pay for additional piano lessons. As she noted in her autobiography, at that point in her life, “If someone had walked up to me on the street and given me a \$100,000 I would have given up popular music and enrolled in Julliard and never played in a club again.”⁵¹

The success of “Porgy” and the consistent album sales of *Little Girl Blue* throughout 1959 opened the door to a venue Simone had longed for: to perform in concert at New York City’s Town Hall. Although she would not be performing as a classical pianist, Simone savored the moment. Not only would she be performing in one of the City’s most revered music halls, she also would be recorded live by her new record label, Colpix. Music critics lavished praise on Simone’s September 12, 1960 performance. The album, *Nina Simone at Town Hall*, drew raves and sold well. Simone recalled that the “reviews were the best I ever had. I was a sensation. An overnight success, like in the movies.”⁵² The nation’s African American weekly newspapers took notice as well. Langston Hughes gushed from his column at the *Chicago Defender*: “She has flair, but no air. She has class, but does not wear it on her shoulders.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Nadine Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 84-85.

⁵¹ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 65.

⁵² Ibid. 66.

⁵³ Cohodas, *Princess Noire*, 106.

Hughes championed Simone's unique style. Her vocalizing, delivered in a deep, emotive alto, fused jazz, folk and blues while her piano approach melded jazz, gospel and classical flourishes. Hughes was not alone. Simone surmised her uniqueness attracted the hip white crowd in New York City, who were always on the hunt for something new. She was popular with audiences in Greenwich Village and New York-based actors, poets and writers. Simone was thrilled she drew the attention of jazz greats such as John Coltrane and Art Pepper. She recalled her early 1960s Village performances put her in the company of "remarkable men and women who would become my friends. Langston Hughes, Jimmy Baldwin, Leroi Jones – as Amiri Baraka was known then – Lorraine Hansberry, Godfrey Cambridge, Dick Gregory – so many talented and exciting people."⁵⁴

Simone had traveled an immeasurable social distance since she, as a bright, ambitious teenager from Tryon, North Carolina, first met Langston Hughes in the late 1940s. She was a student at the Allen School in Asheville and helped organize an NAACP Chapter fund-raiser that brought the poet to town to perform readings of his works. Nina Simone was then known as Eunice Waymon. She was born on February 20, 1933, the sixth child of her mother, a North Carolina lay preacher and her father, a for-hire handyman. Although her parents were poor, when Simone amazed her mother's parishioners with her talent at the keyboards during church services, they saved and scraped every dollar they could to provide her piano lessons. Simone aspired to be a concert pianist and counted Johann Sebastian Bach as her chief musical hero.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*, 67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-41.

Despite her obvious talent, when she applied to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia in the early 1950s, the school's admittance board rejected her. Determined to make a career in classical music, Simone moved to New York City and enrolled in the Julliard School of Music. She performed in Philadelphia, Atlantic City and Greenwich nightclubs to pay for her private music lessons. Along the way, she ceased being "Eunice Waymon" and adopted the name "Nina Simone" – "Nina" for "little girl" and "Simone" as in the first name of a French actress she admired, Simone Signoret.⁵⁶ Her smoky alto was unlike any other vocalist on the jazz scene and her classical piano training gave her an inventive approach to soloing. Simone drew larger and larger crowds to the clubs. In late 1958, Bethlehem released her debut album, *Little Girl Blue*, which, as noted earlier, launched her to commercial and critical success. In the wake of *Little Girl Blue*, Simone's 1959-1960 appearances at Greenwich Village nightclubs became popular events that drew the attention of those she referred to as the "intellectual crowd,"⁵⁷ including Baldwin, Hughes, LeRoi Jones and Hansberry.

In another eerie similarity to Hansberry, Simone also found herself in an unhappy marriage at the time she ascended to fame. She had married her white manager, a Philadelphia hipster named Don Ross, in 1958. As Simone became more and more successful, Ross was more than willing to live off her money and spend his time drinking and talking politics with his Beat friends. Simone filed for divorce in 1960 and received it in early 1961. Her fortunes were soaring. She received several handsome royalty checks

⁵⁶ Ibid., 48-52.

⁵⁷ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 66-68.

for her two albums. She was in demand at the best jazz clubs in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. Simone received glowing reviews for her performances on the summer jazz festival circuit, including the premier venue: Newport. In addition, she found a new love interest: a fair-skinned African American detective named Andrew Stroud, whom she had met while performing at the popular New York city jazz club, the Village Gate. Urged on by Baldwin, Hansberry and Hughes, Simone used her growing popularity to assist fundraising efforts for civil rights organizations. She joined Oscar Brown, Jr., Horace Silver, Art Blakey and Lena Horne in a star-studded lineup that raised money for the CORE Freedom Riders in a telethon broadcast by New York City Channel 13. The Channel 13 telethon and other fundraisers held in East Coast liberal cities and in Hollywood raised over \$228,000 that summer for CORE and the Freedom Rides campaign. The three-month total exceeded the amount raised for the entire year of 1960. Simone's donated performances contributed to that unprecedented sum.⁵⁸

Then, in the middle of her meteoric rise, misfortune struck. A mysterious illness felled Simone in late Summer that year and she found herself hospitalized for over two weeks with what doctors speculated was meningitis. Spinal meningitis had paralyzed Simone's brother and she feared the worst. After enduring painful spinal tap treatments, she convalesced in her New York apartment, retreating from performing for months. Simone and Stroud married in December 1961. They decided to move out of the city and buy a home in Mount Vernon.

⁵⁸ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 189-190.

Simone had met Hansberry on several occasions at her performances in 1959 and 1960. Just weeks after she moved to Mount Vernon, she discovered Hansberry and her husband lived less than ten miles away in Quilton-on-Hudson, where they had moved in early 1962. Hansberry had drawn national notoriety several months earlier for her backhanded slap of black Nobel Prize winner and United Nations Under-Secretary Dr. Ralph Bunche, in an open letter to *The New York Times*. Furious at Dr. Bunche's apology to the United Nations Assembly for the raucous behavior of black Americans protesting in February 1961 outside UN World Headquarters the murder of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba, Hansberry castigated the celebrated black diplomat in print: "As so many of us were shocked and outraged by reports of Dr. Ralph Bunche's 'apologies' for the demonstrators, we were also curious as to his mandate from our people to do so. In the face of it and, on apparently as much authority, I hasten to apologize to Mme. Pauline Lumumba and the Congolese people for our Dr. Bunche."⁵⁹

Hansberry's emphatic rebuke sparked condemnations from black and white elected leaders alike and generated death threats against her. Thus, it was convenient that she and husband Robert Nemiroff decided to move out of New York City after the Bunche contretemps. After learning Simone lived nearby, Hansberry took it upon herself to visit her new neighbor. The two women became good friends. During late Winter 1962, Simone learned she was pregnant and asked Hansberry to be her child's godmother. Hansberry consented but continued to engage Simone in wide-ranging discussions on capitalism, politics and racism. "Although Lorraine was a girlfriend – a friend of my own, rather than

⁵⁹ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined*, 117.

one I shared with Andy (husband Andrew Stroud) – we never talked about men or clothes or other such inconsequential things when we got together. It was always Marx, Lenin and revolution – real girl’s talk,”⁶⁰ Simone quipped in her autobiography

On September 12, 1962, Simone gave birth to a baby girl, whom she and husband Andy named Lisa Celeste. At the child’s christening, Hansberry handed the parents a Tiffany hairbrush and comb for their daughter. As Hansberry and Simone enjoyed the relative peace and creature comforts of suburban New York that year, storms of violent racial confrontation were swirling in the West and the South.

In the West, Malcolm X, the incendiary spokesman for the Nation of Islam, had seared himself into the public’s consciousness with his molten rage over the bloody late April shoot-out between members of South-Central Temple No. 27 and the Los Angeles police department. Aggressive officers had provoked a scuffle by arresting two Nation of Islam members selling suits out of a car trunk after an evening worship. Overmatched by the young Black Muslims, the officers pulled their police revolvers and chaos ensued. When the gunfire ended, two police officers and several Black Muslims had been seriously wounded. Officer Donald Weese had shot dead Minister Ronald X Stokes, leader of Temple no. 27, firing a bullet through his heart from about eight feet away. Witnesses claimed Stokes had raised his hands above his head before Weese fired. News of the confrontation reached Malcolm X in New York City. He immediately booked an airline flight to Los Angeles, where he launched his own investigation of the deadly confrontation and spoke at the funeral of Ronald Stokes. This was the first time the national media

⁶⁰ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 87.

focused on the tall, erect leader who possessed a militaristic swagger and expressed open contempt for the gradualism of the civil rights movement.⁶¹

Los Angeles's social and political leaders were appalled by the audacity of Malcolm X. After arriving, he held a press conference at the Statler-Hilton, which he opened with the statement: "Seven unarmed black men were shot in cold blood..." He characterized the Los Angeles Chief William Parker "as a man intoxicated with power and with his own ego."⁶² Malcolm X indicted Parker as a bigot who had transmitted his racist fears of Black Muslims, blacks in general and Mexican-Americans to his entire force. The Los Angeles news reporters in attendance were "shocked at the audacity" of his remarks.⁶³

With his dramatic entrance onto the world stage in the aftermath of Los Angeles Police versus Nation of Islam bloodbath, Malcolm X elevated his national profile and heightened state and local elected officials' fear of Black Muslims. The FBI, joined by mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times*, demonized Malcolm X as an apostle of hate and falsely accused him of advocating violence against white people.⁶⁴ The former Malcolm Little's withering diatribes against America's institutional racism shocked the uninitiated white news media. But, urban working-class blacks and alert political observers, black elected officials and the New York intellectual vanguard which included James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones and Hansberry, were not surprised at all by the Nation of

⁶¹ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1998), 2-15.

⁶² Ibid, 10.

⁶³ Ibid, 10.

⁶⁴ Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1991), 25-29. See also Walter Lippman, "How The New York Times Distorted Malcolm X's Views on Self-Defense," originally published in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, Spring 1993, <http://walterlippman.com/mx-nyt.html> [Accessed September 7, 2017].

Islam's national minister's outraged reaction to the quick exoneration of Officer Weese in his killing of Ronald X Stokes as justifiable homicide.

Hansberry had learned of Malcolm X nearly a decade earlier through reading *Muhammad Speaks* – a news weekly Malcolm X founded – when she first came to New York in the early 1950s. In 1954, Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad dispatched Malcolm X to Harlem to organize a mosque there. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s main objective was to break the back of segregation in the South and to do so he appealed to a national audience. King believed whites could be brought into his Beloved Community. Malcolm X's rhetoric, for all its fury, advocated self-defense but shunned the non-violence activism of King and others. In addition, Malcolm X never ventured into the Southern civil rights battleground. His audience for the Black Muslim ideology of separatism were black communities in the North and West. Malcolm X denounced whites as "inherently evil." And declared that "America's system of justice was so corrupt that black people needed to live, work, worship and play separately."⁶⁵ Although Hansberry rejected Malcolm X's advocacy of black separatism, she agreed with his argument that blacks should empower themselves at every opportunity and cease seeking to join, via integration, a corrupt white society. Malcolm X and Hansberry shared a birthdate, May 19th, with him being five years her senior. Hansberry discussed her thoughts on Malcolm X and his philosophy with Simone, during their "girls' talks." Hansberry would finally meet Malcolm X in 1963. She stunned the usually unflappable leader by tongue-lashing Malcolm X for his frequent

⁶⁵ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined*, 114-115.

public criticisms of her mixed-race marriage. “Afterwards, he and Hansberry became ‘friends in the cause’.”⁶⁶

In the South during the Summer of 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC had suffered a tactical defeat in their effort to advance the “Albany Movement.” It was a floundering voter registration effort initiated by local blacks in the small city located in Mitchell County, Georgia. Joining the Albany Movement in progress, King and Ralph Abernathy were jailed on two occasions, which forced the Kennedy Administration to work surreptitiously to free them. Mitchell County deputy sheriffs delivered savage beatings to dozens of marchers and sympathizers, including the pregnant Marion King (no relation to Dr. King) who lost her unborn child after being slapped repeatedly and knocked to the ground. In a subsequent march, angry young blacks could not contain themselves and hurled rocks at the deputy sheriffs who had tormented them, embarrassing the champion of nonviolence in the national media.⁶⁷

The Albany Movement fell apart. Malcolm X scoffed that King had been chased from the small Georgia city with nothing to show for his efforts. King withdrew to his Atlanta home and pondered the setback. He resolved he would strategize his own desegregation and voting rights campaigns from that point forward and “not be a fireman anymore” who came to the rescue of campaigns already aflame.⁶⁸ That fall, after the Cuban Missile Crisis had been defused, King and his SCLC lieutenants cast their eyes on Birmingham. What would happen there in 1963 would fully engage Nina Simone, as an

⁶⁶ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined*, 116.

⁶⁷ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters” America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: A Touchstone book/Simon & Schuster, 1988), 601-616,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 632.

artist and an activist, in the civil rights movement. The events would also add new urgency to Lorraine Hansberry's mission to force social change with her most potent weapon: her literary gift.

Abbey Lincoln and Maya Angelou: Reimagining Black Womanhood in a Pan African Context

She became a symbol for young black women...because she was politically astute. Amiri Baraka and Maya Angelou and other people would come up and have these debate sessions, and she was right in the thick of it...it was unsettling to lot of us men, including me. Because her position would be not harder, but more pointed than ours. She'd get right down to it.

Max Roach, recalling ex-wife Abbey Lincoln.⁶⁹

In direct converse to Hansberry and Simone's relationship, the friendship of Abbey Lincoln and Maya Angelou was one in which a younger jazz artist (Lincoln) encouraged and shaped the political activism of an older writer (Angelou). Lincoln was born August 6, 1930 in Chicago, a little over two years and five months *after* Angelou (born Marguerite Johnson) came into the world on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis. As noted in Chapter Three of this narrative, Lincoln had traveled a great distance on her journey to pride in her blackness and her embrace of Pan Africanism by the time she became the paramour and wife of jazz percussionist/composer Max Roach. She was known by her given name, Anna Marie Wooldridge, when she moved to Southern California from rural Michigan in the early 1950s. After working the nightclub circuit in Los Angeles and Honolulu for a few years, she met Bob Russell, who became her manager and suggested the name Abbey Lincoln. She changed her name but loathed the artificiality and insidious racism of mid-1950s

⁶⁹ Max Roach, quoted in Karl McMillan's liner notes to the 2012 re-issue of *Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead* on Candid Records CJM8015 (1961).

Hollywood. Dignified and intelligent, Lincoln chafed at the “black sex kitten” image movie studios foisted upon her.

Lincoln envisioned herself as a serious jazz singer like her childhood heroine, Billie Holiday. She severed her contract with Russell and moved to Chicago. Her singing career started to build and in 1956, she recorded her first album, *Abbey Lincoln's Affair: A Story of a Girl in Love*. Lincoln parlayed the album and the minor fame she had gained with a singing role in *The Girl Can't Help It* to land an engagement at New York City's Village Vanguard, then an intimate supper club, in 1957.⁷⁰ She drew mixed reviews from music critics who judged her voice not pleasing and noted her pitch was suspect. What more than compensated for Lincoln's uneven vocalizing, which she overcame as her career unfolded, was her magnetic presence. Although she hated being objectified, word-of-mouth about the beautiful new singer in town attracted more and more men to the Village Vanguard. Sugar Ray Robinson, the world champion boxer and raffish man-about-town, came to see Lincoln and escorted her on a well-publicized date.⁷¹ Lincoln had little patience for the pampered white movie stars of Hollywood or the black luminaries of Harlem's Sugar Hill, including Mr. Robinson. However, when Max Roach, the Be Bop innovator and famed percussionist, asked her out after seeing one of her late 1950s Village Vanguard performances, Lincoln was intrigued – not by his celebrity but by his fervent advocacy of racial justice for black Americans and independence for African nations. Roach was among

⁷⁰ Sally Placksin, *Jazz Profiles from NPR: Abbey Lincoln*, <http://npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/archive/lincoln.html> [Accessed September 8, 2017]

⁷¹ “Abbey Lincoln,” *HUE Magazine* November 1957, Vol. 5, No.1. See also “Correspondence,” Box 33/Folders 11-12, Max Roach Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Accessed May 17, 2016.

the few artists who dared in the late 1950s to promote Malcolm X, Nation of Islam Minister to Harlem Temple No. 7, as a black leader and thinker whose political ideas had merit. Lincoln agreed.⁷²

Roach introduced Lincoln to socially aware members of the New York jazz elite, including Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Oscar Brown, Jr., John Coltrane and critic Nat Hentoff. In 1959, Lincoln and Roach began collaborating on compositions and themes that would become the *We Insist!* album. Lincoln also had moved into Max Roach's Columbus Avenue apartment near Central Park West, evidence of their blossoming romantic involvement. Although they favored the more confrontational direct action of the young blacks who had sparked the sit-ins across the South, Roach and Lincoln held deep admiration for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. During Fall 1960, they joined a coalition of actors and musicians to present a Sunday series of concerts and theatrical vignettes to raise funds for King's struggling SCLC. Village Gate sponsors called the series "Cabaret for Freedom." In addition to Roach and Lincoln, the performers included Sidney Poitier, Sarah Vaughan, comedian Jack Gilford and Zero Mostel.⁷³ A tall, lithesome thirty-two-year-old professional dancer and aspiring writer had helped the SCLC organize the "Cabaret for Freedom." Her work was so impressive King's civil rights organization named her SCLC's coordinator for the Northeast region.⁷⁴ Her name was Maya Angelou and she soon joined Roach and Lincoln's circle of activist artists.

⁷² "The Day Malcom X Died," Correspondence, Box 146/Folder 7, Max Roach Papers (1880-2012), Music Division, LOC. See also: Placksin, *Jazz Profiles from NPR: Abbey Lincoln*.

⁷³ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 158.

⁷⁴ Hilton Als, "Songbird: Maya Angelou Takes Another Look at Herself," *New Yorker* (August 5, 2002) <http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/08/05.html> [Accessed September 6, 2017]

Angelou had come to New York City again in 1959: this time to pursue her dream of becoming a professional writer and poet. She had already led an epic life, with several forays into the lively arts as a dancer, nightclub singer and actress. At fourteen years of age, she moved with her single mother from St. Louis to Oakland. She gave birth to a son when she was seventeen and, while still in her teens, won a job as the first African American woman cable car operator in San Francisco. She married a Greek electrician in 1951 and at the same time dove deep into modern dance. Angelou formed a dance team with future choreographer legend Alvin Ailey. They performed throughout the Bay Area, but success eluded them.

She next made her first foray to New York City, with her son and husband in tow, to study African dance with Trinidadian instructor Pearl Primus. Unable to find professional engagements, Angelou returned to the Bay Area and created a calypso-inspired singing and dancing nightclub act that earned her consistent work.⁷⁵ During this period of playing clubs on the Bay Area circuit, she legally changed her name from Marguerite Johnson to Maya Angelou. She divorced her husband in 1954 and the same year won a role in the cast of the theatre company that would tour Europe and Egypt with a production of *Porgy and Bess* until 1955.⁷⁶ Contingency would have it that Angelou met expatriate author James Baldwin in Paris after her company performed *Porgy and Bess* in The City of Light. The six-foot tall dancer (and poet-to-be) and the diminutive writer had

⁷⁵ See *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*, a PBS American Masters Film Documentary, co-directed by Bob Hercules and Rita Coburn Whack (New York: The People's Poet Media Group, 2016).

⁷⁶ Maya Angelou, "Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas" in *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 535-604.

an immediate rapport but did not deepen their friendship until after Angelou returned to New York in 1959.⁷⁷

Within weeks of arriving New York that year, Angelou joined The Harlem Writers Guild. She met several well-regarded published authors after joining the guild, including pioneering Pan-African studies scholar John Henrik Clarke and Julian Mayfield, a producer, actor and writer who would become infamous for welcoming Fidel Castro to Harlem in August 1960.⁷⁸ The new friendship that would prove most fateful for Angelou was the one she made with writer-activist Rosa Guy. Guy was a volunteer in the New York Office of the SCLC who also happened to know Abbey Lincoln. Angelou's initiative in producing the "Cabaret for Freedom" and her progressive views on civil rights and African anti-colonialism drew Lincoln's attention. She and her paramour Roach befriended Angelou. While they were participating in "Cabaret for Freedom," Roach and Lincoln also were working on a theatrical interpretation of their album, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, which had been released in February 1960. The album's sales had been disappointing because, in their estimation, it had drawn a politically motivated critical backlash.

Yet, Abbey Lincoln was defiant in the face of critical scorn cast upon her following *We Insist!* Again, Roach may have accelerated Lincoln's ideological journey to what many

⁷⁷ Herb Boyd, "Maya Angelou Remembers James Baldwin," *New Amsterdam News* (August 5, 2010) Vol. 100, No. 32, p. 17.

⁷⁸ Eric Kofi Acree, "John Henrik Clarke: Historian, Scholar and Teacher," Africana Library, Cornell University. <https://africana.library.cornell.edu/africana/clarke/index.html> [Accessed January 12, 2018]. See also Julian Mayfield Papers. The New York Public Library: Archives & Manuscripts. <https://nypl.org.html> [Accessed January 13, 2018]

would now describe as a Pan-African based black pride. But, it was a road on which Lincoln had already traveled a great distance. She was self-confident and unwavering in her convictions: “I found out how wonderful it is to be a black woman. And I decided I would not again sing anything that wasn’t meaningful to me.”⁷⁹ Roach and Lincoln were determined to promulgate their message that the black Americans’ civil rights movement and African peoples’ campaigns to oust their colonial oppressors were allied in a global surge for self-determination among people of color. If radio stations would not play their album and record stores would not stock it, they would present its message “live” to black leaders and opinion-shapers around the country. Roach offered Angelou a role as an African dancer in the planned production. When he learned she was a writer, Roach hired her to work as a publicist. Angelou’s job was to help Roach’s manager market sponsorships of the touring version of the *Freedom Now Suite* by the NAACP, CORE, SCLC and other black leadership groups across the United States.⁸⁰

The revue version of the *Freedom Now Suite* enjoyed a high-profile and successful debut on January 15, 1961 in New York City. Roach, Lincoln and Angelou, along with their supporting musicians, performed a fundraiser for the national office of CORE. Its advisory committee included Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Ralph Abernathy and James Baldwin. The CORE New York office’s event coordinator Jimmy McDonald lavished praise on the production in a typed letter that was mailed the very next day.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Nat Hentoff, “Abbey Lincoln Interview,” Original Liner Notes, *Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead*, Candid Records CMJ8015 (1961).

⁸⁰ Various correspondence, Box 70/Folder 19, Max Roach Papers (1880-2012), Music Division, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ See January 16, 1961 correspondence from Jimmy McDonald to Max Roach, Box 70/Folder 19, Max Roach Papers.

Correspondence emanating from Roach's management firm, Supreme Crafts and Arts, and letters between Angelou and Lincoln indicate a D.I.Y. national marketing campaign of the live review, which they promoted to potential sponsors as *The Freedom Now Suite* "jazz ballet," to their personal network of contacts at civil rights-supporting organizations. They approached Howard University, Carleton College in Mississippi and NAACP offices in San Francisco, St. Louis and Philadelphia, Mississippi.⁸²

Abbey Lincoln exhibited almost superhuman productivity in 1960 and early 1961. She swept her new friend, Maya Angelou, along in a remarkable series of events that merged black activism and the lively arts. Lincoln, Angelou and Rosa Guy were among the most outspoken women in the New York City civil rights vanguard. They also monitored and applauded the dynamic leaders of the new African nations that had cast off colonialism. The newly elected Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba had captured global attention with his eloquent resistance to pressure to swear fealty to Western capitalist powers. His defiance generated admiration among black American cultural and political leaders who had gravitated to a Pan African-anchored reconceptualization of themselves and their place in the world. Lumumba's stance provoked resentment and distrust in the outgoing Eisenhower Administration and among pro-West Cold Warriors in media bastions, such as the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

Lincoln was among Lumumba's most ardent supporters. In 1960, she founded the Cultural Association of Women of African Heritage (CAWAH). She invited Angelou and

⁸² Correspondence, Box 70/Folder 19 and Correspondence (Angelou) Box 146/Folders 2 and 7, Max Roach Papers.

Guy to join her as founding members. Angelou, who herself had taken great interest in Africa's anticolonial freedom movements and had begun to learn Kiswahili, leapt at the opportunity.⁸³ CAWAH grew but it was more of a discussion group in which the "women would explore our culture, our African ancestors," according to Lincoln's recollection of the short-lived organization.⁸⁴ Within a month of the Freedom Now Suite fundraiser for CORE, this group of women who embraced their African heritage would launch the most controversial protest outside the South in 1961.

Angelou recalled first hearing of Lumumba's assassination from Rosa Guy in Harlem. Her West Indian friend had contacts in the diplomatic corps and had learned of the assassination before it appeared in the newspapers. More numbed than angry, she and her West Indian friend wandered into a crowd of Black Muslims who had gathered to hear Malcolm X. Malcolm whipped the crowd into a frenzy, exhorting the crowd to defend themselves from police brutality of the blue-eyed devils. Inspired by Malcolm X's fiery rhetoric, Angelou resolved to stage a dramatic protest of the Lumumba assassination. She asked Lincoln to convene a meeting of CAWAH in the penthouse apartment she shared with Max Roach to devise a demonstration "large enough to awaken the entire black American community of New York"⁸⁵ of the conjoined political destiny of black Americans seeking racial justice and Africans fighting to free themselves from Western colonialism. Lincoln, Guy and Angelou hatched a plan to protest the assassination at the United Nations Headquarters in midtown-Manhattan. They would outfit themselves in

⁸³ Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 756.

⁸⁴ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 245.

⁸⁵ *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 757-758,

black armbands and mourning veils and march in silence onto the floor of the General Assembly, disrupting the planned proceedings. The more conservative members of CAWAH balked at the planned protest. Lincoln showed them the door. In the end, six women led by Lincoln and Angelou and a few men, including Max Roach, pledged to carry out the protest.⁸⁶

Angelou and her boyfriend, exiled South African freedom fighter Vusumzi Make, decided that CAWAH needed to alert the black community of the planned protest. So, she arranged a public announcement at Lewis Michaux's bookstore in Harlem the night before the direct action was to occur. An unexpectedly large crowd assembled and most of them had not yet learned Lumumba had been murdered. Shocked gasps and obscenities rose from attendees after Angelou shared the tragic news. Michaux next asked Lincoln to address the crowd. Angelou remembered reassuring Lincoln, who appeared rattled by the agitated gathering, and encouraging her to speak up: "On Friday morning, our women and men are going to the United Nations. We are going to sit in the General Assembly, and when they announce the death of Lumumba we're going to stand up and remain standing until they put us out,"⁸⁷ Lincoln announced. The crowd roared their approval. Among them was Le Roi Jones, who decided he would join the march protesting the United States' complicity in the Lumumba assassination. CAWAH executed their protest on Friday February 15, 1961. When they stood, they interrupted the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson. Security personnel rushed to remove them, and a

⁸⁶ *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 760.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 763.

minor scuffle ensued with shouts of “Murderers!” and chants of “Lumumba! Lumumba!” shattering the U.N. auditorium’s usual hushed decorum. Startled audience members rushed to the exits. Recalling how the CAWAH protest disrupted the staid U.N., Angelou said:

The diplomats had vanished and except for the guards the whites had disappeared. The balcony was ours. Just as in the Southern segregated movie houses, we were in the buzzards’ roost again. Rosa found me and I got up and followed her. We urged the people back to the safety of the street. The black folks strode proudly past the guards, through the hall and out the doors into the sunshine.⁸⁸

Angelou may have remembered it being sunny that February afternoon, but it was not safe, at least not for the hundreds of protestors who had assembled to support CAWAH and vent their rage. The United Nations police stormed out of the iconic building and beat demonstrators away, handcuffing anyone who offered even a verbal challenge to their tactics. The *New York Times* derided the protestors as African nationalists and black separatists. The newspaper continued by describing the CAWAH action as “the most violent demonstration inside the United Nations headquarters in the world organization’s history.”⁸⁹ Angelou, Guy and Lincoln were surprised and pleased they had triggered such a massive outpouring of people. Angelou was even more pleased when Malcolm X himself granted her and Rosa Guy an audience a few days after the Lumumba protest.

The Minister of Harlem Mosque No. 7 complimented their courage. He also let them know that the *New York Times* had called him to ask if the Black Muslims were part of the protest and he told them they were not. He reminded the *New York Times* reporter of the Nation of Islam’s position regarding the predominant form of civil rights direct

⁸⁸ Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 770-771.

⁸⁹ “Riot in Gallery Halts U.N. Debate,” *New York Times* (February 16, 1961), pp. 1, 10.

action: Muslims do not demonstrate. Malcolm X warned them of the backlash that was sure to come their way, not just from the white political and cultural establishments but also from so-called “Negro leaders.” Angelou left the meeting deflated. Malcolm X had dismissed their bold activism as ineffectual and opined such spectacles would not prevent whites from killing the next African head-of-state or black American civil rights leader.⁹⁰

Subsequent developments soon corroborated Malcolm X’s prediction. Abbey Lincoln released her sharp-edged solo album, which voiced black discontent, *Straight Ahead*, on February 22, 1961. She, producer Nat Hentoff, and Roach assembled an amazing cast of jazz musicians on the session, including Eric Dolphy on alto saxophone and various reeds, Coleman Hawkins on tenor saxophone, Julian Priester on trombone, Mal Waldron on piano and Booker Little on trumpet. Critics lambasted the album when it was released a few weeks later. Noted jazz critic Ira Gitler, as mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, branded Lincoln a “professional Negro.” Another reviewer huffed “we don’t need the Elijah Muhammed (sic) type thinking in jazz.”⁹¹ Roach and Lincoln fought back in the media and in person. Their activism had made them unpopular with mainstream jazz critics and white record-buyers, but Roach and Lincoln had earned great respect within the international community of African diplomats and self-exiled freedom fighters who had taken residence in New York City. Lincoln had also drawn the admiration of Ella Baker and the young SNCC activists for her unapologetic criticism of segregation and economic discrimination.⁹²

⁹⁰ Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 778-781.

⁹¹ Harold Isaacs, “Back to Africa,” *New Yorker* (May 13, 1961), pp. 130-143.

⁹² Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 136-142.

It is telling that after *Straight Ahead*, Lincoln stopped recording and returned to her career as a movie actress. She starred in a 1964 low-budget film, *Nothing but a Man*, with co-star Ivan Dixon (who later had a minor recurring role as the improbable black POW in the television series, *Hogan's Heroes*). Lincoln continued her outspoken support of the new African nations and those nations' leaders took notice. In 1965, *Nothing but a Man* won grand prize for film at the First Negro Festival of Negro Arts, held in Dakar, Senegal. Lincoln could not attend, so Langston Hughes accepted the grand prize from World Festival of Negro Arts Chairman Leopold Sedar Senghor on her behalf.⁹³ After *Nothing but a Man*, Lincoln co-starred as Sidney Poitier's romantic interest in *For the Love of Ivy*. For this non-political role in a Hollywood film that ignored racial issues in the turbulent late 1960s, she received a Golden Globe nomination. Lincoln did not record a jazz album again until 1973, three years after her acrimonious divorce from Roach.

As for Maya Angelou, she decamped to Africa in 1963 with Vusumzi Make and her son Guy. She lived in Accra and supported herself working as an administrator at the University of Ghana and as a free-lance writer for theatre and radio. In the bitterest of ironies, she rekindled her friendship with Malcolm X, who visited her when he toured African nations and made his pilgrimage to Mecca. Malik el-Shabazz, the Arabic name Malcolm X had taken for himself by then, invited Angelou to return to the United States with him in late 1964 to help establish the Organization of Afro-American Unity. She agreed and returned to the United States in December 1964, but the plans never came to

⁹³ Virginia Inness-Brown letter to Abbey Lincoln, Correspondence, Box 73/Folder 31, Max Roach Papers (1880-2012), Music Division, Library of Congress.

fruition because of el-Shabazz's assassination in New York City of February 21, 1965. Angelou and Lincoln remained close friends, supporting and inspiring each other until Lincoln, the younger of the two, passed away in 2010. Together, they inspired generations of black American women to embrace their African ancestry, to lay claim to both the physical and cultural heritage it bequeathed them. The jazz artist could take credit for expanding the political awareness of her writer friend. The writer friend repaid the jazz artist by amassing an award-winning body of literature bristling with unabashed black feminism and Pan-African values. When Angelou was struggling to find just the right title for her first autobiography in 1969, she asked Lincoln for assistance. Lincoln, who was a lifelong admirer of Paul Laurence Dunbar, suggested a line from, "Sympathy," one of her favorite poems by the Dayton, Ohio-born Dunbar. The line was: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Coda: Noteworthy Advocacy in Artistic Expression by Women in Jazz during the Early 1960s

Two songs by Abbey Lincoln, not well-known, stand out from the standard jazz fare of the era for their daring themes. Both works are compositions included on Lincoln's then-controversial 1961 album, *Straight Ahead*. The first song is "In the Red." Lincoln, who wrote the lyrics, describes in a caustic voice her bitterness over living hand-to-mouth, always just a paycheck from being homeless and hungry. The arrangement features disturbing, dissonant bursts from the impressive horn section which includes Booker Little (one of Mingus's favorite session players) on trumpet, Julian Priester on trombone, Eric Dolphy on alto saxophone, flute and bass clarinet, and Walter Benton and Coleman Hawkins on tenor saxophones. Pianist Mal Waldron, who accompanied Billie Holiday

during her final years, offers a spare, understated melody over which Lincoln snarls her disgust.

No account bank account
 Can't hardly raise a dime
 Can't pay the bills!
 Rich folk say to keep on smilin'
 But poor folk pay the dues
 No account, this bank account
 That's got me broke and bent
 Though The Lord Provides
 The rent ain't Heaven sent ⁹⁴

A film noir-esque saxophone solo by the great Coleman Hawkins exudes anguish but resolves in a major key, indicating the protagonist (Lincoln) will persevere. What makes this song exceptional is very few jazz artists had written a song specifically addressing personal economic distress, about barely scratching out a living, during the early 1960s. With “In the Red,” Lincoln achieves what Hansberry identified as necessary for a work of art to transcend the ordinary. She paid meticulous attention to the “particular” in her lyrics to make a universal statement about the economic despair of the working poor. Over fifty-five percent of African American households in 1960 had total incomes that placed them below the poverty line. For black households “with no husband present,” the U.S. Census Bureau reported that a shocking seventy percent of these women-headed families were living in poverty.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Lyric excerpt from “In the Red” (Max Roach-Abbey Lincoln-Chip Bayen) *Straight Ahead* © 1961 Candid Records.

⁹⁵ “Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families, 1959 – 2016.” U.S. Census Bureau. See also Michael Harrington, “Chapter Four: If You’re Black, Stay Back” in *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1962/1993), 61-81.

Abbey Lincoln was not poor, but she had seen economic hardship all around her. She dared to highlight the plight of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, in a song that communicates how chronic financial woes erode hope and calcify bitterness. Although there is no known record of Lincoln communicating with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on how most black families struggled to pay the bills, he was keenly aware of the poor living in a nation governed by the rich. In 1961, the same year Lincoln released *Straight Ahead*, King delivered a speech entitled “American Dream.” In the speech King declared: “As long as there is poverty in the world, no man can be totally rich even if he has a billion dollars.”⁹⁶

The second noteworthy song on an album by Abbey Lincoln is “Retribution,” also featured on the album, *Straight Ahead*. Abbey Lincoln’s dismissive commentary in her composition is an example of how some jazz artists targeted their messages to more militant-minded activists and not the average record buyers:

Don’t want no silver spoon
 Ain’t asking for the moon
 Don’t want no favors done
 Just let the retribution
 Match the contribution, baby

No street that’s paved with gold
 Don’t need no hand to hold
 Hand me nothing
 Don’t want no sad song sung
 Just let the retribution
 Match the contribution, baby ⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. “The American Dream,” Transcript of speech made in Lynchburg, VA, March 12, 1961 (Suitland, MD: Business & Social Recordings, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1961).

⁹⁷ Lyric excerpt from “Retribution,” Words by Abbey Lincoln and Music by Julian Priester, Copyright 1961.

The title of the song itself focuses the listener on the theme of punishment for wrongs done. In the context of the early 1960s with stark images of white violence against freedom riders, blacks attempting to vote and enroll in segregated schools, the wrongdoers were not just the perpetrators but also the political and social institutions that profited from, coddled or ignored racial discrimination. In her song, Abbey Lincoln is not longing for material privilege (“Don’t want no silver spoon”) or her reward in a Heavenly afterlife (“No street that’s paved in gold”). She hungers for justice. She wants an unnamed power to punish racist individuals and institutions. Lincoln demands retribution, which can be defined as not just punishment but also compensation for financial injury. In this latter sense, her song title is a claim for reparations: a monetary settlement to present day African Americans for the centuries of denied wages and economic deprivation suffered by enslaved ancestors. Reparations were due to all “ex-slaves,” as Malcolm X would later refer to African Americans in his “Message to The Grass Roots.”⁹⁸ Lincoln indicates as much with her contemptuous ending line “Just let the retribution match the contribution, baby.”

“Contribution” refers to the hundreds of years of labor captive blacks were forced to give to U.S. planters, businesses and cultural institutions, including Ivy League universities. The Nation of Islam and its charismatic national minister Malcolm X, whose temple in Harlem was just a few miles from the Central Park West apartment Lincoln shared with Max Roach, were among the first to champion the controversial legal claim

⁹⁸ Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots,” in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, George Breitman, ed. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965), 4-14.

that the federal government and the U.S. corporations owed blacks compensation for their forced labor during the Antebellum Period. Lincoln and her friend, Maya Angelou, often joined the Nation of Islam members who thronged Malcolm X's street corner speeches in Harlem and agreed with his assertion that the United States owed the descendants hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars in unpaid wages.⁹⁹

What is remarkable is that Lincoln, in late 1960, coded this daring demand into a song. *Straight Ahead* producer Nat Hentoff attempted to misdirect potential attackers by claiming in his liner notes that Lincoln's lyrics reflected the bitter aftermath of a love affair gone wrong.¹⁰⁰ Hentoff's gambit did not fool alert defenders of democratic capitalism who demanded sworn belief in the "American Dream." They knew Lincoln and Roach were keeping company with black nationalist thinkers and activists in New York. Culture industry critics sounded the alarm and targeted Lincoln as a malcontent. "We don't need the Elijah Muhammed (sic) type thinking in jazz," hissed Harold Isaacs in the May 1961 issue of *New Yorker* magazine.¹⁰¹

The third and final song highlighted here is well-known to most jazz listeners and women's rights advocates. It is Nina Simone's powerful and brooding composition, "Four Women." Perhaps she felt she could move on to other topics after the civil rights movement had achieved a significant victory for racial justice with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in the Summer of 1965. Or, perhaps her late friend Lorraine Hansberry's fearless black

⁹⁹ Maya Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 778-781. See also *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*, An American Masters Video Documentary, Directed by Bob Hercules and Rita Coburn Whack, Directors (New York: PBS, 2017).

¹⁰⁰ Hentoff, Original Liner Notes, *Straight Ahead*, 1961, Candid Records.

¹⁰¹ Harold R. Isaacs, "Back to Africa" *New Yorker* (May 13, 1961), pp.105-143.

feminism haunted her thoughts. Whatever her motivation, in September 1965, Nina Simone entered the Phillips studio in New York City and recorded a melancholy meditation on how racist views on skin color, facial features and hair had objectified and subjugated black women in America. A song on this theme had never been performed before large audiences, let alone recorded and commercially released.

The naked fury Simone conveyed in “Mississippi Goddam” has been chronicled by many critics and historians. In it Simone admits the racial terrorism blacks had endured had made her stop believing in prayer. She warns that our society will pay for its tolerance of evil deeds, noting “We all gonna get it in due time.” But, other artists, including Mingus, had raged at the cruelty of racism prior to Simone.

Simone’s resigned rumination, “Four Women,” should be recognized as her true masterpiece of advocacy in song. She confronted the legacy of slavery that presented itself to any sighted observer every day: the multi-hued skin colors of African Americans. Regarding black women, Simone makes the case their skin color condemns them to hierarchical stereotypes which are akin to castes. In a sullen voice, she acknowledges skin color can tell the observer much about the involuntary interracial lineage of black women. Simone’s clear message in “Four Women” is that color indicates black women’s history and influences their future in the race-obsessed United States.

My skin is black
My arms are long
My hair is wooly
My back is strong ¹⁰²

¹⁰² Songwriter: Nina Simone. “Four Women” lyrics ©Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC.

Simone first depicts the black woman elder, “Aunt Sarah.” Sarah could well be a freed captive because her skin is black, inferring her African genetic heritage is undiluted. Simone, portraying Aunt Sarah, tells the listeners her back is “strong enough to take the pain, inflicted again and again,” words which conjure the sadistic practice of lashing African forced laborers who defied or displeased their captors. Simone next leaps to a woman who is the opposite, hue-wise, of Aunt Sarah. She inhabits the character of “Saffronia.” Saffronia is the first-generation mixed-race daughter of a black woman who was raped by a “father who was rich and white.”

My skin is yellow
My hair is long
Between two worlds
I do belong

Simone invokes the tragic mulatto myth mined by many before her, including her would-be mentor and admirer, Langston Hughes. But, Simone’s somber, matter-of-fact reimagining of the rape that created Saffronia invokes the listener’s empathy far better than other self-pitying characterizations.

The remaining two women whose skin-color-determined lives Simone summarizes in a few short lines are “Sweet Thing” and “Peaches.” Sweet Thing is the tan or bright-brown skinned voluptuous call girl or prostitute, whose “hair is fine” and mouth is like wine. Sweet Thing’s skin color infers Native American ancestry. One of the lesser-reported social phenomenon of the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century was marriage and procreation among First Peoples and African Americans in the Southeastern and Plains states. Louis Armstrong referred to women of this ancestry as “high browns”

in his more ribald tunes.¹⁰³ One can conjecture that Nina Simone, born in 1933 in Tryon, North Carolina – a location part of the Cherokee Nation’s original territory – knew many black women with First Peoples blood in their genealogical history. The last character portrayed by Simone is “Peaches,” a tough, embittered brown-skinned woman “whose parents were slaves.” “Peaches,” could well have been one of Simone’s great aunts or aunts who bequeathed their resentment and suspicion of whites to their talented niece.

Two aspects of “Four Women” make it exemplary. First, Simone beamed an unflattering spotlight on the social, economic and political challenges confronting black women in 1965. (The song was released in 1966 on the album *Wild Is the Wind*.) Although Shirley Chisholm had already begun fighting sexism in New York City’s political circles by then, Simone was among the first, if not the first, black woman artist to speak out on this topic. Second, Simone revealed an ugly “family secret” within most black communities across the nation. With “Four Women,” she decried the internecine destructiveness of “colorism” nearly twenty years before the term became associated with the psychological pathogen.

Colorism is a legacy of U.S. slavery which afflicts the self-image of many African Americans and their concepts of beauty to this day. Simply stated, the societal perception is that the lighter the skin of the African American woman, the more beautiful she is. In 1982, celebrated author Alice Walker, a brown skinned African American woman, best known for her novel *The Color Purple*, chided all African Americans for what she called

¹⁰³ Louis Armstrong vocal performance on “Hesitating Blues.” Written by William Christopher Handy. *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy*. Columbia, 1954. CL-591.

“Colorism.” Ms. Walker asserted that “...unless the question of Colorism – in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color – is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black “sisterhoods” we cannot, as a people, progress. For colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us.”¹⁰⁴ Nina Simone wrote this warning into a song in 1965. By then, some critics had labeled Simone as a rage-filled activist who was dismissive toward her white audience.¹⁰⁵ In her defense, it can be argued Simone seethed at having the intelligence and courage to identify inequities based on gender and race, but not possessing the power or resources to right them. Nevertheless, she remains as one of the most outspoken jazz artists in her advocacy for civil rights and women’s rights.

¹⁰⁴ Alice Walker, “If the Present Looks Like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like?,” an essay from *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 290-291.

¹⁰⁵ Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone*, 169-175.

CHAPTER 6: ARTIST ADVOCACY IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT'S MOST TUMULTUOUS YEAR

Real men don't put their children on the firing line.

Malcolm X ¹

Looking back, it is clear that the introduction of Birmingham's children into the campaign was one of the wisest moves we made. It brought a new impact to the crusade, and the impetus that we needed to win the struggle.

Martin Luther King, Jr. ²

The Freedom Summer year of 1964 is forever stained with the kidnap and murder of three young SNCC voter registration volunteers, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, by Mississippi White Citizen Council terrorists. In 1965, eighteen days after Alabama state and local police officers delivered savage beatings to Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights marchers on March 7th, Ku Klux Klan members horrified the nation by shooting Viola Gregg Liuzzo in the face, killing her instantly. Liuzzo, a Detroit housewife who had been moved to travel to Alabama and work as a volunteer after watching television coverage of the "Bloody Sunday" carnage on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, had been driving an African American teenager, Leroy Moton, back to Selma after the triumphant speech King had given before 25,000 marchers in Montgomery on Thursday, March 25th. Klansmen drove up beside Liuzzo's car and fired. Moton survived

¹ M.S. Handler, "Malcolm X Terms King's Tactic Futile," *New York Times* (May 11, 1963), p. 9.

² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1964), 101-105.

the attack after the vehicle crashed with the lifeless Liuzzo at the wheel by pretending to be dead.³

The injuries suffered and the tragic loss of life in 1964 and 1965, two years in which the civil rights movement activists experienced continued terror but finally some triumphs, are in no way minimized here. Yet, it was the year 1963 that witnessed heroic and horrendous acts which turned the tide of public opinion and convinced federal elected leaders they had to act. The writers and artists chronicled thus far in this narrative were in the thick of the fray: shaping public debate with their socially aware art, raising money for the SCLC, SNCC and NAACP with benefit performances and putting themselves in harm's way on the voter registration and desegregation battlefronts in the South. The sheer number of milestone civil rights movement actions, events and relevant cultural works which happened in 1963 merits fuller treatment.

The year 1963 was the centenary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. It was the pivotal year of the modern civil rights movement: twelve months in which anyone who thought of themselves as a genuine supporter of racial justice had to stand and deliver or retreat into the realization that they were not. In January 1963, James Baldwin, with his observant hand on the pulse of black America, published his foreboding book length essay, *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin's study of the defiant separatism Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslims who followed them and his first-hand

³ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 171-180. See also "Viola Gregg Liuzzo: Civil Rights Activist," <https://biography.com/people/viola-gregg-liuzzo-370152> [Accessed September 8, 2017]

familiarity with the anger seething in poor urban black youth prompted his prescient warning of riots in Northeastern, Midwestern and Western cities.⁴

After his involvement in the Albany Movement produced disappointing results, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his SCLC lieutenants devised a detailed and ambitious plan, in late Winter 1963, to launch a sustained campaign against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. King, Reverend Ralph Abernathy and local leader Fred Shuttlesworth mounted a campaign of non-violent protests on the streets of the Magic City, a nickname the city gained among Alabamans after its population exploded from a few hundred in 1865 to 250,000 in 1878 after huge deposits of iron ore were discovered nearby.⁵ Their weapon would be public spectacle with the marchers drawing support from a national audience of Americans watching the events on the news. Pro-civil rights support from across the nation would in turn put pressure on local white civic and business leaders to desegregate. The SCLC and SNCC-led campaign began with a series of civil rights demonstrations in early April 1963, but they under-estimated the segregationists' resolve and solidarity. King and other leaders were arrested April 12th, Good Friday, for demonstrating without a permit.

The arrest drew international news coverage. During this same period, Nina Simone had embarked on her first major national tour since giving birth to her daughter, Lisa. Upon arriving to play a date in Chicago, she received a call from her friend, Lorraine Hansberry, who chided her for performing in lounges for pampered white people in the

⁴ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963/1993), 103-106.

⁵ Herbert J. Lewis, "Birmingham," in *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*. <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1421.html> [Accessed February 11, 2018]. See also Malcolm C. McMillan, *Yesterday's Birmingham* (Miami, FL: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1975).

North while King languished in a Southern jail. Hansberry's criticism stung Simone, who wondered what difference she could really make as an artist.⁶ Simone recalled that Hansberry's insistence that she speak out more about what was happening in the South was a source of tension between her and her friend. Simone, at that point in her life, doubted political posturing by musicians was effective: "I didn't like protest music because a lot of it was so simple and unimaginative it stripped away the dignity of the people it was trying to celebrate."⁷

On April 16th, King penned his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," but the campaign to desegregate Birmingham dissipated because of the white community's physical threats and economic retaliation against the working poor blacks who comprised most of the demonstrators. Local SCLC organizer James Bevel then presented King with a recommendation that became the most controversial tactical action undertaken during the civil rights movement. The SCLC would replenish the ranks of the marchers with children. SCLC leaders calculated that children were immune to economic retaliation and even the fearsome Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor would not publicly abuse children. SCLC leaders sought the consent of the parents of potential children foot soldiers and gained it from hundreds of them. Thus, the infamous "Children's Crusade" of Birmingham began.

On May 2nd, over a thousand children aged from eight-years-old to seventeen-years-old left the 16th Street Baptist Church and marched downtown to Birmingham City

⁶ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 87-88.

⁷ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 90.

Hall to pray in public for desegregation. Hundreds were arrested. On the second day, Connor ordered his officers to spray the children with fire hoses, hit them with batons and direct police dogs to attack them. The heartbreaking images of defenseless, terrified black teenagers under siege by sadistic law enforcement officers seen on the front pages of newspapers and on television news features stunned national and international viewers. The children kept on coming. In the days that followed, Connor's force jailed so many of them that they had to be imprisoned at the County Fairgrounds.⁸ In Washington, D.C., President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, were angry with King for his refusal to de-escalate the confrontation but aghast at Connor's brutality. The Kennedy Administration pressured Birmingham's white leadership to relent. On May 10th, Albert Boutwell, Birmingham's mayor, and city council agreed to desegregate businesses and release the more than one thousand children who had been jailed.⁹ King and the SCLC had gained an internationally recognized victory. But, at what cost? The ensuing bloody events tell the tale.

Roy Wilkins and the NAACP, still competing with the SCLC, pressured Medgar Evers to expand his voter registration drive efforts in murderous Mississippi. Edgars, ever the brave and loyal field general, obliged. In early June 1963, Edgars organized a high-profile rally in support of the boycotts, sit-ins and voter registration drives which had conflagrated in the Mississippi capital. The rally drew the celebrity participation of Lena

⁸ Kim Gilmore, "The Birmingham Children's Crusade of 1963," *Biography* <https://biography.com/news/black-history-birmingham-childrens-crusade-1963-video> [Accessed August 16, 2017]

⁹ Taylor Branch, "The Children's Miracle," in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 757-777.

Horne, Billy Strayhorn, James Baldwin and Dick Gregory and national news coverage. Wilkins himself flew to Jackson to be arrested with Evers in front of Woolworth's, a key target of the black boycott.¹⁰ On June 11th, President Kennedy gave a nationally televised address in which he announced that he would introduce a comprehensive civil rights bill. The next evening, white terrorists assassinated Medgar Evers in the driveway of his home. On June 19th, Kennedy fulfilled his pledge and submitted his bill to Congress.

On June 23, 1963, a coalition of black ministers, civic organizations and labor unions, including United Auto Workers chief Walter Reuther,¹¹ staged the Detroit "Walk for Freedom." Over 200,000 demonstrators marched from West Detroit down Woodward Avenue to Cobo Arena. It was the largest civil rights demonstration to date in the United States. The Walk organizers requested King to appear as the keynote speaker to close the demonstration and he delivered a speech that focused on economic opportunity and brotherhood.

I have a dream this afternoon, that one day, right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them, and they will be able to get a job. I have a dream this afternoon...that one day little white children and little Negro children will be able to join hands as brothers and sisters.¹²

The deep conviction of King's sonorous baritone when he thundered the words, "I have a dream," elicited shouts of "Go ahead!" from the "Walk for Freedom" Detroiters. They had

¹⁰ Branch, *Ibid.*, 813-816.

¹¹ See John Barnard, *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935-1970* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

¹² Allison Keyes, "Deconstructing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Dream," *All Things Considered*, June 23, 2013, NPR Code Switch Feature. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/06/2013/deconstructing-martin-luther-king-jr-s-dream.html> [Accessed January 13, 2018].

packed the cavernous arena to the rafters and their emotions were raw so soon after the murder of Medgar Evers. Mahalia Jackson, who attended at the behest of Harry Belafonte and prominent Detroit minister C.L. Franklin who had help organize the “Walk for Freedom,”¹³ took notice of the passage’s impact.

Just over two months later, King would present a variation of the speech at the landmark March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, which was thronged by over a half-million civil rights supporters. The employee unions, specifically the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO, whose members included A. Philip Randolph’s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, were instrumental in underwriting the March on Washington, as they had been in facilitating the Detroit Freedom Walk. Walter Reuther was among those who spoke before King. The UAW labor union president reprised the argument made by King in Detroit: the fight for a more just society would not only benefit blacks but working-class whites. Reuther declared. “I am here with you today because, with you, I share the view that the struggle for civil rights and the struggle for equal opportunity is not the struggle of Negro Americans, but the struggle for every American to join in.”¹⁴

King’s prepared text, with which he had labored the night before, was a work-in-progress. Although he was the closing speaker, the organizers allotted him only five

¹³ Rochelle Riley, “Aretha Franklin Reflects on Dad’s Role in Freedom Walk,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2013. <https://usatoday.com/story/news/2013/06/21/aretha-franklin-detroit-freedom-walk/2447321.html> [Accessed January 13, 2018]. See also Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C.L. Franklin, The Black Church and the Transformation of America* (Boston: little, Brown and company, 2005).

¹⁴ Robert Siegel, “Labor Movement Was Critical Ally to Civil Rights Movement,” NPR Transcript. *All Things Considered*, August 27, 2013. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyid=216191855.html>.

minutes. King improvised, snatching the stronger passages from his prepared text, and speaking extemporaneously. As he concluded, King paused for a moment and then encouraged members of the huge assemblage to go back to their home states in the South, to go back to the slums and ghettos of the Northern cities and do something to improve their communities. Mahalia Jackson, standing among the many celebrities lined up behind King on the Lincoln Memorial, anxiously watched. She sensed King was grasping for a crescendo, a high point to his speech and wanted him to seize the moment. Lawyer and author Drew D. Hansen in his 2003 book, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation*, recounted Jackson's words, captured on audio recordings. She shouted a reminder to King: "Tell them about the dream, Martin!"¹⁵ King later told an interviewer, "all of a sudden this thing came to me that I have used – I'd used many times before, that thing about 'I have a dream' – and I just felt I wanted to use it here." King's gift for soaring oratory took over. Hansen marveled, "And he was off, delivering some of the most beloved lines in American history, a speech he never intended to give and that some of the other civil rights leaders believed no one but the marchers would ever remember."¹⁶

One who stayed away from that landmark event was Malcolm X. He derided the spectacle as the "Farce in Washington." Malcolm X also offered a bit of backhanded praise to James Baldwin, who had been denied a speaking role at the August 1963 demonstration.

¹⁵ Drew S. Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation* (New York: Ecco/HarperCollins, 2013), 285-291.

¹⁶ Drew Hansen, "Mahalia Jackson, and King's Improvisation," *The New York Times* (August 27, 2013). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/28/opinion/mahalia-jackson-and-kings-rhetorical-improvisation.html>.

Asked to acknowledge the success of the March on Washington, Malcolm X said: “No, it was a sellout. It was a takeover. When James Baldwin came in from Paris, they wouldn’t let him talk, because they couldn’t make him go by the script. Burt Lancaster read the speech Baldwin was supposed to make; they wouldn’t let him get up there, because they know Baldwin is liable to say anything.”¹⁷ The organizers of the rally had heavily edited Baldwin’s text, removing the provocative challenges the prickly Baldwin was prone to present to white America.¹⁸

The women examined in Chapter Four were active in the dramatic civil rights developments of 1963 as well. James Baldwin invited Lorraine Hansberry to a May 24, 1963, meeting suggested by Attorney General Robert Kennedy in New York City. Joining Baldwin and Hansberry were black sociologist Kenneth Clark, Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte and a young SNCC volunteer, Jerome Smith, who was a battle-scarred veteran of the Freedom Rides and voter registration campaigns in Mississippi. Baldwin had hoped to impress the urgency of the civil rights crisis on Kennedy, but the meeting ended in acrimony. Kennedy reacted harshly to Smith after Smith declared he would never serve in the U.S. Armed Forces because the country denied him equal rights as a citizen. Hansberry stormed out of the gathering. She later said she was upset because she had believed Kennedy was “the best that White America had to offer”¹⁹ and had been thoroughly disappointed in his lack of empathy toward Smith.²⁰ Nina Simone, stirred by Hansberry’s

¹⁷ Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots,” in *The Eyes of the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, 260.

¹⁸ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 878. See also Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, 68.

¹⁹ Carol Polsgrove, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 180.

²⁰ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *Young, Black and Determined*, 123-125.

April challenge, performed at fundraising concerts for SNCC and SCLC in Birmingham and Atlanta during the Summer of 1963. Abbey Lincoln, although she was no longer recording, performed with her husband at galas staged for the benefit of SCLC, CORE and the NAACP.²¹ Maya Angelou, in Accra, staged a twin celebration of the life of W.E.B. DuBois, who died on August 27th in the Ghanaian capital, and the March on Washington.

Unbeknownst to the March on Washington celebrants, a lethal anger had been smoldering in Birmingham all summer long among the notorious Ku Klux Klan Chapter splinter group there, the Cahaba boys. A July 12, 1963 ruling by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ordering the desegregation of Birmingham public schools lit the fuse.²² The target of their anger were black children who had bested segregationist forces in the confrontation earlier that Spring. On Sunday, September 15th, less than three weeks after the March on Washington, Klan members bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church, the very same church that had been the command center for the Children's Crusade. A powerful explosion killed four black girls, Denise McNair (11), Addie Mae Collins (14), Carole Robertson (14) and Cynthia Wesley (14) who were leaving their Sunday School class.

The murder of these four little girls is considered by many to be the most heinous act committed by opponents of the modern civil rights movement. The tragedy pushed Simone over the edge. She said the murder of Medgar Evers and the Birmingham girls made something snap in her. Within a day of hearing the news of the girls' gruesome deaths and the murder of thirteen-year-old Virgil Ware who was shot to death by two young

²¹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 202-203.

²² Kent Faulk, "Fifty Years Ago a Federal Court Ordered the Desegregation of Birmingham Schools," *Alabama* (July 12, 2013) <https://al.com.html> [Accessed August 21, 2017]

white men in Birmingham that terrible September 15th Sunday, Simone wrote “Mississippi Goddam.” She performed it live in Los Angeles a week later to an enthusiastic reception by the audience.²³ Simone, for the rest of her life, was the most consistent and fearsome advocate for racial justice among the artists profiled in this narrative. Reflecting on her decision to support the civil rights movement openly, she said: “My music was dedicated to a purpose more important than classical music’s pursuit of excellence; it was dedicated to the fight for freedom and the historical destiny of my people. I felt a fierce pride when I thought about what we were all doing together.” She concluded, “So if the movement gave me nothing else, it gave me self-respect.”²⁴

From Bohemia to Black Nationalism

One of the most baffling things about America is that despite its essentially vile profile, so much beauty continues to exist here. (John Coltrane’s) music is one of the reasons suicide seems so boring.

Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) from the liner notes for *Coltrane Live at Birdland* (1964)

Although he is now remembered as a political radical, outlaw poet and playwright, Amiri Baraka began his intellectual career as a rather ordinary middle class black college student at Howard University. Born Everett LeRoy Jones on October 7, 1934 in Newark, New Jersey to a college graduate social worker mother and a postal supervisor father, Jones took courses from the esteemed black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier at Howard. Although he could pass “the brown bag test,” Washington’s skin color caste system and self-important black society held little allure for the independent-minded Jones. He had read

²³ Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone*, 144-145.

²⁴ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 91.

Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* and saw it all play out in real life every day at Howard. Frazier, a sociologist, leveled an unflattering deconstruction of African American middle class. He concluded this class had lost their roots to traditional black culture, concocted myths about their business clout and created a society, in which fair skin was essential for ascension to its top ranks. Jones rebelled against these social values, which were omnipresent at Howard, a favored university of the black bourgeoisie. He dropped out of school and enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. Drawn to literature, he spent most of his free time reading while in the service, especially the works of modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot. After his commanding officer found a copy of the *Partisan Review* (deemed subversive by the military) in the aspiring young writer's footlocker, the Air Force dishonorably discharged Jones. He moved to New York City and attended the New School and Columbia University, all the while honing his skills as a writer and growing as an anti-establishment thinker.

Given Nat Hentoff's penchant for thumbing his nose at the white cultural elite, it is not surprising he gave the then 24-year-old LeRoi Jones (he did not legally change his name to Amiri Baraka until 1965), his first opportunity to commercially publish a piece of jazz writing. Baraka pounced on the opportunity and by the early 1960s was writing reviews and essays on jazz for *Down Beat*, ironically enough, and *Metronome*, the British magazine that had given Leonard Feather his first professional credits as a jazz writer. Record companies wanted Baraka to write liner notes for their growing number of experimental jazz artists. Jones's fondness of free jazz was well known by the early 1960s.

Jones had been researching jazz history and its best artists since 1957. It was that year he won the position of shipping manager at the Record Changer, a treasured record

shop for the most discriminating of traditional jazz album collectors. Listening surreptitiously to the debates among the young white jazz critics who would frequent the store, including Hentoff and Williams, Jones developed the desire to learn more about the music and its artists. In his autobiography, Jones explained that his work at Record Changer and a later job working with a private album collector “were like a graduate school” in the recorded history of jazz. “Every day,” he stated, “...I studied bands and players from different periods, labels, and trends. I got to know the key personalities in the different periods of jazz, I began to understand when and how the music changed. Later, I would do my own deeper research on why it changed, which remains to me the most important question.”²⁵

As his late 1950s Beat poetry drew more and more praise in critical circles, Baraka accepted an invitation to a writers’ tour of Cuba in 1960. He traveled there with cultural critic Harold Cruse. The island nation was molten with revolutionary fervor. They arrived on the island nation as Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara’s Rebel Army were forming a new government to replace the ousted regime of U.S. backed Cuban President Fulgencio Batista. When Jones read his “hip” poems, Latino revolutionaries derided him as “bourgeois.” This criticism stung Jones, who had thought of himself as a rebel and outsider.

After his return, Jones wrote his lengthy essay, “Cuba Libre,” which was in large part a self-criticism of his Bohemian past and his realization – drawn from the Cuban example – that determined activists within an established Western capitalist nation could

²⁵ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/ Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 140.

foment radical change. He began to formulate a political strategy that utilized linkages to the African diaspora to contest economic, racial and cultural hierarchies in the United States. Jones believed “First World protest” could aid the cause of “Third World revolution.” Historian Cynthia Jones observed, “Not only did Jones attempt to create an autonomous black national culture; he also connected that culture to the formation of a radical black politics and an anticolonial front in the urban ghetto.”²⁶ From that point forward, he placed the struggle for racial equality in the United States in the context of the international anticolonial movement. Jones had decided to become an activist against U.S. imperialism at home and abroad.²⁷ The non-violent incrementalism of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the other moderate leaders of the civil rights movement was not enough to effect change in Jones’s opinion. Militant action, not moral suasion, was the answer.

It was his post-Havana world view that compelled Baraka to be among the demonstrators enraged by Patrice Lumumba’s assassination who assembled outside the United Nations headquarters on February 15, 1961. This was the very same protest organized by Abbey Lincoln, Maya Angelou and Rosa Guy under the aegis of their organization, The Cultural Association of Women of African Heritage.²⁸ Again, the women of CAWAH, dressed in black armbands and mourning veils, staged a silent protest during United States Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson’s address to the General Assembly on Lumumba’s assassination. On the streets outside the building, UN security forces

²⁶ Cynthia Young, “Havana Up in Harlem: LeRoi Jones and Harold Cruse and the Making of a Cultural Revolution,” *Science & Society* Vol. 65, no. 1 (Spring, 2001), 31- 32.

²⁷ LeRoi Jones, “Cuba Libre,” *Home: Social Essays* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1998 [1966]), 36-39.

²⁸ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 245-246

severely beat Jones and other protestors before New York City police arrived to arrest them.²⁹ The abuse infuriated and further radicalized Jones, who used the Lumumba protests to force a redefinition of black identity. A popular chant that arose during a subsequent mass rally in Harlem was “The word Negro has got to go! We’re Afro-Americans!”

After his beating, Jones applied a sharper political lens to his writing. It was one which brought into focus a conviction that blacks were unique among all other Americans because of their African heritage, which visually identified them as not European. The product of Jones’s new perspective on black music was *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, published in the tumultuous year of 1963. Jones tossed *Blues People*, like a Molotov cocktail, into the boardrooms of academia and jazz journals. His politicized history of black folk music antagonized, probably as he had hoped, many well-regarded experts on Negro culture, most notably Ralph Ellison. The book also confirmed Langston Hughes’s suspicion of Baraka: that he defined himself mostly in relationship to white culture. As John Gennari observed, the full title of the book provides a key clue, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. “Baraka was interested in jazz’s position at the seam between white and black culture, its status as a black-centered object of both white fascination and commercial commodification.”³⁰

Jones’s *Blues People* started from the premise that the “Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in

²⁹ Komozi Woodard, *A Nation with a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 56-57.

³⁰ Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 272.

the dominant tenor of the white man's culture." Jones continued that the black artist realized "he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And, it was this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music."³¹ In the book, Jones stated the most valuable and identity-anchoring component of blacks' African heritage was their music. Jones asserted that the remarkable evolution of black musical idioms, from captives' work chants to free jazz, reflected the ongoing quest of African Americans to express, define and defend themselves from an exploitative larger white society. Black music, especially the blues, articulated the dialectical play between African American and Western culture.

To state its social dynamic in another way: the blues, as an idiom, "squeezes truth from lived experience, acknowledging the interwoven relation of tragedy and comedy."³² Ironically, on this last point, Jones and Ellison, who savaged Jones in his review of the book, agreed. To summarize the book's chief complaint: black people invented new forms of musical expression to cope with and transcend their terrible societal position as disenfranchised, impoverished and physically abused second class citizens in a nation they helped build. Along the way, the entertainment industry synthesized and commercialized ragtime, blues and jazz, paying its black originators a pittance if anything at all and minimizing their rich contributions to American culture. Jones praised working-class blacks – the true blues people – for creating the genre and inferred it is connected to their

³¹ LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Perennial Books, 1963; reprinted 1999), 80

³² Walton M. Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation and Intellectual Pragmatism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 15.

determination to survive. “For the poor, however, ‘culture,’ is simply how one lives, and it is connected to history by habit.”³³

Jones vented rage at middle-class blacks in high culture and politics, accusing them of commodifying their peoples’ precious music. He decried their complicity in brandishing extraordinary black artistry to defend the “West, and most particularly the American system...its values and ideas against totally hostile systems.”³⁴ With his acidic jibes at black musicians who had purged themselves of the “stink” of the blues and “concert hall” jazz supporters, Jones made clear he would not be participating any goodwill cultural exchanges with Third World nations in 1963 or any year after.

Malcolm X’s assassination in February 1965 pushed Jones over the edge, impelling him to sever his *personal* identity from American culture. Within months of Malcolm X’s murder, he left his white Jewish wife and the two children he fathered with her. The same imam who buried Malcolm X renamed Jones “Ameer Barakat, ‘Blessed Prince’ in Arabic. Subsequently, Maulana Karenga, a leading cultural nationalist, Africanized the name Ameer Barakat, making it Amiri Baraka in Swahili, and gave Baraka the distinctive title ‘Imamu,’ meaning spiritual leader.”³⁵ Baraka divorced and married the black dancer Sylvia Robinson who also converted to Islam and took the name “Amina,” a Swahili word which means truthful.

As one of the leading and most quotable black nationalists of the mid-1960s, the razor-tongued Baraka vehemently criticized Western European society – which he argued

³³ Jones, *Blues People*, 180.

³⁴ Jones, *Blues People*, 286.

³⁵ Woodard, *A Nation with a Nation*, 59-62.

the United States was a part – in his poetry and his prose for its economic exploitation of black peoples and the plunder of black art and culture. Blues and jazz were the crown jewels of black culture in Baraka’s estimation and belonged to the people who had mined them, honed them and presented their soul-enriching beauty to the world. While Baraka paid deference to what he termed “Afro-Christian music” or gospel in *Blues People*, he qualified his appreciation of it because “the slave’s swift embrace of the white man’s God” guaranteed blacks’ submittal to Western society and its social order.³⁶

Again, the beginnings of his Black Nationalist ideology can be seen in Baraka’s best-known book, *Blues People*, which was first published in the tumultuous year of 1963. Langston Hughes’s observation, made about the young man he declared the most talented in the then-new generation of black writers in the late 1950, still held true. Anger animated Amiri Baraka’s gift.

Coda: A Surge in Advocacy in Words, Music and Fundraising by Jazz Artists and Writers

In the twelve months of 1963, jazz artists and writers created or published an unprecedented number of essays, books and music which featured overt and implied themes of social protest and racial justice advocacy. Were the triumphs and tragedies of the civil rights movement a rational cause ³⁷ of their outpouring of social commentary? Historians Marc Bloch and E.H. Carr proffered the concept of “accidental” and “rational” causes to differentiate from a chain of events which could be linked to causation and other

³⁶ Jones, *Blues People*, 33.

³⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91-96.

events that were pure happenstance.³⁸ The example they used in historical methodology was a case in which a pedestrian, legally crossing the street to purchase a package of cigarettes, was killed by a drunken driver. The driver's drunkenness was the "rational cause" of the fatality. The fact that the doomed pedestrian happened to be crossing the street to purchase cigarettes was an accidental cause. "Rational causes, Carr went on to explain, 'lead to fruitful generalizations and lessons can be learned from them.' Accidental causes 'teach no lessons and lead to no conclusions.'"³⁹ The evidence presented thus far in "Pride and Protest in Letters and Song" corroborates the claim that the civil rights movement's turmoil was *the* rational cause of jazz artists and writers' wave of advocacy.

Not all the jazz artists and writers profiled in this narrative took the more militant path blazed by Malcolm X and admired by Lincoln, Roach, Angelou and Baraka. The older among them, Ellington, Hughes and Horne, gave the lion's share of their support to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was at the center of the pivotal confrontations and achievements of the civil rights movement in 1963. They headlined fund-raising efforts of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). As noted earlier in this narrative, Ralph Ellison limited his involvement to written castigations of those with whom he disagreed, ranging from Hannah Arendt to LeRoi Jones. Of the three older artists who did engage, the youngest of them, Lena Horne, who had entered her late forties at the time,

³⁸ Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Life in History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 315-324.

³⁹ Gaddis, *ibid.*, 93.

became the most active in the civil rights movement in 1963. Horne feared airplane travel after several near crashes when she performed for black troops during World War Two. In addition, the possibility she would be jailed and physically assaulted petrified her.⁴⁰ These fears had kept Horne from active involvement in the civil rights movement, although she applauded it from afar.

After prodding by acquaintance James Baldwin and her sorority's national chairwoman, Jean Noble, Horne found her courage in the cataclysmic year of 1963. She leapt into the fray, compelled to action by media coverage of the young marchers' cruel treatment by police during the Birmingham Children's Crusade. Horne was among the prominent blacks, including Hansberry and Belafonte, whom Baldwin had gathered in a Manhattan apartment to discuss civil rights issues with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, at his behest, in May 1963. The contentious exchange, which generated several subsequent articles detailing the meeting in the *New York Times* and the *Amsterdam News*, jolted Robert F. Kennedy and, by association, the Kennedy Administration. It awakened them to the anger and impatience seething in the civil rights movement, especially among the younger activists.⁴¹ Soon after her meeting with Robert F. Kennedy, Horne recruited Billy Strayhorn and headed to the front lines, singing "This Little Light of Mine" for the NAACP voting rights volunteers assembled by Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi. The traditional folk song, which carried the message of physical courage based on inner spiritual strength, had become a coded song of resistance sung by civil rights demonstrators

⁴⁰ Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Black Calhouns*, 281-284.

⁴¹ Polsgrove, *Divided Minds*, 176-182.

in the late 1950s and 1960s. Horne had a premonition during the time Evers hosted her. In her memoir, *LENA*, she stated: “I saw how unprotected Medgar was, how easy it would be to kill him. In Jackson he had no big administrative organization to protect him, not even the sanction of religion.”⁴² Klan vigilantes murdered Evers less than forty-eight hours after Horne boarded a plane and flew back to New York to appear on *The Today Show*.⁴³

The Evers assassination and grisly bombing murder of the Birmingham girls galvanized Horne to action. She had seen that celebrities’ willingness to headline fundraisers was crucial. Benefit concerts offered the beleaguered civil rights organizations their best opportunity to access deep-pocketed white individuals and institutions. Lena Horne’s year-end 1963 civil rights concert with Frank Sinatra at Carnegie Hall is an illustrative example. Like Simone, the events of that year prompted her public commitment to the movement. Horne wanted to do something that counted, so she decided to headline a fundraiser for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee.

Recalling how she traded upon her celebrity as black America’s most glamorous woman, Horne noted: “...that year SNCC was controversial, whereas Frank’s charity was not. The two-dollar and five-dollar seats went fast enough, but the \$100 seats and \$800 boxes just weren’t moving. I went out and browbeat friends and slung my name around like never before.” But, Horne felt the brazen use of her image as a symbol of black beauty had been worth it. “My friends rose to the occasion and we finally sold all the expensive tickets...It was a real peak in my life. For once I felt the symbol had been useful.”⁴⁴

⁴² Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *LENA* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 282.

⁴³ Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Black Calhouns*, 282-284. See also Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *LENA*, 283-287.

⁴⁴ Lena Horne with Richard Schickel, *LENA* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 290.

It was noted in Chapter Four that Malcolm X boycotted the August 28, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and mocked it as “The Farce in Washington.” Neither did Langston Hughes attend the milestone event. But, it was not because he disagreed with King’s tactics as did Malcolm X. Hughes had been vacationing with his secretary George Bass in Europe, the Mediterranean, and Israel that summer and did not return to the United States until September 1st.⁴⁵ By 1963, Hughes believed he had proven himself an unquestioned champion of black people and their invaluable contributions to American culture. He resented inferences from Baldwin and others that he had disengaged. Behind the scenes, he supported SNCC, CORE and the NAACP by participating in fundraisers. Hughes promoted Nina Simone’s outspoken songs in a brilliant promotional essay praising her 1964 *In Concert* album, which contained “Mississippi Goddam.” After decades of paying the bills by undertaking grueling poetry reading tours throughout the Jim Crow South and depending on the largesse of wealthy patrons, Hughes was at last financially secure. He was convinced, at sixty-one years of age, he deserved a luxurious vacation. Hughes was content to pass the baton of activism to a younger generation of activists and artists.⁴⁶

Ellington, however, for a reason surprisingly consonant with the political philosophy of Malcolm X, *also* cast a baleful eye at the March on Washington. Ellington was no militant. He was a staunch believer in capitalism and chafed at the civil rights

⁴⁵ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967 I Dream a World*, 365-367.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 367-375.

movement's pleas to have the white establishment save black people. Ellington believed that as long as the overwhelming majority of black people were poor, their attainment of civil rights was a hollow achievement. A lifelong believer in Du Bois's "talented tenth" elitism, Ellington argued the surer route to equality was the establishment of a prosperous black middle class, with black people supporting black-owned businesses and banks. Again, Ellington's thinking on this point was a near corollary to Booker T. Washington's philosophy of black self-help and a self-sustaining black economy.⁴⁷ Ellington revealed his true opinion of the March on Washington in a rare, unguarded moment with an interviewer in 1964: "The only people who did good out of the goddamn parade was the people who owned businesses in Washington, the hotels, and all that, they had a f**king ball, put all the f**king money in their pockets." ⁴⁸

His salty assessment of the March on Washington notwithstanding, Duke Ellington had immense admiration for the personal courage of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ellington, like Hughes, saw himself as a "cultural champion emeritus" of African American people. In an interview with Nat Hentoff, Ellington dismissed those who characterized him as unconcerned with the civil rights movement. Said Ellington to Hentoff in 1965: "People who think that of me haven't been listening to our music. For the past 25 years, social protest and pride in the history of the Negro have been the most

⁴⁷ Booker T. Washington, "Industrial Education for the Negro," in *The Negro Problem*. Booker T. Washington Society. <https://btwsociety.org/industrial-education-for-the-negro.html> [Accessed January 3, 2018].

⁴⁸ Teachout, Duke: *A Life of Duke Ellington*, 316.

significant themes in what we've done.”⁴⁹ Ellington could point to his two attempts to present a grand narrative of African Americans' troubled but triumphant sojourn through history in the United States, *Black, Brown and Beige*, in 1943 at Carnegie Hall and again, in a thematic album for Columbia Records under the same title in 1958, as testament to his claim. But, he was not done with advocacy in song.

Ellington was most proud of the last extended work in which he sought to “command respect” for African Americans' resilience, resolve and rich traditions. The jazz revue, *My People*, was performed live from August 16th through September 2nd, 1963 in Chicago. The city's black business leaders, with the support of white philanthropists, commissioned Ellington to write and perform a long-form work as the artistic centerpiece of the Century of Negro Progress Exposition, an exhibition presented at McCormick Place. African American political leaders, across the United States, used the centennial of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation to bring additional attention to the fact that, one hundred years later, blacks still had not received the privileges of full citizenship. One can argue the century-old unrealized promise of the Emancipation Proclamation is what impelled the SCLC, SNCC, CORE and the NAACP to pursue such intense direct action across the South that year – which in turn segregationists countered with murderous attempts to intimidate and turn back their charge.

On the “advocacy in song” front, Ellington once again set out to tell the triumphal tale. But, this time he anchored it in contemporary civil rights movement events and themes. Choreographer Alvin Ailey, whom Ellington had hired to develop dance numbers

⁴⁹ Nat Hentoff, “This Cat Needs No Pulitzer Prize,” *New York Times Magazine* (12 September 1965), p. 74.

for *My People*, criticized the jazz maestro as not being able to “make up his mind whether the show was for Broadway or the Apollo.”⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Ellington’s admiration for King inspired him to compose a riveting song that rendered emphatic commentary on the SCLC’s Spring 1963 campaign to desegregate Birmingham. Ellington entitled the song “King Fit The Battle of Alabam” and set it to the music of a Jubilee-styled arrangement of “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho.” The song begins with a chorus of somber baritone voices chanting the SCLC leader’s name: “Martin. Luther. King” Ellington then launches into a retelling of the most violent confrontations in the campaign to desegregate the Magic City:

King fit the Battle of Alabam
Alabam, Birmingham
And the Bull jumped nasty, nasty, nasty!

Bull turned the hoses on the church people...
And the water went splashing, dashing, smashing

The children fit the battle of the police dogs...
And the dogs went howling, growling, snarling...⁵¹

“Bull” was the nickname for Birmingham’s infamous police chief, Theophilus Eugene Connor. Ellington used the song to laud the freedom riders whose courage was evident, as well, when they faced a 1961 white mob attack sanctioned by Birmingham’s Bull Connor. The sixty-four-year-old composer closed the work with a bit of rueful humor at Connor’s expense. A narrator delivers a spoken-word commentary praising the bravery of the children who participated in the campaign:

⁵⁰ Teachout, *Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington*, 318. See also Jennifer Dunning, *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing company, 1996), 175.

⁵¹ Duke Ellington, “King Fit The Battle of Alabam,” *My People*, Storyville Records (2012) Cat# 1018430.

Now when the dog saw the baby wasn't afraid
 He pulled his uncle Bull's hose and said
 That baby acts like he don't give a damn
 Are you sure we're still in Alabam?⁵²

Ellington, when asked in 1963 by *Variety* magazine about the racial themes woven into such *My People* songs as “King Fit The Battle of Alabam” and “What Color Is Virtue,” deflected the question, once again conscious of maintaining his image as the unflappable maestro. He claimed otherwise, despite against hard evidence to the contrary:

Only one minute of social protest is written into its script, because while this aspect warrants notice, it unfairly tends to overshadow the continuing contributions of the Negro to American life. *My People* is definitely not political. It has social significance, but the accent [is] on entertainment.⁵³

Ellington was nothing if not consistent in his lifelong quest to ennoble the race through his regal style and musical statements. He loathed the prospect that a white journalist would portray him as among the demonstrators, clamoring for redress from the majority population. Nonetheless, with *My People* in 1963, Ellington was still striving to achieve what he said he wanted to do in 1931: “The history of my people is one of great achievement over fearful odds; it is a history of a people hindered, handicapped and often sorely oppressed, and what is being done by Countee Cullen and others in literature is overdue in our music.”⁵⁴ Duke Ellington made this statement when he was thirty-two years old.

⁵² Bjarne Busk, Liner Notes, *My People*, Storyville Records (2012) Cat# 1018430.

⁵³ Ibid. See also Stuart Nicholson, *Reminiscing in Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1999).

⁵⁴ Duke Ellington, “The Duke Steps Out,” *Rhythm* (March 1931), 20-22. See also, *The Duke Ellington Reader*; Mark Tucker, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 46.

Were the vicious acts of violence and heroic battles won during the civil rights movement in 1963 the cause of the remarkable number of songs and prose presenting political commentary to the public? The landmark books published during that year, *The Fire Next Time* by Baldwin (January 1963) and *Blues People* by Jones/Baraka (July 1963), were conceived prior to the incendiary events of 1963. However, an interrogation of the evidence says the movement's pivotal events of 1963 directly inspired the advocacy in the songs.

Ellington wrote the songs, "King Fit' the Battle of Alabam" and "King" during the summer of 1963. The two compositions, considered together, constitute a solid endorsement by Ellington of King's leadership of the modern civil rights movement. Ellington saw in King several of the same characteristics he saw himself possessing: a confidence, charisma and the ability to command respect. They both were the sons of doting middle class black families who had sent them into a hostile white world armed with intelligence, talent, and self-esteem. Lena Horne was the daughter of a stable middle class black family. She did more than raise money for SNCC that year. She wanted to perform and record a song that be her signature vehicle of protest.

After witnessing the segregationist terrorism wrought upon blacks in Mississippi and then Birmingham in 1963, Horne badgered Jule Styne to write a song which would express her personal protest of racial injustice. Styne used the melody of the Jewish song "Hava Nagillah" and enlisted Betty Comden and Adolph Green to write the lyrics. Comden and Green incorporated comments Horne had made to them about how racial prejudice made a mockery of any claim of American greatness. The result was the song "Now!" The song assailed the hypocrisy of American leaders from the founding fathers until

present day. Horne, in a determined tone, demands that elected officials grant black people the equal rights and protections to which they are entitled by the United States Constitution *right now*. Horne recorded the song in November 1963 and performed it at her year-end SNCC benefit. When she sought to perform it on the television network variety programs in early 1964, the producers refused to allow her to perform it.⁵⁵ The South African government banned the album *Here's Lena Now!* from the nation's radio stations and record stores in October 1964.

Nina Simone, as noted earlier, was also moved to action by Medgar Evers's assassination and the brutal murder of the four black girls in Birmingham. The segregationist terrorism inspired her to write her best-known rebuke of racism, "Mississippi Goddam." Simone said she wrote the song to vent rage after she first wanted to find a gun and kill a white person. "I didn't know who, but someone who I could identify as being in the way of my people getting some justice for the first time in three hundred years."⁵⁶

Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley's murder by Ku Klux Klan terrorists inspired another extraordinary, but lesser known, work of artistic expression by a noted jazz musician: John Coltrane. Born in High Point, North Carolina in 1926, John Coltrane was the son of a tailor. His mother was a domestic housekeeper. However, she had attended college and was a skilled pianist. Both his parents

⁵⁵ Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *LENA*, 289. See also, Randy Weston, *African Rhythms*, 100.

⁵⁶ Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 89.

were children of African Methodist Episcopal preachers. A gifted musician since childhood, Coltrane moved to Philadelphia and then New York City to pursue his ambition of becoming a professional jazz musician. The saxophonist found regular work in the clubs and recording sessions. Coltrane's amiable "country-boy" manner hid the fact he had become an opium addict by the time Miles Davis recruited him to play in his quintet. Coltrane credited a spiritual awakening for his victory over heroin 1957. After becoming addiction-free, Coltrane vaulted to the top of his art in the ensuing years, both as a virtuoso performer and a composer. He was prolific as well. As group leader, he released well-regarded albums such as *Blue Trane*, *Giant Steps*, *My Favorite Things*, *Impressions* and his ambitious orchestral homage to Africa's emerging new nations, *Africa/Brass*. Once a sideman to other jazz greats, such as Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk, Coltrane by 1963 was their equal in critical acclaim and album sales.⁵⁷

However, Coltrane seldom offered opinions on social issues. *Africa/Brass* was the closest he had come to expressing racial pride or political protest in his music. But, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing tragedy anguished the tenor saxophonist. Unlike the confrontational Nina Simone, whose first impulse was to attempt to build a zip gun after learning of the four little girls' gruesome deaths, Coltrane withdrew into prayerful reflection. He obtained a copy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Eulogy of the Martyred Children," which King delivered in remembrance of Collins, McNair and Wesley at the bomb-damaged church on September 18, 1963. According to Coltrane's pianist and

⁵⁷ Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 16-36.

close friend, McCoy Tyner, the saxophonist drew upon King's text and the cadence of his delivery of the eulogy to compose his jazz elegy, "Alabama." The composition's dirge-like refrain is mournful yet resolute. Coltrane's rich tenor saxophone timbre conveys loss but not defeat. The second movement of the composition bursts with energy. Coltrane's backing musicians, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on upright double bass and Elvin Jones on drums metabolize rage into a determination to prevail. Coltrane next establishes a diminuendo with an elegant reprise of the opening melodic theme. Finally, powered by explosive snare, tom-tom and cymbal work by Jones, the song ends on a crescendo, which can have likened to the martyred girls soaring heavenward. If one did not know what event the song referenced or if it had been given another title, it would stand on its own as a work of complexity, depth and modernism. Coltrane uses his virtuosity to express his empathy. "Alabama" is a composition worthy to be played in tribute to fallen heroes or heroines anywhere and at any time.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: MUCH MORE THAN RHYTHM AND MELODY

Although the civil was an unarmed revolution, it did have two powerful weapons: images in newspapers, in magazines, on the evening news; and songs—above all Pete Seeger’s version of an old hymn, “We Shall Overcome.”

Gail Lumet Buckley¹

At the outset of this narrative the rhetorical question was asked: why does the jazz canon, whose artists were at the height of their creative arc during the very same period as the pivotal decade of the American Civil Rights Movement, contain so few songs that resonate in popular memory as supportive of the movement? The song, “We Shall Overcome,” referenced above by Lena Horne’s daughter was performed often in the late 1940s and 1950s by Zilphia Horton, a social justice activist and wife of the Highlander School co-founder Myles Horton. Zilphia Horton credited the song to African American laborers who sang a version of it during a 1945 strike in Charleston, South Carolina. Mrs. Horton collaborated with Guy Carawan and folk music icon Pete Seeger to revise the musical arrangement and words to create the composition now recognizable to most. After hearing Carawan perform the song at their inaugural April 1960 meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee adopted it; the SNCC Singers infused it with gospel-styled gravitas and “We Shall Overcome” became the anthem of the modern civil rights movement. Jazz artists and those writers whose works were inspired

¹ Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Black Calhouns: From Civil War to Civil Rights with One African American Family* (New York: Groves Press, 2016), 271.

by jazz or wrote about jazz are nowhere to be found in the genealogy of the movement's signature song.²

Yet, the historical record presented in the previous chapters revealed that jazz artists wrote *dozens* of compositions inspired by both the civil rights movement and the new African nations which had wrested their peoples and lands from Western colonialism. These artists' collective body of work did not enter public memory because the jazz of the era had become complex, by pop music standards, and too demanding for the average listener. It had become more modernist and less populist. The jazz songs that did feature vocals, such as "Driva' Man" by Abbey Lincoln and "Fables of Faubus" by Charles Mingus, voiced outrage over racism past and present. The polemical bent of the lyrics doomed any widespread dissemination of the music that carried it. Chicago radio programmers who congratulated themselves in 1964 for making "Amen" a hit for their hometown rhythm & blues trio, The Impressions, rejected out of hand playing any track from Abbey Lincoln's *Straight Ahead* three years earlier in 1961, even though Lincoln was a native of the Windy City and a well-known artist. The record labels that released jazz albums containing black or African-themed compositions recoiled at the critical responses. The political responses struck fear into them as well. The South African government banned Randy Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* and Lena Horne's *Here's Lena Now!*, an action which doomed any widespread distribution of them in the United States after 1964.³

² Mary Silk, "Who Wrote 'We Shall Overcome,'?" *Religion News Service* (May 8, 2015) <http://religionnews.com/2015/05/08/who-wrote-we-shall-overcome/html> [Accessed October 9, 2017] See also Harry Belafonte, *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music* (Buddha/RCA Victor/BMG, 2001), 130-132.

³ Randy Weston with Willard Jenkins, *African Rhythms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 100-101.

What becomes clear is the jazz artists wrote and performed music intended to compel the listener to think, not to sing along. John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie quipped that he never set out to write “eight bars of protest.” Yet, he knew he and other aware, involved artists were in the “vanguard of social change.”⁴ Jazz artists and the writers who critiqued them or were influenced by them – Baldwin, Hansberry, Hentoff, Hughes, Jones/Baraka and Angelou – did not simply support the civil rights movement, they imbedded themselves in it. As Mingus observed, jazz switched audiences after the mid-1950s. It was no longer the music of working class blacks. It was the music of college-educated liberal whites and politically aware blacks, the same two demographic groups committed to advancing the civil rights movement.

The Northern and mostly secular jazz artists and writers, despite their empathy and outspokenness, had little real-world impact on the overwhelmingly Southern and church-based civil rights campaigns. Why, then, is what they had to say about the movement worth knowing? The answer is the profiled musicians and writers were thought leaders. Several of the observations they made and ideological stances they adopted were prescient, indicating future strategic shifts and points of view on the quest for racial justice. Thus, it can be argued that their advocacy in artistic expression represented the cutting edge of political thought.

One case-in-point that supports this argument is Abbey Lincoln’s song, “Retribution.” The lyrics (See Chapter Four) are a coded call for reparations to compensate

⁴ Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be or Not to Bop* (New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 287-291.

African Americans for decades of unpaid labor and over a century of economic discrimination. It would take at least two more years for the white public to perceive the existential threat to their cultural and economic way of life posed by reparations *and* for media outlets to associate it with Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. The demand infuriated white conservative politicians and intellectuals. It confounded white liberal political leaders and activists. They realized a large segment of the black population wanted the economic means to establish their own businesses and neighborhoods, to create a black society distinct if not totally apart from white society. This was the vision of the Nation of Islam in the early 1960s and still is today.⁵ Its most eloquent exponent remains Malcolm X, whose fearless criticism of institutionalized racism impressed and influenced Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Nina Simone, Lorraine Hansberry, Max Roach, Randy Weston, Maya Angelou and Abbey Lincoln, among many other jazz luminaries and writers.

Malcolm X's profound impact on most of the jazz artists and writers chronicled in this narrative is undebatable. While they supported the black church-anchored civil rights movement with their fundraising efforts, this group of artists found cathartic satisfaction in Malcolm X's searing condemnation of American hypocrisy at home and abroad. Their embrace of Malcolm, the combative leader, in the late 1950s and very early 1960s is another example of how the political thought circulating among this cadre of jazz artists and writers was an early indicator of a more confrontational, militant activism that would

⁵ Richard Muhammad, "Minister Farrakhan Banned in UK," *Final Call*, August 7, 2017 http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_103754.html [Accessed September 23, 2017].

come to the fore. In this case, it augured how the civil rights movement would evolve into an angrier, more urban and confrontational phenomenon, starting with the Los Angeles Watts riot in 1965.

However, the influence of Malcolm X upon the thinking and creative output of black writers, such as Maya Angelou, James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka, and black musicians, including Max Roach, Randy Weston and Abbey Lincoln, went beyond shaping their critiques of institutional racism and convincing them of the rightfulness of reparations. In his final year, Malcolm X/Malik El-Shabazz shared his vision for a cultural revolution in which “Afro-Americans,” a term he began using in 1964, would reconnect to their African homeland and reject the destructive elements of American society:

We must recapture our heritage and identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people. This cultural revolution will be the journey to rediscovering ourselves. History is a people’s memory, and without memory man is demoted to the level of lower animals.⁶

Malcolm X envisaged a critical role for artists and writers. They would be the agents of change who would instill by means of their creative gifts this new Africa-connected consciousness within black people. He proposed the establishment of cultural centers, with the first being in Harlem, where blacks, supported by their own communities and not white patrons or entertainment industry overlords, would be “free to create” works that focused on bringing them closer to their “African brothers and sisters.” They would “conduct workshops in all of the arts, such as film, creative writing, painting, theater, music and the

⁶ Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970/1992), 77, 79.

entire spectrum of Afro-American history.”⁷ The incisive black social critic, Harold Cruse, later would analyze and expound upon the value of “Afro-American” ideology, as conceived by Malcolm X and other black nationalists, in his 1967 book, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.⁸

Malcolm X’s grand vision entranced Maya Angelou. Malcolm X visited her while she still lived in Ghana in 1964. Angelou offered her ideas regarding the cultural activities of his proposed new foundation, the Organization for Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Malcolm X – who had by then adopted the name of el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz – convinced Angelou, during his last visit to Accra, to return to New York City and help him establish and operate the envisioned cultural center in Harlem. Angelou agreed and returned to the United States in December 1964. However, she decided to take a couple of months to visit her mother and family in the Bay Area. Malik el-Shabazz’s assassination ended their planned collaboration.⁹ Finally, when one examines the community arts initiatives pursued by Amiri Baraka in the late 1960s and his leading role in promoting the Black Arts Movement, it is apparent he had taken his inspiration from Malik el-Shabazz’s call for a cultural revolution.

Malik el-Shabazz’s assassination robbed those African Americans inspired by his Pan-African vision of the leader who could have overseen and directed a strategic plan to accomplish that vision’s political and cultural objectives. His murder left adherents on their own to invent “cultural nationalism” as Baraka attempted or to drift away in sorrow

⁷ Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 78-79.

⁸ Harold Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1967), 420-425.

⁹ Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 1059-1061 and 1073-1074.

as Angelou did. One could argue the counterfactual that Malik El-Shabazz's involuntary departure from the civil rights vanguard undermined any prospects for a vigorous *political* Pan-Africanism among blacks in the United States. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that jazz artists and writers' efforts to inculcate the black civil rights movement leadership with a Pan African perspective failed. The African leaders of the new nations and icons of the civil rights movement forged no significant strategic alliances which helped realize their respective political objectives from 1955 to 1965.¹⁰

Ruth Feldstein, in her book, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*, categorized the musicians, actors, artists and writers who made New York City their home from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s as a subculture.¹¹ The jazz artists and writers examined in the preceding chapters promulgated political thought that, again, in some instances anticipated future ideological and strategic developments in the American Civil Rights Movement and the independence campaigns waged by African freedom fighters.

What made the jazz artists and writers even more valuable to African anticolonialists and civil rights activists was their access to empathetic, moneyed white elites in entertainment and high culture. Harvard social historian Ingrid Monson's impressive research reveals jazz artists and writers were the most active and most reliable

¹⁰ George m. Frederickson, "Non-Violent Resistance to White Supremacy" A Comparison of the American Civil Rights Movement and the South African defiance Campaigns of the 1950s," in *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 213 -223.

¹¹ Ruth Feldstein, *How it Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), 22-30.

fundraisers for civil rights and African nationalist organizations from the early 1950s through the early 1960s.¹² Every national civil rights organization, including NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, established or strengthened their New York presence during the cauldron years of the movement. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., James Farmer of CORE, Diane Nash and the student leaders of SNCC made dozens of pilgrimages to New York City during this period, as did several African nation independence fighters. They did so not only to raise funds but also to forge allegiances with artists and writers with whom they could communicate strategies and tactics. The civil rights organizations also utilized the artists' celebrity to build support for racial justice among empathetic white citizens.

The numbers corroborate the importance of fund-raising by jazz artists and allied writers. Between May 1956 and March 1965, promoters staged at least seventy-six major concerts to benefit well-known civil rights organizations, causes and leaders, chief among them, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The organizations leading the most effective direct action in a particular year – such as CORE and SNCC during the sit-ins and Freedom Rides and the SCLC and the NAACP when they were at the forefront of the desegregation and voter registration campaigns in Birmingham, Jackson, Mississippi and Selma – received the most largesse from donors.¹³

As Monson's eye-opening research confirms, the most powerful evidence of jazz artists and affiliated writers' commitment to the modern civil rights movement was their

¹² See Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 155-159; 191-192 and 202-204.

¹³ Monson, "Activism and Fund-Raising from Freedom Now to the Freedom Rides" and "Activism and fund-Raising from Birmingham to Black Power," in *Freedom Sounds*, 156; 158-159 and 191-192; 202-204 and 212-215.

consistent willingness to use their prestige and talent to raise money for the movement's flagship organizations. It was their cache as jazz icons that drew the moneyed East Coast white liberal elites to a steady succession of benefit performances from 1956 through 1965. Why were the headliners jazz artists and not gospel or soul music stars at these events? The closing argument here is that Charles Mingus was right. Jazz had become the music the white cultural elite embraced and saw as representing the best of African Americans' many artistic contributions to the fabric of American society. Thus, it made sense for benefit producers to anchor fund-raisers with the best-known names in jazz. They calculated these jazz-loving audiences would support, at least monetarily, the civil rights cause.

This narrative proffered a second component to its thesis at the outset. It was that the critical developments, confrontations, and crises in the unfolding civil rights movement inspired or compelled a select group of jazz artists and allied writers to produce exceptional works which were, in effect, advocacy in favor of the movement. The evidence presented in the preceding chapters – overviews of the most pivotal civil rights battles and biographical summaries of the involved artists and writers as well as their social view – reveals how critical confrontations during the civil rights movement inspired important works from the examined figures. These events were also “moments of truth” for the individuals. One such moment was widespread media coverage of organized white resistance to the Little Rock Nine and other local African American-led efforts to

desegregate schools in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education II*.¹⁴ These unavoidable images triggered outrage in the artists and writers. Prominent figures, such as James Baldwin, committed themselves to racial justice once they saw these direct actions which challenged Jim Crow policies and practices.

Several members of the examined cadre of artists and writers are already well-known for their outspokenness, including James Baldwin, Nat Hentoff, Nina Simone and Amiri Baraka. They continued to comment on social justice issues after the peak years of the modern civil rights movement, which only added to their fame and, among some moderate and conservative political observers, their notoriety. However, an intriguing discovery is that the two most fiery racial justice advocates among the artists, Baraka and Simone, committed themselves to the civil rights movement relatively late in the struggle's pivotal decade. It took urging from her friend Lorraine Hansberry and her dismay and disgust at the terrible toll suffered by activists in the blood-soaked year of 1963 to compel Simone to join the civil rights struggle. Yet, when Simone did so, she did with fierce conviction, never looking back nor regretting the price she had to pay in terms of commercial opportunities lost. Baraka's road to militancy started in 1961 with him being beaten by police officers outside the United Nations while he participated in a demonstration protesting Patrice Lumumba's murder – violence he suffered coincidentally because of an initial protest inside the United Nations Assembly Hall organized by Abbey Lincoln, Rosa Guy and Maya Angelou. The February 1965 murder of Malcolm X

¹⁴ Julian Bond, "With All Deliberate Speed: Brown v. Board of Education," *Indiana Law Journal*: Vol. 90: Iss.4, Article 7 (October 1, 2015), 1681.

completed Baraka's transformation into the harsh-tongued black nationalist/black Marxist he remained until his death in 2014.

Here is James Baldwin's epiphany in 1957. It was not, as one would have expected, provoked by the heart-rending newspaper images seen around the world of the solitary Elizabeth Eckford facing the raging white mob outside Central High School in Little Rock. Baldwin, in Paris, was moved to action after he saw a front-page photograph of the tall, resolute black teenager Dorothy Counts. Counts, who in strikingly similar circumstances to Eckford, had to face a gauntlet of jeering, spitting white students and parents as she walked to the all-white Harding High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Eckford, Daisy Bates, and the Little Rock Nine are etched in civil rights lore. Nevertheless, it was Counts's stoic image that brought Baldwin back to the United States. He became one of the most eloquent denouncers of racism among public intellectuals and was an active participant in many of the civil rights movement's storied campaigns of direct action, marching at the side of the Kings, supporting the NAACP and Medgar Evers in terror-ravaged Mississippi and even defending Malcolm X to alarmed and disapproving liberal white elites.¹⁵

Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes, two titans of not just African American, but American culture, revealed themselves as more moderate voices in the modern civil rights movement. Both refrained from active involvement on the frontlines of the movement's many battlefronts. Their decision to not engage can also be explained by their self-perception and political views. Ellington was a pro-business Republican who viewed

¹⁵ James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*, Raul Peck, ed. (New York: Vintage International, 2017), 12-14 and 37-39.

See also Carol Polsgrove, Chapter Two "Northern Reservations" in *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company), 41-57.

himself as the leading American composer of the Twentieth Century and who had “commanded respect” for his race while most of the leaders of the modern civil rights movement had yet to reach legal adulthood. Hughes likewise saw himself as a stalwart “race man” who had expounded on the beauty of black people and their culture since the days of the Harlem Renaissance. He and Ellington both believed they should have been regarded as honored elders of the movement.

In recounting other figures profiled in this narrative, Melba Liston, the shy but gifted trombonist/arranger, ascends to deserved higher recognition. She was a proponent of cultural Pan Africanism in word and deed. Randy Weston’s landmark African freedom movement works would not have been possible without her contributions. Liston, in addition, took sabbaticals from her long, impressive recording career to teach jazz to students in Jamaica and Los Angeles.

Maya Angelou, in her later years, attained an almost sainted status as one of America’s most beloved writers and poetesses. One cannot help but wonder if opinions of Maya Angelou would sour among white admirers if they knew of her Pan African and black nationalist-rooted beginnings. Angelou’s founding role in the Cultural Association of Women of African Heritage (CAWAH), her friendship with the FBI-surveilled Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach and her fervent support of Malcolm X in his final days might prompt moderate to conservative observers to reconsider their assessment of her.

The Lorillards of the Jazz Inn, George Wein, Nat Hentoff and the founders of the Newport Jazz Festival and finally Iola and Dave Brubeck, all civil rights supporters, played a critical role in popularizing jazz with white upper and middle-class audiences during the 1950s. Their combined agency in transforming jazz into a music to be admired and enjoyed

among whites, who otherwise had limited contact with blacks, heightened the influence of jazz artists when they acted to support the civil rights causes and organizations.

As asserted in the Introduction of this narrative, the most accurate appraisal of the examined cadre of jazz artists and associated writers ensconces them in their social milieu. An accurate assessment recognizes their art has not severed them from their communities or the social, economic and political realities with which they are confronted as members of those communities. To the contrary, their artistic gifts afforded them an extraordinary ability to connect to those communities and express themselves, as individuals and as members of those communities. The late Abbey Lincoln had this to say about her responsibility, as an artist, to leave an authentic record of her experiences through her work: “When everything is finished in a world, the people go to look for what the artists leave. It’s the only thing that we really have in this world...an ability to express ourselves and say, ‘I was here.’”¹⁶

The third and final component of the thesis presented at the beginning of this narrative was the argument that a creative work, which had advocacy as impetus, could also rise to the level of art. The identification of any work as artistically significant is, in the final analysis, subjective. Nonetheless, a plausible measure of a work of advocacy’s artfulness is whether it is enriching, given the consumer has no knowledge of its polemics or despite the propaganda it propagates. To paraphrase Lorraine Hansberry, such works,

¹⁶ Abbey Lincoln, Jazz Profiles from NPR, Sally Placksin, producer.
<http://www.npr.org/jazzprofiles/archive/lincoln.html> [Accessed October 25, 2017].

which pay meticulous attention to the specifics of the human condition, gain a universality that transcends contemporary or past politics.

Most of the critically acclaimed jazz produced during the modern civil rights era from 1955 to 1965 is not “catchy,” i.e., enjoyable to listeners accustomed to straightforward songs with major key choruses and 4/4 rhythm. The genre demands the investment of time and effort to be appreciated. Thus, it can be considered “complex” or “modernist” art. But, that does not mean the music is incapable of communicating deep emotions and profound thought to a receptive audience. Critical listening to more than eighty hours of civil rights-themed jazz music and recorded poetry and the review dozens of essays and books by writers associated with the genre went into the selection of the following works. These songs and literature are proffered as advocacy which meets Lorraine Hansberry’s requirement for significant art: touching upon a universal theme impacting human existence. Excerpts of the identified works have been included as an audio addendum to this narrative. Here is a list that recounts the works of advocacy in artistic expression presented in this narrative that transcend ordinary fare.

Music

“Come Sunday,” (1958) written by Duke Ellington and performed by Mahalia Jackson on Ellington’s Columbia album, *Black, Brown and Beige*. This gospel ballad became the enduring anthem of Christian faith-centered resilience and revitalization that Ellington hoped it would. Mahalia Jackson’s soaring contralto shimmers with painful

memory and deep conviction that victory will come to those who have faith in The Lord and “endureth to the end.”¹⁷

“Freedom Suite,” (1958) by Sonny Rollins from his *Freedom Suite* album. Rollins’s instrumental is an unprecedented tour-de-force. With no piano and just his warm, mahogany toned tenor saxophone and masterful accompaniment by bassist Oscar Pettiford and drummer Max Roach, Rollins mesmerizes the listener with inventive chord progressions, masterful soloing and a fluid arrangement that makes this nineteen-minute opus an engrossing experience.

“Dream Montage/Harlem,” (1958) Langston Hughes supported by Charles Mingus and his Jazz Workshop Ensemble conjure the famous New York City village’s storied past and despairing present. The world-weariness Hughes intones in his flat Midwestern speaking voice generates a poignant tension against Mingus’s urbane post-bop arrangement. Hughes uses self-deprecating humor to describe his waning love life and the troubled community which he calls home. There is blues feeling to Hughes’s delivery which gives voice to Albert Murray’s poignant observation: “where there is bare-faced mockery the depth of resistance goes without saying.”¹⁸

“4th Movement: Kucheza Blues,” (1960) written by Randy Weston and arranged by Melba Liston, from *Uhuru Afrika*. On most of the extended tracks on *Uhuru Afrika*, Weston tried too hard to be profound in his long-envisioned tribute to jazz’s cultural linkage to the African Continent. With “Kucheza Blues,” Weston transcends “fake African

¹⁷ Matthew 24:13, ESV.

¹⁸ Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 10-11

music,” as Mingus dismissed most black jazz artists’ efforts at capturing the feel of the Continent. Instead, Randy Weston filters African influences through hard-charging post-bop. His piano playing is joyful and channels his two jazz keyboard heroes, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. Melba Liston’s horn arrangement is full of unexpected and satisfying chord sequences. She exhibits her trademark generosity by allowing ample space for the many already established and future jazz legends performing on the recording session – including Slide Hampton, Clark Terry, Freddie Hubbard, Yusef Lateef, Gigi Gryce, Ron Carter, George Duvivier, Kenny Burrell and Max Roach – to lay down sizzling solos inspired by Nigerian dance hall music.

“Afro-Blue” by Mongo Santamaria on *Mongo* (1959). This Afro-Latin tribute captured the aspirations and tribulations of African-descended peoples’ quest for freedom and justice on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Santamaria added Cuban percussion elements to the song, which drew the interest and acceptance of the song by African-descended peoples of the Caribbean and South America. West African peoples also embraced “Afro-Blue,” its breeze-like, flowing melody propelled, in counterpoint, by its surging percussion, helped make it a rare jazz standard recognized throughout the African Diaspora.

“In the Red,” lyrics by Abbey Lincoln, music by Max Roach and arrangement by Booker Little, on Lincoln’s *Straight Ahead*. (1961). On “In the Red” Lincoln expresses with biting words and bitter delivery the soul-deadening despair of the black working poor. No song before it captures how not being able to pay the rent or provide a decent standard of living for one’s self and their family erodes self-esteem across both class and color.

“King,” by Duke Ellington, from *My People* (1963). Those familiar with Ellington’s typical last-minute composing for the Emancipation Proclamation-themed musical revue claimed the maestro wanted to capture the energy and hopeful forward momentum of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. With the four-minute, up-tempo swinging instrumental, Ellington leapt into the bright future King envisioned. The song is remarkable in its modernity, anticipating the propulsive “jazz orchestra” arrangements of contemporary big band leader/composers, such as Lincoln Center musical director, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and bassists John Clayton and Christian McBride.

“Alabama,” from *John Coltrane Live at Birdland* (1963). Coltrane’s powerful elegy to the four girls murdered in the Birmingham church bombing both haunts and inspires its listeners. The composition is dirge-like, mournful but resolute. Coltrane’s rich tenor saxophone timbre conveys loss but not defeat. Coltrane’s backing musicians, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on double upright bass and Elvin Jones on drums, metabolize rage into a determination to prevail. Coltrane next establishes a diminuendo with an elegant reprise of the opening melody. “Alabama” emotes a universal longing and love for those who have died that makes it appropriate to be played in tribute to fallen heroes and heroines everywhere.

“Meditations on Integration,” *Charles Mingus: Jazz Workshop Concerts 1964-65*. This twenty-minute long dazzling showcase of Mingus’s reach and depth as composer was mischaracterized for decades. It is being regarded a work of advocacy in artistic expression because the composition’s original title, “Meditations on Integration,” conveys Mingus’s intended theme. The composer/bassist had retitled the song “Praying for Eric.” Eric Dolphy, Mingus’s friend since childhood and an immensely talented saxophonist and

flautist, died of complications from untreated diabetes shortly after he recorded the composition with Mingus in the fall of 1964. Mingus had mixed feelings about the passage of the Civil Rights Act that previous summer. Because he was a gifted child, Mingus been thrust into academic and musical environments where he was the only person of color present. Having experienced cruel mistreatment at the hands of white teachers and classmates, he doubted if whites, even if forced to integrate with blacks, would view African Americans as equals. Although he admired the courage of King and other protesters, Mingus linked “his civil rights as an American citizen to his right to evade the constraints of race and the racialized conceptions of artistry.”¹⁹ He poured his inner misgivings and hopes into an unforgettable sonic statement. Blues, gospel, free jazz and classical motifs all can be heard on “Meditations.” Mingus assembled his finest band for the sessions and concerts that produced this recording. The sextet included Dannie Richmond on drums, pianist Jaki Byard, tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan, trumpeter Johnny Coles and multi-reedist Eric Dolphy. Jazz writer Adam Shatz marveled, “In the first ten minutes alone, the full sextet gives way to ruminative unaccompanied piano; then to a somber duet for piano and bowed bass; then back to unaccompanied piano; and finally, to a sorrowful adagio passage for piano, bass and Dolphy’s flute, before the horn section erupts again with volcanic force.”²⁰

“Four Women,” by Nina Simone and released on *Wild Is the Wind*. (1966). Written by her in 1965, Simone’s somber story-told-in-a-song of how women are often prisoners

¹⁹ Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 147.

²⁰ Shatz, An Argument with Instruments: Charles Mingus,” *The Nation* (September 17, 2013). <https://thenation.com/article-argument-with-instruments-charles-mingus.html> [Accessed January 13, 2018].

of their appearance in a male-dominated world and, further, how skin color defines their destiny is powerful and fitting closing work for the 1955 to 1965 period examined here.

Letters

Works cited earlier in this narrative, such as Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*, Jones/Baraka's *Blues People* and Baldwin's *Fire the Next Time*, are acclaimed works of literature which require no further praise or analysis. However, three works by Langston Hughes, Harlem's "Poet Low-Rate," as he referred to himself in self-mockery, deserve attention. As noted in Chapter One, "Mississippi - 1955," was Hughes's challenge to the entire nation to confront and put a stop to segregationist terrorism after the savage murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. *Ask Your Momma: Twelve Moods for Jazz* (1960). This extended "tone poem" by Hughes was his gift to the new generation of civil rights activists coming to the fore as the 1960s began. The initiative and courage of the young sit-in demonstrators impressed him.²¹ *Twelve Moods for Jazz* brims with Hughes's earthy street humor and wit. He draws upon his solid grasp of the cultural enclaves of the Black Atlantic by including songs such as the "Gospel Cha-Cha." Hughes envisioned *Twelve Moods for Jazz* as a jazz musical. Interspersed between the poems, which double as song lyrics, are Hughes's stage directions and recommendations on the genre and tempo of music that should accompany the poetry-powered libretto. The more militant writers of the day, such as LeRoi Jones and the Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, derided the work as "polite

²¹ Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Volume II, 329-331.

protest,”²² but *Ask Your Mama* won its moment in the sun over thirty-eight years later. It debuted at Carnegie Hall in 2009, with opera star Jessye Norman headlining the cast.²³

In 1964, in an unpublished work, simply entitled “Draft Ideas,” Hughes expressed his opinion that the poet sacrifices his career and perhaps his gift when he chooses to take sides in political conflicts. Yet, Hughes believed it was a sacrifice he had to make since he lived in times fraught with racial and political unrest. In the brief essay, Hughes proclaimed himself a peer to the African poets as well as his fellow American writers:

Politics in any country in the world is dangerous. For the poet, politics in any country better be disguised as poetry...Politics can be the graveyard of the poet. And poetry can be his only resurrection. Ask Césaire. He knows. Perhaps not consciously – but in the soul of his writing he knows. The Negritudinous Senghor, the Caribbean-esque Guillen, the American me, are regional poets of genuine values and authentic values.²⁴

In the end, why is it important that jazz artists and allied writers receive due recognition for their trove of racial justice-themed works? It is because jazz itself is one of the most compelling cultural art forms to emerge from the United States in the Twentieth Century. Further, the nation’s most persecuted minority during the Twentieth Century created it, synthesizing it from African musical memory, European military bands and the black field hand work songs and Irish-Scottish reels that became the blues. Jazz represents the ideals of the American republic’s still-unrealized promise. Jazz, at its best, is rooted in an authentic democracy of people working together as equals to produce lush, harmonic and adventurous music. Yet, within its structure, jazz allows the soloist the freedom to

²² Ibid., 332.

²³ Jeff Lunden, “Ask Your Mama: A Music and Poetry Premiere,” *NPR Morning Edition* Feature (March 16, 2009).

²⁴ Langston Hughes, “Draft Ideas,” December 3, 1964, the Langston Hughes Papers. Yale University.

compete with other instrumentalists. One is reminded of the famous head-cutting sessions – the genre’s term for fierce one-on-one challenges to demonstrate superior virtuosity – in Kansas City night clubs that produced such jazz icons as Charlie Parker and Lester Young. The freedom to pursue individual excellence, in turn, enriches and adds to the art form. Ralph Ellison’s observation holds true: the constructive competition of jazz and the synergy it generates among its artists are instructive models for those who still seek to realize the best possible American society for its citizens.²⁵

The public intellectual and social activist the world most identifies with the modern American “Freedom Movement” as he often called it, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was not an enthusiastic jazz fan. Yet, by late 1964, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, he had come to realize the global cultural influence of the music. The producers of the first Berlin Jazz Festival had asked King to write and present introductory remarks for the opening for the event, whose Cold War significance was heightened because it was being staged in West Berlin not far from the heavily guarded Berlin Wall. There are no records or photographs of King delivering his remarks in person. However, the organizers included his foreword, “Humanity and the Importance of Jazz,” in the festival program, dated September 24, 1964. King shared these thoughts in his commentary:

Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life’s difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the harshest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph. Modern jazz has continued in this tradition, singing the songs of a more complicated urban existence. Much of the power of our Freedom Movement has come through this music. It has strengthened us with its

²⁵ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 197-198.

sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies when spirits were down. This is triumphant music.²⁶

Would King have lavished such praise on jazz in 1955? It is a fair question to ask. Perhaps, his many rewarding encounters with jazz musicians and writers who headlined fundraisers for him changed his views. It is also possible that these artists, some of whom marched side-by-side with him during some of the movement's most dangerous campaigns, had earned his respect by 1964. In the end, King's comments acknowledge jazz artists had played an intangible but positive role in advancing support for the same personal freedom their music epitomized. For the jazz artists and affiliated writers who rose to acclaim during the cauldron years of the civil rights movement – a movement which defined America's domestic politics in the 20th century and reverberates to this day – to not receive full historical acknowledgement of their contributions to the fight for racial justice is itself unjust. It has been the aim of this narrative to play a part, even if it is small, in remedying this injustice.

²⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. "Humanity and the Importance of Jazz," foreword, *Berliner Jazztage* (Berlin Jazz Festival) Programme, September 24, 1964.

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