

“CASTLES MADE OF SAND”:
MUSICIANS WITH COMPLEX RACIAL IDENTIFICATIONS IN MID-TWENTIETH
CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIETY

by

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To my grandparents and parents, for the values of love and empathy they passed on, the rich cultures and history to which they introduced me, for modeling the beauty of storytelling, and for the encouragement always to question.

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-twentieth century, musicians with complex racial identifications due to family backgrounds of multiple ethnicities and apparent racial ambiguity did not fit neatly into the existing racial power structure. As time progressed, the rising power of social movements, especially the Civil Rights and Black Power movements as well as an entertainment market of increasing complexity and reach, gave these musicians increased opportunities to wield their complexity as a tool for more expansive artistic expression and social critique. They also struggled, however, with the pressures that came with the exoticization and commodification of their personas. How these musicians dealt with these forces is suggestive about transformations in the racial order and entertainment market of the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

When Jimi Hendrix stepped on the stage of pop culture history in summer 1967 at the Monterey Pop Festival, he could not have known the extent to which his legendary, provocative 40-minute set had been prefigured. And certainly the interracial but predominantly white audience of young and optimistic concertgoers did not understand that their revolutionary moment in culture was doomed to reinforce the very forces they were attempting to rebel against. In that moment, Hendrix would play a blues standard with two white British musicians who could keep up with him. He would kid about kissing his bassist. He would tell the crowd he would play “the English and American combined anthem together,” and then launch into Chip Taylor’s “Wild Thing.” For a brief moment, performers and crowd collectively unleashed the promise of a sensual and dangerous utopia. The stultifying racial, sexual and mass consumerist order seemed precarious. But fifty years later, Hendrix would be long dead, and a cardboard cutout of the man burning his guitar on that stage would haunt an exhibit at the Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville where this author works for \$9.50 per hour. But Hendrix was, in that moment, for that crowd, the embodiment of a hope to overcome divisions fostered by racism in American society and blow up the spiritually deadly threat of a mass consumer society built on violence and domination. That it was doomed to fail, that divisions along the lines of race would intensify in the next 50 years, that images of

Hendrix's body would be commodified in a museum that costs an adult \$24 to peruse, did not matter then. There is a history behind that moment, in the story that led to it, and in the period that followed it that deserves to be reconstructed. The story hints at what went wrong, but it contains in it the germ of possibility, what philosopher Walter Benjamin called a "weak messianic power."¹

In contemporary American popular culture and politics, a frequent topic of debate is cultural appropriation, the idea that people of a dominant group adopt cultural practices that originate from the culture of people of an exploited and marginalized group. These debates have often been illuminating, drawing attention to the role of cultures in constructing and maintaining systems of hierarchy. That these debates have become common features of popular discourse and not limited to the pages of inaccessible cultural theory journals is a development worthy of celebration.

Nonetheless, there can be a troubling racial essentialism implicit in many of the arguments made in these debates by those critiquing instances of cultural appropriation, while many who mount defenses of cultural appropriation glibly deny the consequences and harm associated with cultural appropriation's ubiquity as a practice. Reactionary thinkers weaponize a colorblind pose to flatten out differences in experience and criticize wells of anger, outrage and hurt that have accumulated because of perpetual exploitation, the expropriation of cultural commodities, and the maintenance of power hierarchies.

This impasse has helped the American political and economic elite to avoid

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Live at Monterey*, recorded June 18, 1967, UMe B0009843-02, 2007, CD; *Jimi Hendrix: From Nashville to Woodstock*, Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum, Nashville, Tennessee.

accountability for crises such as endless war, economic disaster, widening wealth inequality, and the encroaching threat of climate change. Even so, in an era of neoliberal group identity formations structured through the consumption of culture, clashing perspectives along the fault lines of race, gender, disability and other identity formations have often disrupted potential bonds of solidarity among peoples experiencing linked systems of domination. The seeming impossibility of a resolution to these debates can be linked to the particular boundaries on ideological thought and political actualization in the United States, as well as mass forgetting and historical distortion.

Out of these problems, historians have an exciting opportunity to engage in the history of popular culture with both sophistication and purpose, drawing out forgotten complexities of the past and catalyzing the formation of new connections between peoples. With this in mind, I have determined that the history of American musicians with complex racial identifications in the mid-twentieth century is a topic ripe for exploration. Musicians in the mass entertainment market were highly visible. Accordingly, they left behind of a rich record of documentation and they have the accessibility that makes their stories a potentially engaging teaching tool.

People assigned to different racial categories by systemic racism have made American music a sphere of revealing cultural exchange by continuously adapting musical ideas that originated with people from other parts of the racial order, transgressing racial dividing lines and sometimes reinforcing them. In the middle twentieth century, as exploding consumerism coexisted with intense Cold War anxieties and idealistic struggles to challenge foundational hierarchies of American society, musicians, record producers, record executives, advertisers, critics, listeners, and other

participants in the music industry found these cultural exchanges to be stimulating, lucrative, and fraught. Examining the racial identifications of people involved in mass music culture can offer insights into the mass dynamics of racism and the aspirations of individuals during this period of startling change and complexity.

In the post-war mass media industry rooted in cosmopolitan urban centers, musicians from disparate backgrounds leveraged racial complexity to construct public personas that allowed them a broader range of musical and economic freedom, as well as the ability to lob social critiques at the absurdities and injustices of the racial order. In turn, music industry participants, such as marketers, executives, journalists and publishers saw racial complexity and transgression as a flash point of exoticism and controversy, creating opportunities to generate profits. In this respect, musicians had vested interests in playing along, even as their artistic commitments, economic interests, and political principles sometimes generated adversarial relationships between musicians and those who sought to profit from their music and images. Audiences, meanwhile, had varying reactions. Younger and more rebellious white critics and observers tended to flock to racially complex musicians as representatives of a utopian racial idealism. More reactionary white observers saw racial complexity as a threat and promoted tamer alternatives. Meanwhile, Black audiences and critics sometimes looked upon musicians who leveraged racial complexity as sell-outs, especially in the context of the emerging ideas of Black Power. These dynamics can serve as an accessible way to illustrate complex and often bewildering battles over racial politics for a mass audience interested in audio-visual content as well as the written record.

This study will trace these forces through the lives of specific musicians with complex racial identifications and the historical spaces they occupied. First, however, a topic of this complexity requires a thorough grounding in the historiography of racial construction and the linked history of racial identity formation through the culture industry. As such, in my first chapter I will outline historical literature about how race was legally, socially, politically and culturally constructed throughout American history before turning to examine the music industry's role in the construction of racial ideology more specifically. In chapter two, I will tell the stories of the formative years of two musicians, Lena Horne and Charles Mingus, and how they fit their complex racial identifications into the homogenizing Jim Crow racial order promulgated in American popular culture during the years of the Great Depression and World War II. Chapter three will follow Horne and Mingus' professional, political and personal lives in the context of a booming post-war mass media market that opened new opportunities of expression for them while simultaneously introducing new pressures on them for exotic self-spectacle as well as political solidarity. Meanwhile, the young musicians Charles Lloyd and Jimi Hendrix experienced their formative years in this milieu, giving them previously unknown opportunities for mobility and artistic creation while simultaneously presenting them with the obstacles associated with a complicated world rife with social conflict. Chapter four explores how each of these musicians attempted to navigate the contradictory forces of the rise of popular ethnic politics and countercultural racial utopianism after 1965, both of which were quickly commodified. It will also include a brief examination of the career of the jazz musician Keith Jarrett, a white pianist who

latched on to the aesthetic markers of the moment to individualistically achieve maximum expressive license, no matter whose cultural turf he was appropriating.

Together, these stories suggest that the category of race is both a powerfully resonant force as well as a historically contingent one. Its historical expressions and uses deserve an intensely critical examination for the boundaries and traps it sets as well as its potential, when its victims turn the evil of racism on its head, for liberationist politics. A vital part of navigating these forces are examining their articulations in popular culture both as an entertainment industry and as communities of artistic expression.

CHAPTER I: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF RACIAL CONSTRUCTION, SUBJECTIVE RACIAL COMPLEXITY, AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

A history of musicians with complex racial identifications operating in a market context requires engagement with separate but overlapping historiographies of twentieth century American history. These historiographies establish the paradigms and definitions necessary to conduct a study of these musicians in popular culture. There are two separate but interconnected through lines of historiography that inform my work: literature about the legal, ideological and cultural construction of race in American society, and histories that explore racial ideology in the more specific context of the American music and culture industry.¹

Histories that detail how race was legally and culturally constructed in the United States show its definition was unstable. How people identified themselves, how their neighbors and bosses defined them, and how the government classified them varied by place and era. Systems of racial classification, since their emergence as a prominent mode of social organization, have been anything but constant, yet they have stratified

¹ Prior studies that touched on my topic either have either dealt with it in brief while focusing on other questions, or been more narrowly focused biographies. For the first variety, see Charles L. Hughes, *Country-Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); or Ann Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2017). For the second, see Ernest Aaron Horton, "Charles Mingus and the Paradoxical Aspects of Race as Reflected in His Life and Music," (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2007); or James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*, (New York: Atria Books, 2009).

people and valorized whiteness since their invention. Legal and cultural frameworks had to be adaptable in order to maintain a workable white supremacist hierarchy that functioned economically, politically, and culturally. A web of legal, “scientific,” social and cultural ideas determined the race of individuals, though as recent works of history suggest, individuals who could plausibly “pass” as one race or another had significant control over how they were perceived by others. When “one-drop rules,” which decreed that persons with small amounts of African ancestry were to be legally classified as Black, became increasingly common in American legal frameworks, they contributed to American cultural ideas of race. Nonetheless, people with complex racial identifications still functioned within American society, exposing the absurdity of the logic underlying systems of racial categorizations. The inherent complexity of this history belies essentialist logics of race, which have nonetheless held tremendous sway over Americans’ ideological worlds.²

² Derrick Bell, *Race, Racism and American Law*, (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1973); Charles Chesnutt, “What Is a White Man?” *Independent* 41, (May 30, 1889); W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177; Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181, (1990), 95-118; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914* (New York and others: Harper & Row, 1971); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963); Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 1991); Daniel Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White*, (New York: Penguin, 2011); Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, (New York: Alfred A.

The reality that these essentialist ideas which ascribed racial difference to biological determinism were so culturally influential demands familiarity with how racialized classification worked in practice. This is true in the world of popular music, which developed based on transformations in technology, markets, cultural ideologies emanating from the academy, and musical innovations. The complexity of these overlapping forces could be bewildering, but some historical works have helped to define their specifics in mid-twentieth century popular culture. Historians and other cultural critics have described dynamics of popular music involving race, market structures, and ideologies that operated within the mass market infrastructure.

Together, these histories paint a picture of the space my study will operate within: by the mid-twentieth century, legal frameworks of race centered on “one-drop rules” had guided white elites to organize American society along racially stratified lines. People of all classes, however, contributed to a constant negotiation of the definitions of race, and helped shape where people of different ethnicities fit into a broader racial spectrum. Individuals’ specific histories defied the seeming simplicity of the one-drop framework. At the same time, a mass music market had emerged which operated primarily out of urban spaces but reached people all over the country. This market involved a complex web of musicians, label owners, studio owners, venue owners, radio DJs, advertisers, publishers and journalists. The people who made up this industry sold and classified music in a racialized way that both reflected and influenced popular discourses about

Knopf, 1956); William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race In America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

race. At times, these discourses advanced an integrationist framework around race, but essentialist notions that assigned a color to music shaped this market. These works inform my contention that musicians with complex racial identifications leveraged this complexity within the market as license for artistic exploration and a tool to advance their various interests even as it also made them vulnerable to exploitation as exotic objects.

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While race is primarily constructed socially and culturally, the different laws of the United States have had an important role in how race was defined, varying by time and place, revealing race's fictive nature, and influencing the active workings of race. Legal scholars and historians have shown that judges and juries' efforts to place racially ambiguous litigants into mutable categories of race were dependent on unreliable assessments of litigants' physical characteristics. Awareness of the absurdist nature of the United States' amalgamation of laws defining race dates at least as far back as 1889, when the author and lawyer Charles Chesnutt, a Black man who was fair skinned enough to pass as white, wrote the essay "What is a White Man?" and it was published in *The Independent*. In the essay, Chesnutt compared the laws determining race in a handful of states, describing how some states like Mississippi and Michigan defined whiteness as having less than one fourth "Negro blood," others like Louisiana had defined whiteness as having less than one eighth "Negro blood." He noted that states like South Carolina with especially large Black populations often had the least strict laws governing race, something he posited may have been developed in order to preserve a large enough white

minority to maintain white supremacy. He also detailed how many states employed complex definitions in law such as “quadroons” and “mulattoes,” with variable legal implications. W.E.B. DuBois also contributed to this line of inquiry with his groundbreaking 1935 work, *Black Reconstruction*. In it, he described how in the Reconstruction era, although elite whites looked down on poor whites, and would describe them pejoratively as showing signs of having Negro blood, they considered the category of whiteness important in preventing class solidarity among poor Blacks and whites. According to DuBois, even some white elites had it in their interest to make the legal categorization of whiteness broad in order to forego a loss of status if their own racial histories were investigated. Accusations of having Negro blood were a feared rhetorical tool that sometimes led to violence. DuBois’ line of analysis that rooted the development of legal racial definitions in class conflict became commonplace by the 1970s, appearing in the works of scholars like Edmund S. Morgan, who examined the origins of slavery in colonial Virginia, and Eric Foner, who wrote several books that built on DuBois’ analysis. Most of these historians, unlike Chesnut, did not focus on how the fictive nature of race as determined by law affected people on the margins of racial classifications.³

Despite the early attention of Chesnut, a lawyer himself, legal studies of how race has been constructed did not flourish until after the development of the critical race theory tradition marked by the 1973 publication of legal scholar Derrick Bell’s *Race, Racism and American Law*, which was among the first studies to focus on racism as a

³ Chesnut, “What Is a White Man?”; DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 26-27, 158; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Foner, *Reconstructio*; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*

distinct entity to be studied in relation to law as its own force, and not merely within the frameworks of constitutional law, civil liberties, or civil rights. This focus on racism within law led to studies of how race was constructed in law, a line of inquiry that blossomed in the 1990s. These works argued that law played a significant role in establishing racial definitions, but they also supported the notion that race was primarily a cultural and social construction that law influenced and interacted with but did not solely define. Works such as Cheryl Harris' article contending that whiteness should be understood as a kind of property began to detail a legal history of racial categorization that both described the case law that defined race as well as examined the material implications of these cases. Harris described how property rights in American law were contingent on whiteness, and this developed whiteness into a kind of social property codified in law.⁴

Several works of legal scholars examined trials involving racially ambiguous litigants, revealing important legal histories of racial construction. The work of one scholar, Ian Haney López, was instrumental in popularizing the oft-repeated phrase that “race is socially constructed” within legal studies. Not only did Haney López argue in his works that race was socially constructed, he also contended that law, by determining the legality of intermarriage, helped to create the physical characteristics commonly used to define race, and acted as a legitimizing force for racial stratification. Another important work, Ariela Gross' “Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth Century South,” maintained that the lack of consensus between written law,

⁴ Bell, *Race, Racism and American Law*; Harris, “Whiteness as Property”; A. Leon Higginbotham, review of *Race, Racism and American Law*, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 122, No. 4 (1974), 1044-1069.

the insistence of many judges that racial definition was a matter of common sense, and a variety of community beliefs made the performance of whiteness the essential factor in determining race, a performance that included participation in the legal system. She demonstrated in these cases that there was significant debate over whether race should be “scientifically” determined or determined by performance understood through “common sense,” and that these cases betrayed considerable anxieties among white southerners about the possibility of racial ambiguity undermining the white supremacist southern social order.⁵

Other legal historians have placed the law at the center of their work, but looked well beyond the courtroom to examine concrete social and cultural consequences of law. Daniel Sharfstein, a legal historian from the law tradition, has significantly contributed to this discourse by arguing that not only do court records reveal that race was socially constructed, but that participants in these court battles in the twentieth century *understood* race was socially constructed and therefore negotiable. He maintained that this understanding of race’s social construction helped lead to the proliferation of one-drop rule laws in the twentieth century in an attempt to eradicate racial ambiguity. Peggy Pascoe, who, unlike most scholars of the legal construction of race, came from historical training, has contributed significantly to this corpus by examining the legacies of American case law and tracking how it influenced the development of law and ideology in the twentieth century. Pascoe has argued that in law in the twentieth century, the slow

⁵ Ian F. Haney López, “The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 29, no. 1 (1994); Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*; Ariela Gross, “Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth Century South,” *Yale Law Journal* 108, no. 1 (1998).

repudiation of scientific racism gave way to the adoption of what she termed “modernist racial ideology,” which held that the eradication of racism depends on the deliberate nonrecognition of race. This ideology, Pascoe maintained, has held as much influence in the twentieth century as what she terms racialism (a combination of scientific and culturally determined racial ideologies) did in the nineteenth. Pascoe first made this argument in the 1990s, but she extended her line of analysis much further in her recent book, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, which posited that miscegenation laws were at the heart of elite enforcement of segregation, the creation of modern racial categories, and the maintenance of white supremacy. Pascoe expanded her argument in her monograph to complicate the polarized Black-white narrative that has traditionally dominated accounts of miscegenation laws by thoroughly exploring miscegenation laws in the Western United States, and examining cases involving people of Asian or Latin descent.⁶

Despite legal historians emphasizing the law’s importance, none claimed that the function of race was solely, or even primarily, constructed by law. Instead, their works suggest that cultural and intellectual histories are vital avenues for understanding how race has shaped American societies over time. In American historiography, prior to DuBois’ work, historians’ ideas about race reflected dominant societal mores, taking race

⁶ Daniel Sharfstein, “The Secret History of Race in the United States,” *Yale Law Journal* 112, no. 6 (2003). Sharfstein has further developed this contention in an article and a book, both setting out to demonstrate that even as early as the colonial era, some people, while they were familiar with the one-drop rule, recognized that it was socially constructed and flouted it: “Crossing the Color Line: Racial Migration and the One Drop Rule, 1600-1860,” *Minnesota Law Review* 91, no. 3 (2007), and *The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White*, (New York: Penguin, 2011); Peggy Pascoe, “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-Century America,” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009);

as a natural given and placing whiteness on top of a racial hierarchy. These ideas are best represented in the work of the Dunning school, which helped to define Americans' perceptions of Reconstruction, and Ulrich B. Phillips' work on slavery and race. Other historians, including C. Vann Woodward and Oscar and Mary F. Hanlin, began to analyze the function of racial hierarchy in constructing and maintaining political and economic systems from colonial history to the early twentieth century. They did this adeptly and without a belief in biological determinism, but they did not make racial categorization the focus of their work, focusing on how it was used rather than how it was constructed.⁷

Starting in the 1950s, however, historians began questioning the origins of modern racial categories in the United States, giving rise to a historical consciousness of race as a constructed system of social relations. Kenneth Stampp's seminal *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* was focused on rebutting the earlier assertion by Ulrich B. Phillips that slavery was benign and unprofitable, and detailed slavery's brutality and profitability. A sub-argument of the book, however, was that racial classification was entirely arbitrary, an argument Stampp overstated by contesting that "Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less," an argument that downplays the existence of Black cultures. Other works were more focused

⁷ For representative examples of the Dunning school, see William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1907) and J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, (New York: Columbia University, 1914). For Ulrich B. Phillips' most famous work see Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929). C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); Oscar and Mary F. Hanlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1950), 208-209.

on the history of racial categorization itself. In 1960, the University of Chicago Press published William Stanton's *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Towards Race in America, 1815-59*. In it, Stanton described the debate among scientists of racial classification in nineteenth century America, detailing their fierce disagreements about how, exactly, race should be classified, and suggesting that even among people who took Black inferiority for granted, there was no unified definition of race. He also pointed to the ways the opinion of race scientists influenced American public opinion. Two years after Stanton's book, Thomas F. Gossett's study *Race: The History of an Idea in America* was published. Gossett, though his academic training was in English, wrote a thorough intellectual history that tracked ideas of race in American letters, as well as social science and politics. The lengthy book, which covered several centuries of American history and was long on description and short on exposition, had a necessarily broad argument that properly respected a historicized view of each time and place: The dynamics of racism were distinct in America from other times and places in the world, and the ways racist ideas were deployed depended on their particular historical context. Furthermore, Gossett tentatively argued, "before the eighteenth century physical differences among people were so rarely referred to as a matter of importance that something of a case can be made for the proposition that race consciousness is largely a modern phenomenon." Later in the book, he argued, "By a little judicious tampering, the historians and political scientists could adapt racial theory to the needs of the moment," and "The fact that race has no precise meaning has made it a powerful tool for the most diverse purposes."⁸

⁸ Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, vii; Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots*; Gossett, *Race*, 3, 117-118.

By the late 1960s, the idea that race was a creation of social relations was beginning to be taken for granted within historiography, and race became an ever-more frequent mode of analysis, especially through the framework of “attitudes.” No doubt this academic interest was influenced by the growing prominence of racial discourse linked with the social movements that also affected the musicians I write about. Winthrop D. Jordan’s *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* in one section described how Anglo-Americans developed the framework of one-drop rules, which treated “mulattoes” largely the same as Negroes and subjected them to racialized slavery. According to Jordan, racial classification was practically constructed by appearance, though a spattering of laws and rules were proposed to establish definitions. George Fredrickson also contributed to this line of analysis in his book *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny*, which found an increasing tendency in whites over time to believe in the essential inferiority of Negroes, even among whites who “resisted its full implications.” One slightly later work, Joel Williamson’s *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, went beyond this framework of “attitudes” to delve into the psychology of Southern whites, arguing that psychosexual fears of miscegenation were a motivating factor in the rise of segregationist politics in the South.⁹

Some scholars criticized the focus on race as an ontological category of its own. In an influential 1982 essay, Barbara J. Fields critiqued the attitudinal line of analysis to examinations of race. Elevating race to a similar plane of analysis as class, Fields argued,

⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 167-179; Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, xii, 3; Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*.

resulted in circular, transhistorical logic that downplayed or ignored objective material conditions. Race, being entirely ideologically and historically constructed, she argued, could not provide a sufficient lens with which to examine history over broad swaths of time or space. Unlike class, she contended, race had no objective foundation. In an essay with a similar theme from 1990, Fields argued explicitly that academically studying racism as a distinct category separate from historical contingencies, especially class, reproduced racism by accepting race as a category, and that despite the best intentions of authors of those kinds of studies, preserved the essentialist logic those authors professed to abhor. According to her, there was no way for scholars to accept race as having a “life of its own” without reinforcing racist discourse.¹⁰

In the 1990s and 2000s, however, a group of scholars historians associated with a school known as “whiteness studies” reasserted the importance of race as a distinct category in American history, seeking to examine how whiteness was constructed across time and place. Scholars in this school sought to upend the study of only “Black history,” or “history” without a critical take on “white history,” as well as examine how whiteness disrupted the potential for Black-white class solidarity. Two of the most important works in this school were David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* and Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Roediger’s monograph proposed that European Americans of a lower class status than the monied elite came to identify themselves as white in opposition to the related concepts of Blackness and slavery.

¹⁰ Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” 143-177; Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” 95-118.

Roediger made Irish-Americans the focus of this work, arguing that their experience of discrimination was so severe that it was not clear in the nineteenth century that they were considered white by other whites in American society. In a psychologically-based argument, Roediger also contended that white Americans came to see Blacks as manifestations of their uninhibited selves, a notion that gave rise to blackface entertainment and minstrelsy. Roediger also went out of his way to criticize Fields' arguments as representative of traditional Marxist class reductionism in his introduction, maintaining that Fields' view sometimes contradicts itself, de-emphasizes events that cannot be attributed to class alone, and imagines white workers as dupes of elite racist theories rather than active participants in the creation of race and racism. Jacobson's work, based on images and representations and not concrete social relations, took a longer view than Roediger's, and focused on how other Americans perceived European immigrants. Jacobson argued that Americans' conceptions of race moved from one of a Black-white dichotomy to one of a differentiated whiteness during a period of mass immigration, and then back to a dichotomized Black-white view that incorporated a greater range of ethnic groups than the earliest conceptions of a Black-white dichotomy. Fields and others have forcefully criticized whiteness studies, alleging that it tends to apply transhistorical analysis, obscure the malignant nature of racism by applying vocabulary that suggests race could benignly exist without racism, and too often ignore actual social relations in place of transhistorical "attitudes" and "mentalities."¹¹

¹¹ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Barbara J. Fields, "Whiteness, Racism, and Identity," *International Labor and Working Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 48-56; Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 3-32. For a more tempered critique of whiteness studies, see Peter Kolchin,

In recent years, works that have examined racially ambiguous people in the United States have tended to avoid this contentious debate, applying examinations of actual social relations while applying the methods of cultural history often employed by whiteness scholars to productive results. The aforementioned book by Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, succeeded in this manner. So has Allyson Hobbs' *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, which argued that passing often resulted in material benefits for African Americans, from escape from slavery to middle class lifestyles, but also that passing was experienced by individuals and communities as a loss: of community, of relationships, of a certain kind of sustaining identity. This is not to say Hobbs ignored class relationships; indeed, they were often central to her analysis, and passing was most often undertaken in response to material concerns. Hobbs also introduced modes of analysis from gender studies, but without falling into an excesses of psychoanalysis that sometimes characterized the work of historians such as Joel Williamson, who also used gendered concepts as motivating factors for people's actions. George Lipsitz, who is associated with the whiteness studies school but has managed to stay out of anything but the footnotes of the contentious debates over that school, has also contributed fine work on race, class, and music in the form of his biography of Johnny Otis, a son of Greek immigrants who became "Black by persuasion," to use Otis' term, and a central figure in the history of Rhythm & Blues. In it, Lipsitz's central thesis did not venture far beyond the hagiographic contention that Otis created "new communities and new forms of consciousness" through performance, but Otis' life is certainly

"Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2001): 154-173.

illuminates certain aspects of the complicated class and racial dynamics involved in the creation of American folk and popular music.¹²

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The histories of racial politics and music in America are inextricably linked together in both the popular imagination and the historical record, in part due to the hyper-visible roles of African Americans as both subjects and creators within American popular music for more than a century. Despite the closeness of the subjects, only since the 1960s have historians tackled the subjects in tandem due to their past bias towards written evidence and pervasive racism within the field itself. Since the Civil Rights era, scholars have produced a rich and complex body of literature about these interrelated subjects. Historians, journalists, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists have all written useful histories of these subjects, which has made the field complex and full of varying methodologies. Nonetheless, a survey of historical literature about racial politics and music reveals these works have evolved in a distinct pattern since this kind of history began to be written.

This evolution was shaped by changes in these histories' methodologies and ideologies for understanding race and popular music. The handful of innovators had much in common with other scholars in the New Social History, focusing on the

¹² Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*; Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2014); George Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse: The Johnny Otis Story*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xviii.

relationship of music to ordinary people and looking to evidence from their lives. Because music is an aural medium, they were required to be inventive in their use of sources, but they grew their work out of the textual analysis that had long characterized historical and musicological analysis. Their ideological and intellectual frameworks were closely related to, and sometimes directly inspired by, the social movements that had rocked the United States. These scholars' closeness to popular consciousness and experiences had both advantages and pitfalls, however, in that they spent little time challenging the categories of race and genre they inherited, and like much of the popular discourse they used as a departure point, their analyses of gender in the history they wrote was either shallow or nonexistent.¹³

Next came a wave of scholars with more in common with other cultural historians of the 1970s and 1980s; they expanded the kinds of sources used for writing music history and thickened their descriptions of music and musical cultures. They did not, however, do much to challenge the conceptual categories of race, gender and genre their predecessors had used. These scholars paid closer attention to aural and visual evidence, and some also expanded the theoretical frameworks they used to approach their sources. Their projects were more about deepening understanding of the relationship between music and race rather than a conceptual reformation of established categories. These scholars were successful in their quest to expand the historical record and ways of

¹³ Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*, (New York: Norton, 1979); LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (New York: William Morrow, 1963); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music/American Music*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1979); Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962); Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

understanding it. Analyses of gender in relationship to their topics were still notably underdeveloped, however, and the abstract theorizing that dominated much of their writing sometimes undermined their comprehensibility.¹⁴

More recent works attempted to challenge established conceptual categories and re-center narrative storytelling, though they took advantage of the tools taken up by earlier cultural historians, such as analysis of audio-visual evidence and an interdisciplinary openness. In many ways, these works acted as syntheses of earlier approaches even while they reformulated or challenged accepted boundaries and categories. These scholars displayed an especially well-developed consciousness of popular as well as scholarly metanarratives — the overarching stories told about race, music and society in both the academy and in popular and commercial forums. A handful of these scholars also displayed a greater consideration for questions of gender, and the way sexism had skewed interpretations of the historical record. Together, the waves of music scholarship created from the 1960s to the present have constructed a rich but still incomplete body of knowledge.¹⁵

¹⁴ William Barlow, *Looking up at Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York: Free Press, 1994); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History of the Mississippi Delta*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982); Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Charles L. Hughes, *Country-Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Ann Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in*

The early social historians of racial politics and music were not the first scholars to tackle the relationship between racial politics and music. Anthropologists, folklorists and ethnomusicologists (including important figures like John Lomax) had written about the intertwined topics, but they rarely applied a historical approach to the music's past, and their work was often shaded by their racism. In the 1960s, however, in the midst of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, authors inspired by these movements began to challenge both the methods and conclusions of these earlier studies. One key text for this wave of historical studies was LeRoi Jones' *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. Jones was well-known as a poet, playwright and activist, but *Blues People* demonstrated his ability as a scholar and shaped the contours of much of the popular and academic conceptions of Black music that came after it. Building on the work of the anthropologist Melville Herskovits, and countering the idea that African culture had been erased after enslaved people were brought to America, he argued that musical characteristics of African cultures had a persistent influence on Black music. Although Herskovits (and others, including W.E.B. DuBois) had made similar arguments before him, Jones was the first to trace the evolutions and continuities of Black music in a historical narrative that tied the music to the broader history of Black people in America. In his telling, Black music in its many forms functioned as an essential means for Black people to negotiate what he characterized as the oppositional value systems of African and European cultures and the persistent oppression of African Americans by whites. The

American Music, (New York: HarperCollins, 2017); Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

result of this, he argued, was a distinct but evolutionary African-American musical culture.¹⁶

Jones' book was a pathbreaking effort, but its closeness to popular discourse in the Civil Rights era proved to be a double-edged sword in the ways it guided his interpretation, and the book mostly lacked consideration of gender's role in the history of racial politics and music. When the book was released, Jones was beginning his ideological journey into a particularly intense vision of Black Nationalism. This historical context for his work helps to explain his sometimes essentialist accounting of racial cultures. Jones, who was not constrained by the disciplinary bounds of the academic history of the time, made innovative use of recordings in his interpretations of racial politics and music. But while he demonstrated a discerning ear in his writing, his opinions on aural qualities of the music demonstrated a higher degree of subjectivity than his textual analyses of lyrical themes. One final issue of the book is his relative neglect of gender as a necessarily ever-present framework by which to consider the history of racial politics and music. His use of gender as a category of analysis is mostly absent from the book save for some perceptive remarks about the influence of gender roles in the predomination of women in urban, "classic blues" settings vis a vis the male-dominated "country blues."¹⁷

The ethic of the New Social History, a wave of historical studies employing a bottom-up approach inspired by the global social movements of the 1960s and 1970s,

¹⁶ Jones, *Blues People*; W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," in *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903); Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941).

¹⁷ LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

also led to new evaluations of the blackface minstrel tradition in the history of racial politics and music. Hans Nathan's biography of Dan Emmett, the author of the song "Dixie" and the pioneer of the blackface minstrel group, was artfully intertwined with a history of the birth of blackface minstrelsy. Nathan tracked the rise of stereotypes of African Americans as stage characters in England in the late eighteenth century through their popularization on American stages between 1815 and 1835. In America, Emmett describes how two archetypal characters, Zip Coon and Jim Crow, emerged from a complex combination of close imitation of African Americans by whites and dehumanizing exaggeration. Nonetheless, he argued that genuine engagement with African-American culture on the part of whites was at the core of uniquely and originally American music, and although he described the dehumanizing and insulting imagery aimed at African Americans, he prioritized his portrayal of Emmett and other early blackface minstrels as humble but heroic innovators of a distinctly American music. Later, Robert Toll took on a broader survey of blackface minstrelsy, one that was much more critical of its consequences. In it, he argued that minstrelsy developed a national folklore aimed at the interests of the white common man, one that vigorously lampooned aristocracy and spoke to a desire for a certain kind of white egalitarianism even as it degraded African Americans, foreigners, and progressive causes such as women's rights.¹⁸

These books helped to elevate blackface minstrelsy as a historical phenomenon worthy of deep study, one that had enormous consequences for American music and

¹⁸ Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*; Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*.

racial politics. They relied heavily on printed sources, in part because of the lack of alternative sources, and sought to tell ground-up histories of working-class entertainment. These studies failed, however, to look at more than surface level analyses of the complex gender dynamics of minstrelsy, and Nathan's study elided the destructive effects of blackface minstrelsy's degrading racist stereotypes. Future scholars would be more critical in their accounts of blackface minstrelsy.¹⁹

This first wave of New Social History about music and racial politics also included wide-ranging studies of folk and popular music extending into the twentieth century, though these ground-up histories largely worked by detailing information in widely accepted categories that later scholars would challenge. Building on DuBois and Herskovits' framework for understanding the persistence of Africanisms in Black folk art, Lawrence Levine employed historical methods and rigor to write a cultural history of what he termed "Black consciousness." He traced an evolution from a collective belief of Black people in a world with a unified relationship between God, Nature and Man, to a dualistic world where the sacred and the secular became increasingly distinct over the twentieth century, before detailing the development of a strong protest ethos within Black folk art.²⁰

Writing in the same period as Levine and using a similarly text-heavy social history, Bill C. Malone and Charles Hamm attempted to write scholarly accounts of American popular music, its distinguishing characteristics and its evolution. Malone looked out from his earlier focus on country music with *Southern Music/American Music*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.

In the book, he argued that the widespread poverty, rural isolation, and mutual borrowing between white and Black styles of music in the South produced the distinctive cultural resource of Southern music, which served as the wellspring for every kind of American popular music. His somewhat romantic exceptionalist narrative was popular beyond the academy. Charles Hamm, on the other hand, took a musicological approach in his book *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*, which went to an extreme of dependence on written evidence, excluding instrumental music and recordings in favor of musical analyses of written music for popular songs placed within a historical narrative. Hamm's relatively insubstantial thesis, that each era of American popular music is best understood in the context of other eras, has plenty of flaws, though Hamm offered astute analysis of each era and sometimes offered insightful comments on the context of racial politics that shaped popular music. Despite the book's successes, it epitomized the limitations inherent to histories of music and racial politics that relied primarily on print sources and accepted popular categories of musical genres. Even Toll's, Levine's and Malone's books were limited by their emphasis on textual evidence despite their more critical stances, which avoided the more uncomplicated celebratory tone of books like Nathan and Hamm's.²¹

A new wave of historians of music and racial politics expanded the methodological and theoretical tools used to understand their subjects. In tandem with the cultural turn of this era, starting in the 1980s, textual sources were more intensely examined for power biases. Alternative methodologies and critical perspectives were

²¹ Malone, *Southern Music/American Music*; Hamm, *Yesterdays*.

employed to unearth hidden or underemphasized histories of racial politics and music. A pair of works on the history of the blues help to illustrate these dynamics. In *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History of the Mississippi Delta*, the journalist and ethnomusicologist Robert Palmer argued vigorously that the Delta Blues had to be understood as a historically-situated performance tradition that textual analysis alone could not illuminate adequately. Palmer used a variety of sources — oral histories, field and commercial recordings, as well as traditional lyrical transcriptions — to argue that blues music in the Mississippi Delta met a variety of particular needs of its original Black audiences. These variety of uses — for dance, processing of trauma, comedy, imagination of travel, identification with the Other — forged the blues into a deeply rich cultural tradition that came to be mined many times over in the course of American popular music. Palmer's use of detailed aural descriptions and his contention that the Blues were produced by historically situated power dynamics revealed the influence of postmodernist thought and gave his work a more complex insight into the dynamics of the ultra-marginalized communities of African Americans in the Mississippi Delta who experienced extremes of violence, exploitation and poverty. Later, William Barlow tackled the subject of the blues in a less regionally specific approach in *Looking Up at Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture*, where he examined a variety of styles of the blues. He argued that the blues were a modernistic music that existed in conversation with their historical context of Black resistance and migration in the face of deepening oppression and reactionary forces. His approach was more textual than Palmer's, but he also took significant advantage of sound recordings and oral histories to illuminate marginalized histories of racial politics and music. He also afforded significant scholarly

attention to less-valORIZED urban and commercial blues styles that illuminated intersectional histories of gender and race discrimination against Black women.²²

In the 1990s, historians applied a dizzying array of theoretical and methodological approaches — post-structuralist, feminist, anthropological thick description, dialogic, semiotic — to a broad range of historical musical subjects. Some were old, some were new, but these historians used these tools to extract new insights about music and racial politics. Many works in this vein originated from historians with sympathies for leftist politics who were struggling to make sense of the ascendancy of neoliberalism around them in their historical investigations. Their studies were theoretically rich, but they sometimes became overly inscrutable and lost the thread of narrative in their complexity. Even in all their intricacy, they often failed to critically examine the contours of popular categorizations and divisions of music and races and too often prioritized masculinist narratives even when they used the theoretical tools of feminist theory.

George Lipsitz's *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* is one such highly complex work. In it, he used a dialogic framework — the idea that all utterances of culture are created in conversation with what came previously, and are situationally dependent for meaning — to examine films, television and music. He concluded from this study that supposedly “low culture” products are repositories of historical meaning, and contain the seeds of catalysts for historical change. In his treatment of rock and roll, for instance, he argued oppositional thought in popular music that is “denied expression by the monopolies who market culture survives in the subtle

²² Palmer, *Deep Blues*; Barlow, *Looking Up at Down*.

nuances of cultural moments too small for co-optation or censorship.” He located a popular, working-class ethic in the mainstream adaptation of oppositional thought from African Americans, who operated as a hyper-exploited group within the broader capitalist system which simultaneously made African-American cultural forms hyper-visible in its mass media. In the book, Lipsitz also broadened the subjects of racial politics in popular music, moving beyond the familiar Black-white dichotomy to examine the cultural politics of music made by Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, showing how sanitized mass media presentations of rich musical traditions masked heightened dynamics of exploitation and marginalization.²³

Like Lipsitz, literary scholar and historian Eric Lott applied a dense analysis deeply indebted to Marxism to the subject of music and racial politics, but he chose a more distant subject: blackface minstrelsy. His acclaimed and revelatory work, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* added contemporary journalistic descriptions to the old sources of sheet music and playbills in order to animate the endlessly complex dynamics of blackface minstrel shows in antebellum New York City. He argued blackface minstrelsy gave expression to white working-class Americans’ admiration for Black American culture even while it simultaneously helped to define racial boundaries and institutionalize white domination. Drawing from a range of analytical traditions including deconstructionism, Freudian psychoanalysis and feminism, he made a number of distinct but related arguments. Among these, he drew out whites’ simultaneous fear of and homoerotic desire for Black male bodies, the ways in

²³ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*.

which blackface minstrelsy contributed to the class consciousness of American workers, and blackface minstrelsy's role in developing the anti-elitist but often reactionary tradition of American humor. The book is justifiably acclaimed, but it contains notable flaws as well: its use of a battery of theoretical approaches lends great depth to its insights, but this thick description often comes at the expense of offering a wealth of evidence, opening questions about the significance Lott allots to his evidence. In addition, each of his theoretical examinations are brief and at times underdeveloped. Finally, Lott's endlessly complex prose and assumption of background knowledge makes this a difficult text for all but the most highly educated readers.²⁴

The acclaimed historian Robin D.G. Kelley was also part of this wave of historians writing about music and racial politics with an intricate cultural analysis, though his fluency with vernacular language lends his work a degree of approachability lacking in some of his contemporaries' work. In *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, Kelley argued for a broad and multifaceted understanding of the Black working class and the various ways its communities responded to oppression. Kelley believed in collapsing what he saw as artificial divisions between race, class and gender, as well as politics and culture, in order to gain insight into the deeply complex and multifaceted but often buried histories of Black working class communities. One part of that collapsing in *Race Rebels* occurs with his analysis of the political significance of Black cultural rebellion against the forces of oppression. He did this in a chapter analyzing the use of Black nationalist themes by Black American communists, another

²⁴ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*.

examining the zoot suit era where style, music and dance were used by Black working class subjects to distinguish themselves from their predecessors and contemporaries, signifying a rebellion of taste and attitude. In the final chapter of the book, he related the then-recent history of gangsta rap in Los Angeles. Kelley illuminated the contradictory dynamics of Black working class culture and unflinchingly broke down both the beauty and ugliness in his subject. Gangsta rap, he argued, was a music created in response to the particular forms of oppression in postindustrial cities that displayed both an admirable rebelliousness against the repressive order of racism and capitalism, but also maintained a persistent and degrading misogynist ethic, and sometimes reinforced rather than challenged capitalist and racist narratives. There is one notable flaw in Kelley's work on music and racial politics, however. Despite his comfort using a feminist theoretical lens to examine his topics, women themselves rarely appear as historical actors in his narratives about racial politics and music (though they appear more prominently elsewhere in the book).²⁵

Other works in this era returned to older methods of analyzing primary sources but displayed some of the lessons absorbed from the cultural turn. Among them was Samuel Floyd's seminal work of musicology, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History From Africa to the United States*. Floyd openly acknowledged the influence of his own subjective position on his analysis, a result of the wide and rich range of Black musical and cultural expressions and thoughts to which he had been exposed. Applying Henry Louis Gates' literary theory of the "signifying monkey," he elucidated how

²⁵ Kelley, *Race Rebels*.

persistent characteristics of Black music create the context through which to understand musical expressions by Black people. Floyd's scholarship was exceptional for the way he presents his own work as an act of creation, perhaps not only illuminating meaning in his subjects, but also creating it. He supported his positions with complex and sound musicological evidence, but his central conclusions aspire to something mystical beyond the bounds of rationalism.²⁶

In a pair of works about soul music from the 1990s, expanded analytical frameworks are similarly applied to older methodologies — in this case social history. In *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations*, Brian Ward used a postmodernist approach against largely textual evidence in an attempt to explicate the evolution of Black consciousness in popular music. In the book, Ward argued that developments in rhythm and blues from the 1950s through the 1970s reflected and reinforced changes in the political consciousness of Black people. The argument of the book is somewhat obvious, but Ward compensated with vivid storytelling that considers a multiplicity of power frameworks in his considerations of racial politics and music. The work also made good use of visual and aural evidence. His overarching point about mass Black consciousness does not land, in part because he drew on highly manipulatable commercial charts to draw conclusions about the mindsets of enormous numbers of Black people. Still, his astute narrative writing lends his study enormous value. Suzanne E. Smith's *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* similarly applied a consciously multivariable analytical lens to a social

²⁶ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*.

history methodology in her study of Motown's relationship to the cultural politics of Detroit. She argued that Detroit's historically unique institutions and cultural politics set the stage for Motown's popular success, even as the company developed a contradictory relationship with the city and ultimately abandoned it for Los Angeles. Smith's account paid particular attention to the ways institutional forces of racism created those dynamics, including in the areas of economic development, housing, and the cultural context Motown's music was supplied by the racial politics of the 1960s.²⁷

In the 2000s, contemporary syntheses of prior approaches have emerged. These works have often turned their attention to the ways racial politics and musical divisions have been historically constructed as well as the interrelationship between the resulting categories. These studies have used time-tested methodological and conceptual approaches while sprinkling in historical approaches not often associated with music, such as labor history. Their consistent consciousness of the historically constructed nature of genre and racial categories reveals the influence of postmodernist thought, and they have displayed a critical attitude towards the ways contemporary dialogue has shaped and sometimes distorted the history of popular music in America. They have also tended to avoid the theorizing excesses of some earlier cultural histories, and a consistent characteristic of these works is their use of tight narrative storytelling. Benjamin Filene produced an important early work in this tendency with *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music*. In the book, he argued mediators from the academy and recording industry defined folk music from racist and elitist perspectives for gains of

²⁷ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*; Smith, *Dancing in the Street*.

financial and cultural capital. Though later works have sharpened, expanded and improved upon his argument, his examination was important for the way it pointed to the historically constructed nature of “folk music.”²⁸

Two works that have taken up this line of argument and refined it are Karl Hagstrom Miller’s *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* and Charles L. Hughes’ *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*. Miller took on a topic similar to Filene’s but with a more focused and thorough approach. In his book, Miller showed how popular and scholarly racial ideologies worked together in the era of segregation to create resilient ways of racially coding music. Although Miller’s focus was on race, he gave significant attention to the workings of gender and class ideologies, and how they intersected with the use of racial ideology to maintain power hierarchies. For his sources, he based his account on the complex repertoire of songs used by musicians across races, demonstrating that the evidence belies the idea of stable racialized genres of music. Hughes took a similar approach to more recent history. He looked at session musicians of Memphis, Nashville and Muscle Shoals as laborers, showing how those musicians played a wide variety of styles of music because it advantaged them as workers. He contrasted the high degree of genre flexibility musicians of all races demonstrated with the ways marketing systems pigeonholed musicians into particular racialized genres. By doing this, entities in the record industry maintained racially coded categories that preserved racial hierarchies in the music industry. Music business professionals did this even as they self-promoted a

²⁸ Filene, *Romancing the Folk*.

utopian story of how the music was made, covering up the highly charged tensions that rumbled in the integrated workplaces that produced the music.²⁹

This latest wave of scholarship has also produced overviews of the sweep of American popular music that attempt to counter accepted metanarratives and categorizations of race, genre and gender. Elijah Wald's *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* attempted to reform understanding of the entire history of recorded pop in America. Wald argued that a raft of cultural critics dominated by white men have distorted the historical understanding of pop music because of their biases of taste. Because of these distortions, Wald contended that the complex racial and gender dynamics of what music dominated popular music have been buried in favor of celebratory narratives of great artists. By attempting to retell the history of American popular music against common metanarratives of popular music, Wald unearthed complexities in these stories that were missed by earlier historians of racial politics and popular music. Wald focused on music that was actually most popular in each period he studied rather than the music retroactively remembered by cultural critics for its aesthetic quality. For racial politics and music, Wald's study underscored the persistent popularity of watered-down white translations of African-American styles and challenged uncritically celebratory narratives of American popular music's multiculturalism. Ann Powers' *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music* used a similarly sweeping approach to inject an analysis of sexuality into a large-scale narrative of American music, though she emerged from her

²⁹ Miller, *Segregating Sound*; Hughes, *Country Soul*.

study with a more celebratory message than Wald. Her book has its faults, including the lack of a clear organizing thesis, but it is laudable for its attempt to highlight the continuities of racialized sexual politics through American musical history across genre and time, showing how popular music became a medium that was used to both challenge racial categories (and taboos against interracial sexual relationships) as well as uphold them. Previous scholars had often neglected these dynamics, and Powers' account supplied a pathbreaking if flawed and incomplete narrative attempt to examine the sexual and racial politics of popular music in America.³⁰

In the progression from social to cultural history, and then the ascendancy of contemporary accounts that ask new questions about the categories retroactively applied to historical evidence, a complex body of literature about racial politics and popular music has been created. These waves of historiography have been shaped by the ideological and methodological evolutions rippling throughout the scholarly community en masse, though the particular developments in this field are of note. Scholars in this field have made innovative use of sources such as recording technology, lyrical content, and oral histories, and they have applied an array of ideological frameworks to their evidence in order to frame the meaning of the stories they have told. Within this historiography, some topics, such as the role of music in the maintenance of racial ideology and hierarchy, have received extended attention. Still others, such as the influence of gender hierarchies on racial politics, have been relatively neglected. Yet taken together, this body of literature has revolutionized the ways of understanding racial

³¹ Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll*; and Powers, *Good Booty*.

politics and American popular music, elevating the topic from a minor curiosity of historical inquiry to a dynamic and consequential subject ripe for further exploration.

This thesis attempts is my humble attempt to contribute to this historiography by building upon its successes and learning from its failures. Like the New Social Historians, I will try to ground my analysis in the movements of the masses and everyday social forces. Like the historians of the cultural turn of the 1980s and 1990s, I will try to be informed by well-developed theoretical perspectives. And like the synthesists of recent years, I will attempt to write a clean, accessible narrative and pay proper attention to the workings of gender.

CHAPTER II: RACIAL COMPLEXITY IN THE EMERGING MASS MEDIA MARKER OF THE PRE-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1919-1945

In the pre-Civil Rights era, the lives and early careers of the singer and actress Lena Horne, and the jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus grant us a clear picture of the contours of the racial and gender politics in the music and entertainment industry specific to the period. Still, as much as any historian is compelled to demonstrate the significance of her or his subject, it would be disingenuous and inaccurate to claim that the figures examined here represented a total break from their past. I hope to show that each of the figures I feature in this study reveal something important about the effects and structure of racial hierarchies in the culture industry of their era, but the dynamic leveraging of racial complexity and transgression has been a featured, not exceptional, force in the history of the American music industry. As such, even contemporary arguments for the importance of the figures I study should be viewed with a degree of skepticism; it often suits the interests of persons to make bold claims for the importance of their moment and its figures. As much as Lena Horne was claimed as a pop culture pioneer by her generation — a “first” Negro woman on screen, a progressive force — she was preceded in international fame by pop culture icons such as Ethel Waters and Josephine Baker. And as much as Charles Mingus was portrayed as a singularly complex, serious and volatile performer and composer, he was prefigured by acclaimed artists

laden with racial complexity such as Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet and Duke Ellington.¹

As the earliest figures I examine in this study, it is especially important to sketch some sense of the milieus Horne and Mingus emerged from. Born in the late teens and early twenties, respectively, both experienced the Great Depression in their formative years and began their professional lives in the era of World War II. During this era, jazz-derived big band “swing” music was the predominant popular music of America, and the music was widely understood to have had its origins among “Negroes,” echoing earlier patterns of popular music development seen with the phenomena of blackface minstrelsy, ragtime music, and the “jazz” of the twenties (which should be understood to be somewhat distinct from the curated genre history developed by later cultural critics — the “jazz” of the 1920s was as much Paul Whiteman’s as Louis Armstrong’s, if not more so). In Horne and Mingus’ early years, Duke Ellington, Ethel Waters, and Louis Armstrong were household names — as popular entertainers more so than artists. “Swing” was big business. And although the culture industry was segregated, it featured highly visible performers of color. Indeed, the culture industry was one of the few spheres of American life where Black people were granted any degree of respect, even in racialized terms, and any prospect of a substantial salary in those economically precarious times. In the early 1930s, Waters became the highest paid star to ever appear at the Cotton Club. Ellington and Armstrong were semi-regularly featured in films and paid substantial salaries.²

¹ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 112-115, 145-149; Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34-44 54-57, 119-121, 297-303.

² Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 145-149; Allen Lowe, *That Devlin’ Tune: A Jazz History, 1900-1950*, (Berkeley: Music and Arts Programs of America, 2001), 73-74, 165-166; and Elijah

This same visibility of a select few Black performers helped to reinforce the Jim Crow system of the early twentieth century, however. As established by works deploying Marxian analysis like Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* and Karl Hagstrom Miller's *Segregating Sound*, the culture industry was crucial in erecting and reproducing lines of racial demarcation, even as the cultural "raw material" of the industry was created by infinitely more messy cultural exchanges across the color line. At the same time, transgression of this line was key to sublimating the contradictions it engendered. Culture industry participants were key in performing this role as well. For instance, the white jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman's coronation as "The King of Swing" and widespread adoration by popular media outlets was, all at once, an admission of the attractiveness of a primarily Black-created cultural product, and a claim of white dominance. Meanwhile, Duke Ellington was also the recipient of popular adoration, but it was as a great *Negro* composer and bandleader.³

It was in this context that both Mingus and Horne began their careers, although both had personal backgrounds incongruous with the homogenizing categories set out by the culture industry. Both were born into families with long histories of interracial relationships and procreation. Relatedly, both had intimate contact with institutions and spaces more deeply complicated than the culture industry had the capacity to represent, even if elites in the industry had desired to. The personal family histories and uneasily

Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78-81, 97-110, 119-124.

³ Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 129; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Lowe, *That Devlin' Tune*, 165-166; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

integrated spaces encountered by both Horne and Mingus in their early lives and careers defied the narrative promulgated by folklorists and record industry executives of neatly separate spheres of American music and life. At the same time, Horne and Mingus' early lives and careers were sharply different because of demarcating lines of gender. Horne's career was typically coded in a gendered way as "commercial," and "unserious," while Mingus, even from an early age, was able to pursue some version of an "artistic" and "serious" professional life in music, a pursuit also enabled by his relatively privileged economic status. Both figures had formative years that were defined by contradictions and complexity.

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By the time Lena Horne had reached two years old in 1919 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, she was already being used as a symbol in racial politics. Her grandmother, a woman with a well-founded distaste for nonsense and white people, shuttled little Lena to the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People offices to register her as a member. Soon afterwards, Horne was featured in the pages of the *Branch Bulletin* as an exemplar of a well-fed, well-heeled young lady. A full-length photograph was accompanied by a caption describing Horne as one of the NAACP's "youngest members" and pronouncing her "delighted" with her visit to its offices in New York. She was, the caption noted, especially pleased with the typewriters, and the NAACP's then-secretary, James Weldon Johnson. In an era when hyper-racist caricatures of Black children were used to sell every

kind of product imaginable, the image of a healthy (if not particularly happy-looking) Horne in a neat white dress and bonnet was a defiant symbol of the fact that not all Black people in America were impoverished and degraded.⁴

Later in her life, Horne was able to exert a greater deal of influence over her self-presentation. But this politicized use of her image was an early instance of a recurring pattern. For decades afterward, a somewhat bewildered Horne was pulled into the center of contests over the symbolism of race in a deeply racist country. Despite her intelligence and independence, it was often her physical appearance that determined the political uses to which her appearance was put. Her famously “bronze” skin and striking features, as well as her connectedness to strong political and economic institutions, embedded her in fierce struggles around the appropriate presentation of Black women in mass media, even as all involved agreed to use those characteristics to construct an image of her expressly designed to be bought and sold. Her public life was defined by the push-and-pull of commercial and political forces that illuminated dividing lines between high and low culture, racial pride and exotic ambiguity, and modesty and sexuality. As a result of these external forces, her public image rarely corresponded with her much more complicated sense of self that developed out of a personal life shot through with the absurdities and complexities of racial classification, prescribed gender roles, and class stratification.⁵

⁴ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*, (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 8-13; Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Hornes: An American Family*, (New York: Applause Books, 1986), 81; For more on the NAACP’s use of child models to defy stereotypes, see Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America’s Long Struggle for Racial Equality*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For a study of racist caricatures in advertisements, see Brian D. Behnken, *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to Frito Bandito*, (New York: Praeger, 2015).

⁵ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 68.

Horne's career as an entertainer and her involvement with midcentury Black freedom struggles shine a light on the interplay of the historical forces of a midcentury boom in the American economy, a corresponding explosion in mass commercial media, the increasing militancy of the long struggle for Black freedom, and the way these forces worked together to construct the historically specific dynamics of race in the period. Over the course of her public career, the interaction of these political and economic forces created more spaces in the commercial sphere for ambiguity and complexity — as long as the presentation could be commodified. But the gaping racial inequalities and injustices that were exposed and challenged by a Black freedom movement of growing militancy that had its roots in the World War II era and flourished afterward had its own cultural pull. It made racial solidarity and pride attractive for a person like Horne, who possessed a powerful sense of social responsibility for Black people despite, and in part because of, her internally complex insecurity of racial identity.

Lena Horne's complex sense of her own racial identity was rooted in a complicated childhood and family tree. She was born June 30, 1917 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, to one of the neighborhood's most prominent Black bourgeois families. The family's rootedness in the Black community was a direct result of the American cultural hegemony of the one drop rule, which mandated, by law and custom, that persons with seemingly small traces of "Negro blood" be considered culturally and legally Negroes in full. Examining the amalgamation of American laws and practices across different states that defined this state of affairs in the formative years of Horne's grandparents, lawyer, author and activist Charles Chesnut mocked their absurdity in an 1889 essay entitled "What is a White Man?" In one section, he pointed out that in South

Carolina — not a place noted for its racial liberalism — that there were curiously lenient rules for how much “Negro blood” could be present in a person who was still considered white. He implied that this resulted from a necessity to maintain a numerous enough white population to ensure political dominance over the majority-Black state. In another part of the essay, he noted that “it is a fact that at present, in the United States, a colored man or woman whose complexion is white or nearly white is presumed, in the absence of any knowledge of his or her antecedents, to be the offspring of a union not sanctified by law. And by a curious but not uncommon process, such persons are not held in the same low estimation as white people in the same position.”⁶

This interpretation helps to explain why members of Horne’s family identified with their “Colored,” and not European, ethnic heritage. Horne’s grandmother Cora took pride in her Black heritage in spite of the fact that her mother was white, and her father, who had been categorized as a mulatto, was directly related to John C. Calhoun, one of the fiercest champions of slavery and white supremacy in American history. Meanwhile, Cora’s husband, Edwin Horne, was the son of an Englishman and a Native American, though he presented as a Negro. As a result, Lena Horne’s father had very little African ancestry, though his family were firmly part of the upper crust of Black society in New York. Lena’s mother, meanwhile, was the daughter of a Native American and a Portuguese Negro who were also members of the Black bourgeoisie.⁷

The most important figures of this complex family tree in Lena Horne’s early childhood were her grandmother Cora and grandfather Edwin. Horne’s parents’ marriage

⁶ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 8-12; and Charles Chesnutt, “What Is a White Man?” *Independent* 41, (May 30, 1889).

⁷ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 8-12.

had been brief and unhappy. Her father had been a playboy and an adventurer, and her mother a pampered daughter of privilege. “As I observed them in later years, the only thing I could see they had in common was good looks,” Horne recalled. Horne’s father was a distant figure in her childhood, constantly away traveling, and while her mother was closer at hand, she was primarily focused on pursuing an acting career and did not always live with Lena, who spent her early years in her grandparents’ home.⁸

Edwin Horne, who presented as a Negro man, had no African ancestry. This had not stopped him from working as editor and publisher of the Black newspaper *Justice* in his hometown of Chattanooga, Tennessee, nor had it stopped him from becoming secretary-general of the United Colored Democracy of Greater New York. Edwin also performed all the housework of the Horne household. Cora, fiercely resentful of stereotypes of Black women as mummies and servants, refused to do any of it. Instead, her energies were poured into various activist groups and organizations of social uplift in New York. She was an active member of the NAACP, the Urban League, the National Association of Colored Women, and the Ethical Culture Society, a progressive, secular humanist organization.⁹

Despite their race pride, however, Edwin and Cora both shunned what they considered to be the “low” parts of Black culture, including its music. Both listened almost exclusively to classical music, and Cora especially looked down upon musical genres, like blues and gospel, that she associated with uncultured Negroes. This

⁸ Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *Lena*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 5, 16-17.

⁹ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 8-12; Charlene Regester, *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010), 175.

complicated family dynamic, with its mixture of pride, shame, and silence, left Lena Horne with little strong identification with what she termed “the Negro people” — at least initially. “I never learned anything about who I was or what I was,” she later wrote in an autobiography co-written with a journalist and released in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. “Nobody in my family ever told me and I certainly never learned anything about my racial identity in school, because the only Negro ever mentioned was George Washington Carver, and he was too pure and too good to believe.”¹⁰

When Lena reached the age of seven, her mother Edna took her from her grandparents’ house, and the two moved to Miami, where Edna hoped to break into the vaudeville circuit. Edna found little success and instead suffered through ill health. Meanwhile, Lena was shuttled through living in a variety of strangers’ homes while intermittently living with her mother. One of Horne’s most vivid memories from this period came from a near-encounter with a lynching in Jacksonville, which was her first exposure to the terror of racial violence in the deep South. She also spent some time in her uncle’s home in Fort Valley, Georgia, where she received some more exposure to the open politics of the Black bourgeoisie, as her uncle was the dean of a school similar to a junior college. She recalled the adults in her life talking seriously about history, politics, lynchings, and the NAACP, conversations she relished learning from. Soon after, she also learned about the predatory tendencies of men when she was molested by a man who owned the house she and her mother were staying in.¹¹

¹⁰ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 8-12; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 2, 274.

¹¹ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 23-38.

After this unstable period of moving between homes and various caretakers, Horne returned to her grandparents' home in Brooklyn, but the degree of stability she enjoyed there did not last long. Her mother had married a white Cuban man named Miguel Rodriguez and took Horne from her grandparents' home. Living and traveling with her mother and Rodriguez helped to evolve Horne's developing racial consciousness because the family was on the receiving end of suspicion and discrimination due to the interracial relationship and the clashes it aroused within the larger Jim Crow society. The family unit moved from Brooklyn to the Bronx, and then from the Bronx to Harlem. Horne later wrote that it was in this time that she first started to understand that racism was responsible for many of the troubles of her life, a consequence of living with a mixed-race couple and experiencing the racial resentments that marriage drew from both white and Black people. "Our family unit was now a mixed one, which meant we had no place among Negroes or whites," she wrote. Her mother's performing days had soon passed her by, and Rodriguez, who was unable to speak fluent English, found it difficult to secure work as the depths of the Great Depression had hit the country. Horne had to work to help her family survive, which led her to start performing as a dancer — first as an amateur, but soon as a professional.¹²

The teenaged Horne soon got her first exposure as a public performer and symbol since her appearance as a *Branch Bulletin* model. She won a job as a dancer at the Cotton Club, a speakeasy for white audiences famous for its Black house orchestras, which included a star-raising stint for Duke Ellington's orchestra, as well as for Cab Calloway's

¹² Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 45-48; Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 7-8, 27-28.

big band. The Cotton Club was also famous for its dancers, billed as “tall, tan, terrific gals,” who were hired for their “exotic” looks and were an enticing draw for the club’s white customers.¹³

It was at the Cotton Club that Horne first started to actively sell her unique looks; although she resented how she was often defined by her beauty, she conceptualized her role in the entertainment world as labor first and foremost, not art. At the club, she avoided personal encounters with white customers, and her age protected her from encouragement to sleep with them, unlike other dancers at the nightclub. The white owners and managers of the Cotton Club wanted to avoid drawing the attention of law enforcement to their operation by allowing or encouraging child prostitution at the establishment.¹⁴

Soon she also started singing and got a job touring with Noble Sissle’s orchestra. Rodriguez traveled with Horne and the group on tour. Tense interactions between Rodriguez and the Black musicians in the orchestra helped to develop Horne’s consciousness of race. Rodriguez prodded the musicians to fight against racial humiliations. Horne later wrote that she believed Rodriguez had been right in principle, but that his behavior had mortified her because as a white man, he had no standing to chide Black men on how they dealt with the discrimination they faced. She compared Rodriguez’s position to the one she later learned from Paul Robeson, “that it was useless to prate on about dignity and the progress we were making until we had ceased to accept the small indignities constantly heaped upon us because they were part of the way things

¹³ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 34-36; John Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 28-29.

¹⁴ Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 48-52.

had always been.” But Horne sympathized primarily with the Black musicians over her white stepfather. “The men in the band hated him. They knew he was right and they hated him for being right. But somehow you could never get it through his thick skull that at the time that was the way things had to be.” She and the Black men in the band understood that even a slight challenge to the indignities thrown their way could produce deadly results.¹⁵

Horne also resented her stepfather’s presence because he acted as though if she weren’t under constant policing, she would pursue “immoral” behaviors. The highly sexualized nature of her act, where she was under pressure to perform as a mulatto seductress, helped to draw these suspicions. But Horne always saw the act as labor for pay, and invested very little of her personal identity in it beyond a craftperson’s pride in doing the work professionally. She resented others for not being able to recognize that she had control over her actions, instead equating her with the character she performed for money. She had desires to pursue romantic relationships, but her body and behavior were policed. “A perfectly healthy interest in the opposite sex was being twisted by them into something it was not; and at the same time, I was being asked to exhibit myself and to say to the audience, ‘Look at me. Don’t you want me?’”¹⁶

This repression of the flowering of her personal life led directly to her early first marriage, to Louis Jones, a man she met through her father. She later recalled that the marriage had been an attempt at an escape from her prior existence as a public sex object who was repressed in her private life. She did not anticipate the difficulties of marriage.

¹⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁶ Ibid., 71-72.

“To put in bluntly, I was still a virgin and one of the reasons marriage was so attractive to me was that I was desperately eager to know the physical side of love. If someone had told me to go to bed with Louis or some other nice boy, a great deal of the pressure would have been dissipated,” she recalled. Soon, she and Louis had a child, Gail, and Lena’s traumatic experience of the birth at the hospital, where she did not know her Black doctor would not be allowed to help her deliver the baby until she arrived. This experience further opened her eyes to the Northern brand of racial prejudice her grandparents had shielded her from.¹⁷

Just months after having given birth, Horne got her first chance to appear in a film, a low-budget film with an all-Black cast called *The Duke is Tops*. She and Louis decided that she would appear in the film for the financial reward. Horne immediately ran into trouble. An agent responsible for her casting in the film, who had remembered her from her Cotton Club days, was disappointed with the weight she had put on from having a baby (though a viewing of the film’s footage reveals an astonishingly slender woman for someone who had very recently given birth). The film’s producers had also not yet secured all the financing they needed, so Lena and others appearing in the film did not receive the money they were promised. To make matters worse, Horne’s husband forbade her from attending the film’s debut in Pittsburgh, a special showing benefitting the NAACP. In her film debut, Horne was presented unambiguously as a Black woman, portraying a young singer whose husband’s showbusiness career keeps getting in the way of her own. Eventually her on-screen husband decides to sacrifice his career for hers,

¹⁷ Ibid., 80.

after which they live happily ever after. The plot was innocuous and arguably even quite progressive for its time, though it was there as a bare-bones linking device in service of several musical and dance numbers. The film was little-noticed, but it provided Horne a way into her career as an icon of the screen and stage, and as a controversial figure whose image was endlessly disputed as she became a star to a cross-racial audience.¹⁸

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Charles Mingus' early life was also defined by layers of contradictions. Mingus was raised in a family with African, German, British, Chinese, Swedish and Native American ancestry in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. His father, Charles Mingus, Sr., was born into an old family whose time in America stretched back to the late eighteenth century, the son of a white woman and an unrecorded father who was probably Black. Mingus' mother, Harriet, had Black and Hong Kong Chinese parents. She died only months after his birth, however, so he was raised by his father and his father's third wife, who had Black and Native American ancestry.¹⁹

His father's attitudes about many subjects, like Mingus' later, were contradictory. He often looked down on darker-skinned people and called them "niggers," but he took an active part in some of the institutions of Black life in Watts, like the local African Methodist Episcopal church and the NAACP. He had served with both Black and white

¹⁸ Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 88-91; *The Duke is Tops*, directed by William Nolte (Million Dollar Pictures, 1938), accessed December 2017, <http://amazon.com/>.

¹⁹ Brian Priestly, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1984), 1-3; and Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

people in the armed services from 1897 through 1922, including a stint in the Philippines during the Spanish-American war, long enough that he collected a substantial pension in the depths of the Great Depression on top of his salary from the post office, where he rose to the level of supervisor. There, he decried racism on the job and fought to integrate the separate Black and white postal workers' unions. He was a union man, but also deeply conservative about other issues, particular on issues of gender.²⁰

Mingus' lifelong complicated, but deeply sexist, approach to women was certainly shaped by his childhood experiences. His father was a stoic, conservative and patriarchal figure. His step-mother was more communicative, but strict. He was close to his sisters, and the entire family doted on him, especially compared to his sisters. He displayed a strong attraction to girls from a very young age. He developed an obsessive "first love" with a policeman's daughter at the age of six in details recounted in his semi-fictionalized autobiography *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*, and later more-or-less verified by the journalist Gene Santoro in his biography of Mingus. Not long afterward, Mingus got into trouble after he was caught looking up the skirts of girl classmates in the third grade, for which his father punished him with a beating and a shaved head, a mark of shame in their AME community. Despite his transgressions, he was popular with girls throughout his boyhood and teenage years, though, as his good friend and fellow musician Buddy Collette later recollected, his accounts of his youthful sexual exploits in *Beneath the Underdog* were highly exaggerated.²¹

²⁰ Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 20-24.

²¹ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World As Composed By Mingus*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1971), 14-17, 19-23, 77-82; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 20-24, 31.

Young Mingus' experiences with race were also deeply complex and contradictory. According to Mingus in *Beneath the Underdog*, he was ostracized for being a "fat-ass, half-yella, schitt-colored nigger" as a child by darker-skinned boys. He was also tormented by white and Mexican-American boys. In his recollection, written in the third person (perhaps to project a sense of authorial objectivity) he recalled that "Whenever he looked in the mirror and asked 'What am I?' he thought he could see a number of strains—Indian, African, Mexican, Asian and a certain amount of white from a source his father boasted of. He wanted to be one or the other but he was a little of everything, wholly nothing, of no race, country, flag or friend." He resolved to embed himself with what he called the other "mongrels," but barriers of language and culture prevented him from finding acceptance there either. "All he wanted was to be accepted somewhere and he still wasn't, so fuck it! He became something else. He fell in love with himself," he wrote. "I understood what he was trying to do. I've met a few other people who live on that colorless island."²²

According to work by the journalist Gene Santoro, Mingus' accounts of his boyhood struggles with race were informed by real troubles, but Mingus was also wont to recast events informed by a number of factors — Mingus' class status, his sensitivity, his bowed legs, his oddities — as examples of racial prejudice. His high school friend and fellow musician Buddy Collette, who was also Black, told journalist Gene Santoro:

A lot of times he thought more was happening about that than there was; he'd concentrate on it all the time and make it stronger. The racial thing was there, and he was very light-skinned... He'd say "God, those guys look like they don't like me." And then part of the reason would be they might not know what he was. He's saying, "I'm Black." They could have said, "You don't look it."

²² Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 52, 66.

Mingus was certainly the victim of very real racial prejudice, inculcating an intense sensitivity to racism, but he also quickly learned to use the racial prejudice he experienced to his own ends, a pattern he would deploy often in his later professional music career.²³

Mingus' experiences in between races also shaped his experiences with music. His stepmother only permitted religious or classical music in the home, and his first experiences with music were playing classical music on trombone, then cello, with his school orchestra, and then the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic, where he developed a deep respect for the European classical tradition. At the same time, he had significant exposure to the sounds of African-American gospel music through his church experiences, both at his own family's AME church and friend and fellow musician Britt Woodman's Holiness church. Eventually, despite his love of classical music, and with the encouragement of friends, he turned into the world of jazz, switching from cello to bass, because it appeared to be the only financially viable venue for a nonwhite man with his talents to creatively express himself.²⁴

It did not take long for Mingus to develop into a budding virtuoso playing on Los Angeles' Central Avenue, the center of the West Coast jazz world, a path for which he received an unusual amount of support. After he bucked his father's plans for him to take an exam to follow in his father's footsteps and become a post office worker, his father helped Mingus acquire a quality instrument and an accomplished private teacher. He

²³ Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 27-31.

²⁴ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 24-26, 30-31, 63-65; Priestly, *Mingus*, 2-3, 29; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 29, 36-37.

studied bass with jazz bassist Red Callender as well as Herman Rheinschagen, a white bassist who had played with the New York Philharmonic. He studied composition with Lloyd Reese, a member of the Black bourgeoisie who had ties to both the classical and jazz worlds. His artistic ambitions were encouraged and nourished by his father, teachers, and mentors.²⁵

Mingus began to pursue a complex cosmopolitan lifestyle in Los Angeles and Watts as World War II began, bridging gaps between a bohemian multicultural arts scene in Los Angeles and an increasingly standoffish Black and brown zoot suit culture that defied white authority, while also dipping his toes in the mass entertainment world of Hollywood. Mingus became friends with the artist Farwell Taylor, and frequented his parties that hosted a range of intellectuals, artists, and public figures, including Ernest Hemingway, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Billie Holiday. He read Sigmund Freud (a lingering obsession of his), Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and H.G. Wells. He also took part in the much-mythologized World War II-era zoot suit culture, in which young Black and Latino men wore stylish, loud zoot suits, bucked austere wartime culture by engaging in conspicuous consumption, used a complex hipster lingo that set them off from mainstream culture, and defied white authority figures, particularly servicemen and police. In summer 1943, the tensions engendered in this subculture erupted when servicemen went after Latino zoot suiters in Los Angeles. Bands of sailors and soldiers roamed around, targeted young working class, zoot suit-clad Latinos (as well as some African-Americans and Filipino-Americans), stripped them of their clothes, and burned them in what became known as

²⁵ Priestly, *Mingus*, 29; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 35-37.

the “Zoot Suit Riots.” Similar to Malcolm X, then known as “Detroit Red,” Mingus purposefully evaded service in World War II.²⁶

But unlike most zoot suiters (and despite later claims to have acted as a pimp, all claimed by friends to have been fabricated or exaggerated), Mingus was not a roaming, hustling, underemployed part of the Black working class. Mingus had already developed an artistically successful and reasonably secure career as a jazz bassist on the virtues of his talent and skill, playing with some of the premier musicians of the jazz world in a time when the music was still a part of mainstream popular culture. Some of the marquee artists he performed with included Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and soon, the pied piper of the next wave of jazz, Charlie Parker. And Mingus had also found his way into the periphery of the world of Hollywood, appearing in a bit part in the film *Higher and Higher*. He also sometimes modeled his public presentation on Orson Welles, a figure he deeply admired. He was quickly becoming comfortable deploying drama and theatricality as part of his art, and was already developing a distinct, mysterious, and salable public persona.²⁷

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Horne was also beginning to develop a public, theatrical persona. Hers, however, was driven by need more than artistic ambition because her gender, her financial

²⁶ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 161-163; Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* 140-143, 156-162, Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 60-62; and Eduardo Obregón Pagan, “Los Angeles Geopolitics and the Zoot Suit Riot, 1943,” *Social Science History* 24, No. 1, (Spring, 2000), 223-256.

²⁷ Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 57, 102-103.

precarity and her responsibilities limited her ability to pursue a cultivated aesthetic in her career. Still, her first film had reinvigorated her career, something her husband went along with for the money, at least at first. Horne was soon touring with a revue that had enjoyed success in previous years but was now on the decline in a changing entertainment economy, Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds*. Leslie, a Jewish producer, had worked extensively with Florence Mills, a noted Black comedienne and cabaret singer. Although Leslie also failed to pay Horne and the other revue players' promised salaries because of widespread trouble finding financing in the midst of the Depression, Horne thought of him fondly for helping her to develop greater confidence on stage, and for putting on a "high class" show that avoided degrading stereotypes or numbers designed to please lecherous audience members. When her husband refused to let her attend the cast party, it precipitated a decision by Horne to leave him, though not before she became pregnant and gave birth to her second child, a son named Teddy. The problems in her marriage, however, escalated to a point where she decided to move from Pittsburgh back to New York.²⁸

After her arrival, she got looked for jobs around the city. One piece of advice she received irritated her more than any others, however. Venue managers around the city seemed to think her style was not "Black enough" for them to book her, as she had few stylistic roots in blues or Gospel music. One man, George White, suggested to Harold Gumm, the agent who helped her land her first film role, that she pass as "Spanish." Horne fiercely rejected this option, knowing many of her family members would have

²⁸ Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 91-97, 100-104.

been able to pass as white if they wished but chose not to. She feared shaming her family by passing, and she wanted to stake out an individualized claim to her identity:

My entire life until then had been a succession of attempts to by other people to give me what nowadays I suppose would be called “an image.” But who was really me? The respectable middle-class Brooklyn girl, the rootless child, the band singer, or maybe just a chick who would end up faking it as Spanish or as a blues shouter? I was still grabbing my identity on the fly.²⁹

Instead of faking it, she found a gig as a singer in the previously all-white band of Charlie Barnet, a secure job. Horne later remembered her time with Barnet with good feelings despite the awkward and alienating instances of racism she encountered on the road with the band; venues sometimes requested she not sing or otherwise demand that she hide away on the band bus or in the powder room between numbers. Barnet always paid her, even on nights where the venues requested that she not perform with the band, and when the band toured the South, he decided not to risk bringing her along but paid her for her time regardless. She made several popular recordings with the band, including the hit song “Good-for-Nothin’ Joe,” which featured her nascent vocal style. She sang in a smooth, sensual mid-range voice with a medium vibrato. She showed little-to-no influence of the guttural, blues and Gospel music-derived style often expected of Black women vocalists.³⁰

After leaving the Barnet band, in an attempt to develop as a singer, Horne auditioned and won a gig at Café Society, a well-known integrated hangout of leftists in New York. Café Society was where Billie Holiday had debuted “Strange Fruit,” a celebrated protest song depicting a lynching. During this time, Horne became more

²⁹ Ibid., 105-107.

³⁰ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 107-113; Charlie Barnet & his Orchestra, vocal refrain by Lena Horne, “Good-for-Nothin’ Joe,” Bluebird B-11037-A, Shellac 10” 78 RPM.

interested in Civil Rights issues due to her contact with politically inclined artists and activists, and, relatedly, began to invest more in her own identity as a Negro. “Negro” was the term most commonly used to describe people of African descent in America at the time, and it carried few of the negative connotations it is now burdened with. She developed a friendship with the famous Black singer, actor and communist Paul Robeson. Previously, her grandmother Cora had helped Robeson secure a scholarship to Rutgers University. He, along with Café Society’s white owner, Barney Josephson, encouraged her to embrace her identity as a Negro and develop a consciousness around race and its relationship to musical forms. “It’s ironic that the people who taught me to appreciate the blues were the so-called white liberals,” she later wrote. “In the late thirties and early forties they discovered this music, and they were listening very hard to it.” Robeson, she recalled, would tease her among friends for having too much of a temper and liking nice things too much to make for a good activist, but in private, he encouraged her to develop a sense of herself as a Negro.³¹

Horne’s security in the New York club scene, the positive notice she had received for “Good-for-Nothin’ Joe,” and, for a time, having both of her children with her, allowed her a degree of happiness she was unused to. But her reputation was growing, and she received an offer to perform in a new Hollywood club called the Trocadero sharing a bill with Duke Ellington, an offer she finally accepted after much deliberation. One factor in her decision was the encouragement of Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP and a friend of her grandmother’s.³²

³¹ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 12; Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 112-119; David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 3-4.

³² Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 120.

White had begun to cultivate a relationship with her, and he saw a job for her at a Hollywood club as an opportunity to land someone in films whom he considered a beautiful, respectable, modest Black woman of the middle class. White had long bristled at the stereotypes typically displayed in Hollywood's portrayals of African-Americans, and he recognized that Horne was someone who had potential star power, but who was also someone he felt he could exert influence over. The NAACP first made use of her image by featuring her on the cover of *The Crisis* in 1941, while she was with Barnet's band. On the cover, she was shown with light skin and straightened hair, reflecting, scholar Megan E. Williams has argued, the colorism, or internal discrimination on the basis of skin tone within the Black community, displayed by the Black bourgeoisie related to its multiracial roots.³³

When Horne arrived in Los Angeles, the appearance of her, her daughter Gail and her cousin Edwina created a moment of racial surprise for her new neighbors. She remembered Felix Young, the owner of the new club, neglected to tell her neighbors their group was Black. Speaking of their appearances, she wrote, "Edwina was white, white, white; Gail, as a baby was rather Oriental-looking; and stupid people often mistook me, as noted, for a Latin type." The war scuttled Young's plans to actualize his grand designs for the Trocadero, so instead he opened a smaller one. Horne began to sing at the club and at glamorous Hollywood parties, though she was uncomfortable with the latent

³³ Megan E. Williams, "The Crisis Cover Girl: Lena Horne, the NAACP, and Representations of African American Femininity, 1941-1945," *American Periodicals* 16, No. 2, (Spring 2002), 211; Walter White to Countee Cullen, September 19, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans.

racism and relative lack of sophistication of the crowds compared to the ones she had become comfortable with around Café Society.³⁴

Her exposure, however, landed her an offer for a long-term contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, with plans to use her in an upcoming big-budget all-Negro review entitled *Cabin in the Sky*. But the picture could not be made for some time, and in the meantime Horne was concerned about the kind of films she would be made to perform in. She found an ally in that concern in Walter White, who had perceptively anticipated her star power, and who had a shared interest in having her portrayed on-screen in a way that defied stereotypes. As a result of the negotiations of her, her father, and Walter White, MGM assured Horne that she would not be asked to portray maids, the typical role for Black women in films of the time. Horne's demands upon the studio also bothered other Black actors, she recalled. She remembered being viewed with suspicion as a kind of guinea pig for the NAACP.³⁵

But MGM also did not have her portray exactly the kind of image she sought, and her racial ambiguity, especially on screen, posed a problem for the studio. Her first prospective film, *Cairo*, included a part where she was supposed to play a servant to a movie star whom is mistaken for a Nazi spy. Despite the typical role of servitude, the part was better fleshed-out and complex than most for Black women, but the fact that Horne could be mistaken for a white woman posed a problem for the studio. In their screen test for her, they darkened her skin but ultimately decided it was simpler to give her part to Ethel Waters. Although Horne found the whole episode farcical, she despised its

³⁴ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 121-122.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136-137

consequences. The studio makeup crew went about creating a special kind of pancake to darken her skin, which ended up being christened “Light Egyptian.” She especially resented that the makeup shade was later used to give white actresses parts playing lightskinned Black women. When Horne made her first film after signing with MGM, *Panama Hattie*, she portrayed a racially indeterminate singer of Latin suggestion who performed two musical numbers incidental to the plot of the movie. Although the movie was a minor flop, she received glowing reviews, though she recalled that audiences took her for being a Latina of some sort, something that rankled her.³⁶

Next in her career, Horne starred in two of the most important all-Negro revues of the war years, and she was shown in such a context that no one doubted she was a Black woman. Horne was grateful for actual leading roles in *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*. But Walter White, among others, was dissatisfied with these films — the lascivious role *Cabin in the Sky* assigned Horne, and the “primitive” musical numbers of *Stormy Weather*. This did not stop White and the NAACP from capitalizing on Horne’s growing fame and renown, once again featuring her on the cover of *The Crisis* in 1943.³⁷

White’s displeasure with these landmark films set the stage for his decision to exert his influence over Horne and the Black entertainment world when he attempted to stop the production of a Broadway musical, *St. Louis Woman*, that he felt portrayed Black people in a backwards light. The musical’s script was written by two Black writers of critical acclaim, Countee Cullen and Arna Bontemps, adapted from a novel by Bontemps.

³⁶ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 106; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 136, 140.

³⁷ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 73, No. 2 (Spring 1986), 383; and Williams, “*The Crisis* Cover Girl,” 213.

Horne was set to play a character that in her words was a “flashy whore who was in love with a jockey.” The musical was backed by Arthur Freed, who was also a producer at MGM, where Horne had her Hollywood contract. Correspondence from the NAACP reveals that White, after working to personally read the script for the musical and listen to a reading, tried to persuade key figures to shut the entire production down. But his real priority, the correspondence reveals, was in making sure that Horne not participate. He did not want his young, beautiful symbol of Negro respectability and sophistication to portray a prostitute on the popular stage. MGM also had interest in turning the musical into a film, something White was dead set against.³⁸

NAACP correspondence reveals that White took a personal hand in attempting to scuttle the musical and eventual film, and that he was willing to pull out all rhetorical stops and apply personal pressure to get what he wanted. In a letter to Countee Cullen, one of the authors of the musical’s “book,” White explained his fierce opposition to the musical’s characterizations of Black life: “Three times before he died the late Wendell Willkie and I went to Hollywood to try to persuade the producers there to cease picturization of us as venal, immoral, comic, servile types... Appearance on Broadway in the year of our Lord 1945 of a play which may conceivably be made later into a moving picture which perpetuates all these stereotypes of the Negro could be disastrous.” White was aware that his objections to the musical could be considered overly puritan, allowing

³⁸ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 173-177; Leon Hardwick to Roy Wilkins, August 25, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 187; Walter White to Arthur Freed, letter draft, undated, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans.

that his stance might make him appear analogous to the Women's Christian Temperance Union, but his strong position suggests he believed the potential negative effects of the perpetuation of low-class characterizations of Black Americans outweighed any artistic merit or historical fidelity to a particular kind of working-class culture. White even predicted, in the context of African-American service in World War II, the potential for violent objections to the continual portrayal of degraded Black Americans.³⁹

White also objected to the play's portrayal of the internal colorism of the Black community. In a later letter to Cullen, he said one of his objections was "the apparent belief by all the characters that there is some special virtue in being 'high yaller.' I very much dislike the disparagement of dark Negroes which is implicit throughout the play." This was a sensitive issue for White, who was racially ambiguous himself and sometimes landed on the end of accusations of colorism and lacking in race pride. His particular sensitivity to this issue likely sprang from his belief that differences and internal divisions within the American Black community should be sublimated to the collective struggle for Black empowerment. He did not want the divisions of Black America paraded for the entertainment of a Broadway or film audience, and, being the authoritarian man he was, he was determined to nip the issue in the bud.⁴⁰

White's position that the effects of perpetuating working-class Black stereotypes was too harmful to outweigh the value of artistic freedom was shared by Roy Wilkins,

³⁹ Walter White to Countee Cullen, September 4, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Janken, *Walter White: Mr. NAACP*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2-3; and Walter White to Countee Cullen, September 19, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans.

Assistant Secretary of the NAACP as well as the then-editor of *The Crisis*, still the premiere publication of the Black establishment in America. “It is true that it is a play of a certain period of Negro life in St. Louis, but it is also true that there is nothing good in the play. There are no good characters. There is nothing to relieve the parade of pimps, prostitutes, gamblers, and other ‘low life’ characters,” Wilkins dictated in a memo to White.⁴¹

Horne found herself caught between the studio machine and the strong influence of the NAACP. While she had no great fondness for degrading stereotypes, she was in need of work in between the few weeks a year she was in Hollywood, and she was impressed by the set of songs featured in the musical written by Harold Arlen, the composer of the music for *The Wizard of Oz*, and Johnny Mercer, a renowned Tin Pan Alley lyricist, composer, and entrepreneur. One of the songs was “Come Rain or Come Shine,” which went on to become a standard in the Great American Songbook. Nonetheless, she was successfully pressured into stepping down from the role by White.⁴²

White felt a good deal of responsibility for her, so he recommended a lawyer from the NAACP to discuss her troubles in Hollywood. A report referenced in the NAACP’s papers from the *New York Mirror* suggests that Horne’s decision to pull out placed her in trouble with MGM higher ups. In response, White contacted Louis Mayer directly to argue that Horne’s appearance in the musical would damage her value for MGM, and to ensure that Horne’s career would not suffer for her decision not to participate. Horne and

⁴¹ Williams, “*The Crisis* Cover Girl,” 200-201; Roy Wilkins to Walter White, September 17, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, “St. Louis Woman” film and portrayal of Black Americans.

⁴² Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 173-174; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 179.

MGM, at least initially, viewed the musical as a value proposition, and were not much concerned with the symbolism. White's argument to Mayer reflects his recognition of the fact that MGM viewed Horne primarily as a financial investment, and he was fully willing to go along with that value proposition to get what he wanted. Mayer denied the episode would be the cause of any reprisals against Horne, and he told White he valued her work very much, as evidenced by her contract. White passed along this response to Horne. Nonetheless, the episode left Horne feeling disenchanting and resentful for being used in such a manner by both the studio and the NAACP. She drew away from her association with the NAACP and the world of Hollywood, and for a time, she cast about for sustainable ways to pursue both her entertainment career and her interests in struggles for Negro uplift as a way to affirm her place and establish social solidarity with other Black folks.⁴³

⁴³ Louis B. Mayer to Walter White, telegram, October 6, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans; Walter White to Lena Horne, September 19, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans; Walter White to Lena Horne, telegram, October 6, 1945 in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans; Walter White to Louis B. Mayer, telegram, October 4, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans; Walter Winchell, "In New York," *The New York Mirror*, October 3, 1945, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews, Folder: 001457-020-0576, "St. Louis Woman" film and portrayal of Black Americans.

Horne's and Mingus' lives complex racial identifications were troublesome for a music and entertainment industry defined by segregation in the Great Depression and World War II eras. The very possibility of entertainment careers for them, even if they miscast and misrepresented the complexities of their actual lived experiences, indicated a changing industry, however. Still, there were strict limitations placed upon them in different ways. Horne was expected to perform symbolic functions of exoticism or respectability largely defined by powerful men and then presented for popular consumption. Mingus saw his individual artistic ambitions encouraged, but any hopes for a career as a classical composer were severely circumscribed by the racism of that world. Larger social forces would move on, however, creating new opportunities and roadblocks for both.

The end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War era was a tumultuous time in American racial politics. Mass migration and mobilization had been a socially destabilizing force that Black civil rights and labor leaders had taken advantage of to win significant policy changes and gains through campaigns like the March on Washington Movement. More anger with the hypocrisy and brutality of America's Jim Crow system was stirring. The Black entertainment world was also experiencing significant changes. Big band swing music declined in popularity, the first stirrings of what would become Rhythm & Blues music emerged, and a new, virtuosic music was being created by talented young musicians, soon to be labeled bebop. Its adherents were unsatisfied with being viewed as mere entertainers, and they sought to create music that would stand on

its own artistically. They quickly became heroes of anti-establishment hipsters and social critics, many of them white, who saw in their music a parallel development away from Cold War social conservatism.⁴⁴

The context in which racial complexity functioned was about to change. Civil Rights and Black Freedom struggles were about to open up space for racial complexity in the marketplace beyond bohemian subcultures. The boom in the post-war market would also cause record companies to take more chances to produce salable commodities, even with figures in their business who could provoke anxiety among social conservatives. Even as more spaces opened up for musicians with complex racial identifications, the pressures on them would not subside.

⁴⁴ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-31; Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1-7; and Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," *Callaloo* 36, (Summer, 1988), 597-605.

CHAPTER III: RACIAL COMPLEXITY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY OF THE INTEGRATIONIST ERA, 1945-1965

The postwar era proved to be a catalyst for new probing questions about identity from a diverse array of Americans. This was, arguably, the era when the concept of “identity” became a popular concern. The extension and entrenchment of consumer society in conjunction with economic boomtimes meant that many kinds of Americans, not just those among the wealthy, were constructing their sense of selves at least in part through consumption. Also catalyzing examinations and constructions of identity were the turns of left political organizing away from broad class politics and towards more specific and delineated issues in the context of McCarthyist repression. Socialism was off the table, but there were possibilities for advances in Civil Rights for Black Americans, feminism, anti-nuclear and peace movements, and environmentalism. Popular movements arose around all of those struggles.¹

The self-examinations that resulted had a pronounced effect upon musicians with complex racial identifications. Mature musicians like Charles Mingus and Lena Horne who had risen in the era of the Great Depression and World War II stood at a galvanizing crossroads. New possibilities were developing in their professional careers. In the larger,

¹ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 12-17; Marie Moran, “Identity and Identity Politics: A Cultural Materialist History,” *Historical Materialism* 26, No. 2, (Spring, 2018), 21-45; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 367-373.

more diverse entertainment market, they could give birth to fuller artistic works than the limited depression and wartime entertainment markets allowed. They could also capitalize on racially complex public personas as integrationist struggles gained some degree of popular currency. It would be a mistake, however, to portray the market as a purely progressive force; segments of the music and entertainment market of the era played a more reactionary role in response to integrationist and civil rights gains. Racism, even if it was not of the Dixie flag-waving kind, was ubiquitous. Nonetheless, based as it was in cosmopolitan urban areas, the relative liberalism of the media industry gave musicians with complex racial identifications space to take on broader artistic projects, play with humor that hinted at or launched full-on critiques of racial hierarchy, and to take part in intensifying social movements.

Younger musicians with complex racial identifications growing up with the postwar era's prosperity, newly expanding horizons for social movements and multilayered entertainment market would also be profoundly shaped by the possibilities of the period. Upcoming musicians like jazz saxophonist Charles Lloyd and the rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix were able to take advantage of the enhanced opportunities of the anxious but prosperous postwar economy. They would not, however, suddenly become immune to the effects of racism, or contradictory market and social pressures. In addition, they would find the contours of their experiences would be affected significantly by place, and the possibility of mobility freed them to roam where opportunities beckoned.

Two young musicians who came to have complex racial identifications crafted by this era were Charles Lloyd and Jimi Hendrix. They shared a number of similarities, as well as some important differences. Both identified not only with the Black experience in America, but also the heritage of Native Americans. They also shared formative experiences in the segregated Southern music scene playing blues and rhythm and blues music, one based in his native Memphis, the other based out of Clarksville and Nashville. In time, both became symbols of a countercultural racial utopianism, even as both flirted with the symbolism and in some cases politics of the Black Power movement. They even became friendly acquaintances, part of the same countercultural corner of the entertainment industry.

But before they rose to fame, they came of age in very different places. Lloyd was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1938 and raised there in a middle class family with a complex racial heritage. Members of his extended family were Native American, Irish, Mongolian, and of African descent. In the South however, a place with historically stringent definitions of race, that complexity meant very little to the white power structure. To the white authorities who ran the city Lloyd grew up in, he was a Negro, nothing more. They didn't care that Lloyd's biological father was the successful coach of the Fisk University football team, that his stepfather, also named Charles Lloyd, was a pharmacist, or that his grandfather, Ben Ingram, was part Irish, part Native American.²

² Josef Woodard, *Charles Lloyd: A Wild, Blatant Truth*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2015), 14-16.

Those distinctions made a tremendous difference in Lloyd's young life, however. He was able to pursue a serious musical education both in and out of school, and he had a sense of stability and, according to him, self-confidence taught to him that were absent from some of his peers, such as fellow Memphis-bred saxophonist George Coleman, who came from a humbler working class background. Setting his own experiences and relationship with his grandfather against Coleman's own rearing, Lloyd later recalled, "He has a kind of humility that doesn't have that endowment of strength and pride... I'm not trying to come off as that I'm better because of that station. I'm saying that station did give me an endowment of pride."³

Lloyd's education was not only traditional, however. He learned music formally in school and in some private lessons, but a crucial part of his music education came from playing saxophone in clubs on Beale Street, as well as from the big-name Black musicians who stayed in his mother and stepfather's home in lieu of segregated hotels. Among the musicians who passed through included Count Basie's band, Duke Ellington's orchestra, and the famed blues and R&B songstress Dinah Washington. Locally, he frequently performed and played with musicians from the Memphis blues and R&B scene such as Bobby "Blue" Bland, Howlin' Wolf, Willie Mitchell and B.B. King. He also played alongside musicians who became the backbone of the later Stax Records sound, such as the original bassist for Booker T. & the M.G.'s, Lewie Steinberg, a racially ambiguous musician himself who played his first gig with Lloyd. Lloyd loved the blues and R&B music he played, but he pined to find a place in the modern jazz world

³ Ibid., 19.

after hearing bebop great Charlie Parker at about age 9 or 10. Locally, modern jazz was not a hot commodity, so he and other ambitious musicians such as Coleman, Booker Little, Harold Mabern, Frank Strozier and Phineas Newborn who made a living playing blues and R&B played jazz for themselves after hours, developing their technical know-how and improvisational skills.⁴

In 1956, Lloyd's relative privilege soon allowed him the chance to leave town with its segregated and commercially driven music scene, and to explore options out west in Los Angeles. At the end of his high school years, he went to study classical music and composition at the University of Southern California (USC) and became embedded in the same Central Avenue jazz scene that Charles Mingus had come up through. His middle class background, like Mingus, allowed him to have his artistic ambitions taken relatively seriously, including in the world of classical, though as a non-white man, there were still more opportunities for him in jazz because of the racism of the mostly white classical world. In Los Angeles, he was mentored by Buddy Collette, Mingus' friend and contemporary. He also became acquainted and played with musicians who would become budding stars of the avant-garde and free jazz movements such as Scott LaFaro, Eric Dolphy and perhaps *the* key figure of the avant-garde, Ornette Coleman. At USC, he also developed a budding global vision of music, one where he felt comfortable drawing on any kind of music that moved him, defying racialized divisions. He later claimed he got into "world music" before that titled was bestowed upon it, listening to musicians like

⁴ Charles L. Hughes, *Country-Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 56-60; *Charles Lloyd: Arrows Into Infinity*, directed by Dorothy Darr and Jeffery Morse, USA, 2012; *Charles Lloyd - Journey Within*, directed by Eric Sherman, USA, 1968; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 20-30.

Ravi Shankar. He was suspicious of the European art music canon and the way it excluded his compositional heroes such as Ellington. He was also disappointed by the racism he encountered in Los Angeles away from Jim Crow Memphis. “When I was going to USC I would always talk about Duke Ellington, and they didn’t know anything about that,” he later recalled. “They’d always talk about Beethoven and stuff. Cool, Beethoven’s a brother. Did you know that Beethoven was a Moor?” Lloyd’s vision of classical music was more expansive: “One thing always bothered me at USC. They said it was three hundred years of European classical tradition. I said, ‘What are you talking about? What about African and Indian music, and Duke and Jimmie Lunceford?’”⁵

After Lloyd earned his degree, he taught music and worked around Los Angeles, but the Central Avenue scene was dying down, so he was relieved when he got a call from Buddy Collette inviting him to take his friend Dolphy’s place in the popular group of the drummer Chico Hamilton in New York. Jazz was declining in popularity as it transitioned from mainstream popular music largely played by big bands for dancing into a small-group virtuosic art music. Nonetheless, Hamilton had found a niche in the music market playing a cool jazz and chamber music fusion, winning enough fame to be signed to Columbia Records, a major label, and scoring and appearing in a mainstream film noir picture, *Sweet Smell of Success*. Hamilton’s group, with its dual reputation as both cosmopolitan and adventurous, was an ideal place for Lloyd to develop his music. He became the group’s musical director, writing and arranging a large portion of its repertoire. As musical director of the group, he led them to play music that balanced

⁵ Clora Bryant, Buddy Collette, William Green, Steven Isoardi, Jack Kelson, Horace Tapscott, Gerald Wilson and Marl Young, editors, *Central Avenue Sounds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 400-406; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 31-40.

influences from the rising avant-garde with more accessible and melodic modern jazz as well as hints of his “world music” influences. Pieces Lloyd arranged for Hamilton’s group like “El Toro,” co-written with Hungarian guitarist Gabor Szabo and Hamilton, which used scales often used in Spanish, North African and Middle Eastern music, and “Sun Yen Yen,” signaled worldly sophistication. His stage presence also became worthy of notice. Audiences noted his passionate but controlled demeanor and finely tailored suits. His work with Hamilton became noted enough that he got a job with an even bigger name in jazz, the charismatic “Cannonball” Adderley, and released his own debut album as a leader on Columbia Records, *Discovery!* By 1965, Lloyd’s fortunes in the jazz world were rising.⁶

Jimi Hendrix’s rising fortunes in the same period were similarly made possible by the mobility and prosperity of the postwar years, as well as similarly fortuitous educational musical experiences, though his path was more circumscribed by his lower class status. Hendrix was born Johnny Allen Hendrix in Seattle, Washington, in 1942, the son of 23-year-old James Allen Ross Hendrix, who went by “Al,” and Lucille Hendrix (née Jeter), a teenager with a light complexion. His parents’ first date was to a William “Fats” Waller concert, and they bonded over jitterbugging when they first met. Soon, she was pregnant, and he was drafted by the army. Al and Lucille married, but in his absence caused by his service in World War II, the teenaged Lucille was unprepared to be a full-time mother to Johnny, and she partied around town in Al’s absence, taking up with a series of men in Seattle’s active nightlife. As such, Johnny was raised in a communitarian

⁶ The Chico Hamilton Quintet, *Sweet Smell of Success*, Decca DL 8614, 1957, LP; The Chico Hamilton Quintet, *A Different Journey*, Reprise R9-6078, 1963, LP; Chico Hamilton Quintet, *Passin’ Thru*, Impulse! AS-29, 1963, LP; Charles Lloyd, *Discovery!*, Columbia CS 9067, LP; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 31-46.

fashion, moving around between relatives and friendly neighbors who doted on the good-looking young boy. At war's end, his father returned, and he and Lucille attempted to embark on their marriage properly, giving birth to several siblings for Johnny, who was renamed James Marshall Hendrix at his father's insistence. The marriage did not survive long, however.⁷

One stabilizing influence in young Hendrix's life were his grandparents Bertran and Nora Hendrix. Nora claimed Cherokee heritage and told the boy stories to that effect. Amateur researchers have cast doubt on Hendrix's supposed Native American ancestry, but he took that heritage seriously, whether it was imagined or not. "My grandmother's a full-blooded Indian... She used to make clothes for me. And everybody used to laugh at me when I went to school, you know, the regular sob story," he later told an interviewer. It is possible that Nora developed her "Cherokee" ancestry as part of her career as a vaudevillian, prefiguring Hendrix's later theatricality. In any case, it is likely that Hendrix's belief that he had Native American ancestry, in combination with his mother's fair skin — many people who knew her said she could have "passed" if she had chosen — and the relative diversity of his childhood schooling, where he had white, Black, and Filipino classmates, contributed to his complicated relationship to race.⁸

⁷ Harry Shapiro and Caesar Glebbeek, *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Gypsy*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), 5-33; Charles R. Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*, (New York and Boston: Hachette Books, 2005), 12, 16-17, 49.

⁸ For a discussion of Hendrix's supposed Native American heritage and Lucille's fair-skinned features, see Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*. Amateur researchers have challenged the veracity of claims of Native American heritage in Jimi Hendrix's family despite claims upon his legacy by institutions such as the National Museum of the American Indian, and Henry Louis Gates has studied ubiquitous claims of Native American heritage among African-Americans, which are usually dubious. For a brief discussion, see Henry Louis Gates, "High Cheekbones and Straight Black Hair?" *The Root*, December 29, 2014, <http://www.theroot.com/high-cheekbones-and-straight-Black-hair-1790878167>; Interview quote from Jane de Mendelssohn, "Hendrix: As Experienced by Jane de Mendelssohn," *International Times*, March 28, 1969, 13

Seattle is also where Hendrix had his first musical experiences. In the postwar years, the city was not an epicenter of the entertainment industry, but it was a significant enough spot to attract famous acts across several genres. Hendrix did not receive good grades on music in school, but as a very small boy he hauled around a broomstick with which he imitated his first musical hero, the scandalizing racial transgressor Elvis Presley. In time, he started messing around with a one-stringed ukulele he found, picking out melody lines, and by the age of fifteen he had finally obtained his first guitar. Over the next few years, music became his obsession, and he gigged around Seattle before a run-in with the law threw an eventually fortuitous wrench in his Seattle-bound musical development. In 1961, he was convicted of joyriding in stolen cars, and, in the Cold War environment, got out of jail time by enlisting in the army, where he joined the 101st Airborne.⁹

After basic training in Fort Ord, California, Hendrix shipped to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. As a soldier, Hendrix was still obsessed with music and soon met a musical companion he would play with on and off for the rest of his career, the bassist and fellow serviceman Billy Cox. They formed a band on the base called the King Kasuals and were able to play at joints in nearby Clarksville as well as other army bases. Despite Hendrix's initial enthusiasm about joining the 101st airborne, he quickly tired of the discipline and unfreedom of military service. He attempted to fake mental illness to get out of the service at first and then, failing that, purposefully injured his ankle and acted as if it were

⁹ Shapiro and Glebeek, *Jimi Hendrix*, 36-40; Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 75-84.

worse than it was, at which point he was granted an honorable discharge for “unsuitability” to the army.¹⁰

After his discharge, he spent too much money to be able to afford a way back to Seattle, so he settled in Clarksville, Tennessee, close to the base. He and Billy Cox kept playing under the name of the King Kasuals, based first out of Clarksville, then in a brief foray to Indianapolis, and then back again in Clarksville before relocating to Nashville. It was in Nashville, Hendrix later claimed, that he “really learned how to play guitar,” an account supported by his friends who described him obsessively practicing everywhere, even in movie theaters. Hendrix got to be accomplished enough that when he wasn’t playing with the King Kasuals around the Nashville area, he got a variety of pick-up gigs touring the famous Chitlin’ Circuit with notable R&B artists, including Solomon Burke, Carla Thomas, Jerry Butler, and Otis Redding. In the segregated South, Hendrix’s musical world was also strictly segregated, and R&B was his only possible outlet. Recordings of the time reveal Hendrix deploying a highly competent, Curtis Mayfield-inspired sound, but with a harder edge. Nothing about those recordings, however, hints at his psychedelic experimenting to come. Thinking the King Kasuals did not have much chance for growth on the Chitlin’ Circuit scene, Hendrix decided moved to New York City in early 1964, where he hoped to expand his musical horizons.¹¹

When Hendrix first arrived in New York, he settled in Harlem. He continued to play backup guitar in R&B groups, performing with Curtis Knight, Little Richard, the

¹⁰ Shapiro and Glebeek, *Jimi Hendrix*, 50-73.

¹¹ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 93-95, 103-107; The Isley Brothers, “Move Over and Let Me Dance” and “Have You Ever Been Disappointed,” Atlantic 45-2303, 1965, 45 RPM; and Bill Kerby and David Thompson, “Spanish Galleons Off Jersey Coast Or ‘We Live Off Excess Volume,’” *Los Angeles Free Press*, August 25, 1967.

Isley Brothers, and King Curtis, touring the country with them but now returning to New York instead of Tennessee. New York's cosmopolitan openness allowed him new expressive opportunities as well. He had already begun to garner a reputation as a flamboyant show-stealer, but 1960s New York gave him opportunities to experiment with style and to explore new scenes away from the enforced segregation of the South. He became a devotee of Bob Dylan's music, and he began to wander from Uptown down to Greenwich Village, where he checked out the music, the style, and the lifestyle, and found it to his liking. New things were brewing for the young guitarist chafing from the constrictions of musical segregation.¹²

δ

Despite the booming economy of the postwar years, Lena Horne entered into a difficult period of her life. Although she resolved to exact more control over her career, she ran into obstacles beyond her control and encountered new pressures. She made use of the expanded opportunities of the postwar economy and found fulfillment in a more independent-minded engagement with politics.

In the postwar years Lena Horne's film output declined, in part, she said, because she was tired of being at the center of the tug-of-war over the use of her image. The beginning of the Cold War had also led to intense scrutiny of her friendships with communists and left-wingers from the Café Society circles, especially Paul Robeson. To

¹² Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 108-130.

make ends meet, Horne toured nightclubs all over the country. Her struggles between her public image symbol and her search for a secure personal identity continued to plague her, even as she escaped the grinding objectification of the Hollywood machine. Her feeling of being torn between the pressures of show business and a commitment to Civil Rights causes also affected her personal life via her relationship and eventual marriage to Lennie Hayton, a white Jewish conductor and arranger in Hollywood. “Falling in love with Lennie represented, I now realize, a culmination of the battle within me between two forces—the need for racial pride and identity and the need simply to be myself, to assert my rights as a private, even selfish, person,” she later wrote. She sometimes took Hayton to task for the sins of white people in general, but at other times she was fiercely protective of her relationship with him because she perceived that Black people active in the Civil Rights movement frowned on her relationship with a white man, and she wanted space for a personally satisfying relationship.¹³

Horne soon worked her way back into a more consistent showbusiness career, in part because she decided to denounce Robeson and communism in the heightened Cold War atmosphere. In that space, her perceived racial ambiguity had become less of a problem for a mass media machine looking for ways to excite and titillate the public. On an important comeback album for her as a recording star, *At the Waldorf Astoria*, one tune performed was called, “How You Say It.” In it, Horne took on the character of a Latina woman obsessed with an American man, but struggling to ensnare him due to her poor English. Another album, *Lena Like Latin*, showed her on the cover wearing vaguely

¹³ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*, (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 216-217; Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *Lena*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 179, 194, 204-206.

“Spanish” clothing, and was composed entirely of songs with deplaced “Latin” rhythms. Few knowledgeable pop culture fans were unaware that Horne was Black by this point in time, but the longstanding perception of her as vaguely “Spanish” and “exotic” continued to pay commercial dividends.¹⁴

By the time of the 1960s, Horne wrote that she had been able to reconcile the commercial and political pressures in her life by actively supporting the Civil Rights movement while happily pursuing a fruitful musical career in cabarets and on stages. This support allowed her to feel more secure in her identity as a Black woman. Horne took a visible part in the movement, attending the March on Washington, appearing at benefits and fundraisers, and taking part in an infamous meeting between Black artists, intellectuals, activists and then-Attorney General Robert Kennedy.¹⁵

Her relationship to the Civil Rights Movement was complicated, however. She had tired of being trotted out as a symbol, in her terms, a “first.” She agreed to come back into the fold of the NAACP when she accepted an NAACP Scroll of Honor from the organization in 1960, but only after the overbearing influence of Walter White had dissipated due to his death in 1955. She resolved to exert greater control about when she spoke out about issues, exerting a greater control over the use of her as a symbol. Her account of the meeting with Kennedy demonstrated her firm identification as a Negro, and she criticized Kennedy’s attempts to compare Irish discrimination with anti-Black racism. Through the Civil Rights Movement, she had come to understand tokenism, the

¹⁴ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 236; and Lena Horne, “How You Say It,” *At the Waldorf Astoria*, RCA-Victor, LOC-1028, LP, 1957; Lena Horne, *Lena Like Latin*, CRC Charter, CLS-106, LP, 1963.

¹⁵ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 325; and Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 277-281.

benefits her beauty and racial ambiguity had allowed her to receive, and she decided to firmly identify with her Black heritage.¹⁶

She ended the last chapter of her 1965 autobiography with an account of her appearance at a fundraiser for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in New York, a Civil Rights organization with a notably different culture from the NAACP. She felt she was putting her artistry and position to good use, feeling firm in her racial identity: “That night I felt I was really home at last. Home to the city of my birth, home to myself and maybe getting home to my race and my people.”¹⁷

δ

The twenty years following World War II were tumultuous but prodigious years in Charles Mingus’ life. He flowered from a talented but little-known bassist and composer in Los Angeles to one of the towering figures of the jazz world who even had a limited degree of mainstream notoriety. He was driven by an ambition to knock down barriers: between jazz and classical, entertainment and art, performance and life, spirituality and secularity, and even between ascribed races.

In 1945, Mingus had two life-altering experiences. He began to record his first music under his own name for small, independent labels, and he encountered the life-

¹⁶ Papers of the NAACP, Part 24 Special Subjects, 1956-1965, Series B: Foreign Affairs-Leagues and Organizations, Folder 001486-010-0001, 1960 Freedom Fund dinner planning, memorial tribute to Oscar Hammerstein II, and presentation of NAACP Scroll of Honor to Lena Horne; Horne and Shickel, *Lena*, 269-272, 277-281; Kenneth Janken, *Walter White: Mr. NAACP*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 358-359.

¹⁷ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 289-291.

changing music of alto saxophonist Charlie Parker in person. The virtuosic, harmonically complex, sometimes dissonant and often rapid sounds of bebop had been developed through experimentation during the war years by talented young musicians based out of New York, but it had mostly gone unrecorded due to its strangeness and an American Federation of Musicians strike on recordings. In 1945, however, small labels began to record the experimental sounds of the movement's leading figures, trumpeter John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie and saxophonist Parker. They developed a small but devoted following. In late 1945, Gillespie led a band with Parker that debuted the new music at a club in Los Angeles called Billy Berg's. Mingus probably did not attend the initial run of official shows the group performed, but heard Parker at some of the many after-hours jam sessions taking place. Ironically, given his later devotion to Parker's legacy, Mingus did not enjoy the music at first. The music's rapid-fire tempos and flurries of notes sounded different from the moody compositions inspired by Ellington and classical music Mingus had been developing. Mingus came around, however. Besides developing an attraction to the beboppers' musical experiments, he shared with many of them far-flung artistic ambitions, a demand to be taken seriously as artists, a similar impatience for degrading showbusiness practices, and a critical stance towards American society.¹⁸

For the rest of the 1940s, Mingus slowly became integrated into the bebop scene, playing and recording with young stars of the modern new music like Howard McGhee,

¹⁸ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 236-272, 396-398; LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (New York: William Morrow, 1963), 175-236; Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," *Callaloo* 36, (Summer, 1988), 597-605; Charles 'Baron' Mingus, *West Coast 1945-49*, Uptown Records UPCD 27.48, 2000, CD; Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 65-67.

Eli “Lucky” Thompson, Milt Jackson, Gillespie, and a Cuban-American trumpeter with whom he developed a deep friendship, Theodore “Fats” Navarro. Mingus and Navarro became close playing in the big band of the vibraphone star Lionel Hampton, and they bonded over their shared inside-outside perspective on the American music business and race. Although much of Mingus’ later memoir, *Beneath the Underdog*, was fictionalized, Mingus’ friend and music critic John Goodman believed Mingus’ recollections within of his conversations with Navarro, which form a crucial part of the book, were faithful to his memory. In Mingus’ recollection, Navarro and himself did not look upon race as something naturalistic, but rather made. Mingus wrote that he complained about a lack of solidarity and camaraderie among Black musicians in the face of white exploitation and repression, telling Navarro, “That’s the system, Fats, the system that keeps Blacks apart,” to which Mingus remembers Navarro replying, “I see what you mean—so busy worrying how to make a dime with your horn, ain’t got time to make a race.”¹⁹

Business had been on Mingus’ mind because of his inability to keep steady work, sometimes forcing him to go back to a post office job for money. In mid-1950, however, he got a reliable gig playing with veteran jazz vibraphonist Red Norvo and guitarist Tal Farlow, who were both white. Despite his incipient sympathy to Black nationalism, he took advantage of his racial ambiguity to keep a gig at a venue with the trio. The venue refused to serve his friend Collette because he entered the club with an interracial group of friends. Collette considered suing, but Norvo, backed by Mingus, talked him out of it. Collette figured that the venue had not realized Mingus was Black, so he did not want to

¹⁹ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World As Composed By Mingus*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1971), 188-191; Brian Priestly, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1984), 248-256; John Goodman, *Mingus Speaks* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013), 311, 314.

cause trouble and lose out on the opportunity. Mingus' primary reflection on his time with the trio in *Beneath the Underdog* revolved around racism, but in an instance where he was more clearly the victim. Mingus had relocated from California to New York City as his new permanent residence, and the trio had been offered a spot on a color television show playing five days a week with Mel Tormé. At the last minute, Norvo informed Mingus that he could not play on television but would continue with the band in club performances. The American Federation of Musicians local, motivated by some mix of racism and bureaucratic upkeep, did not want Mingus to perform with the group, and corporate sponsors were uncomfortable with the idea of presenting an interracial group. "The way television was in those days, they had sponsors who worried about 'the Southern market' and 'mixing' was taboo," Mingus later recalled. In Mingus' account, this insult prompted him to quit the group.²⁰

Mingus' confidence in his own abilities was firmly in place by the early fifties, even if musical and commercial opportunities were not availing themselves easily. He played a variety of jobs in the New York City bebop scene, though he struggled to get recording dates at first. Mingus had already displayed a mildly radical edge in the music business, performing in cooperatives and eschewing the constraints of the industry, but he was about to take an almost entirely unprecedented leap. He and the drummer Max Roach, a key musician in the early bebop scene, were similarly politically-minded and frustrated with white-owned labels determining recording opportunities, so they hatched a plan to build their own modern jazz label — Debut Records. Not since the 1920s with

²⁰ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 322-323; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 87-94.

Black Swan records had there been a concerted effort for Black Americans to run their own record label. Mingus' new wife Celia, a white woman, wrote liner notes and badgered jazz photographers into selling their work for below-market rates. Mingus shipped the records himself. The label did not succeed in generating much in the way of profits, but it was a triumph in several other ways. A number of recordings released on the label have since been recognized as classics, especially *Jazz at Massey Hall*, a live recording of an all-star quintet of Mingus, Roach, pianist Bud Powell, Gillespie and Parker, which critics have praised as among the greatest live jazz recordings ever made. Debut Records also marked the beginning of musician Teo Macero's efforts as a record producer on his own album, work he continued after Debut's decline, producing recognized classics at Columbia Records for Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, and Mingus himself. Perhaps most crucially for Mingus, the drive and romantically heroic ambitions he demonstrated in spearheading the effort became a masterful display of self-promotion it itself.²¹

With his work on his own record label and through prolific efforts around New York, Mingus became a staple of the bohemian Greenwich Village scene where bebop musicians, artists and beatnik writers converged in defying the stultifying conformism of mass culture in the 1950s. Mingus was frequently playing with a rotating group of musicians he was calling the Jazz Composers Workshop, or just the Jazz Workshop. His efforts won him glowing praise in the major jazz journal of the day, *Down Beat*. And although Debut Records was falling apart due to a lack of financing and sales, Mingus

²¹ Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102; The Quintet, *Jazz at Massey Hall*, Debut DEB-124, 1956, LP; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 99-110.

won the attention of more successful record labels for which he began recording, including Prestige, Atlantic, RCA-Victor, and Columbia.²²

Not all was well with Mingus or the scene he was part of, however. In early 1955, he played with Charlie Parker in one of Parker's very last live appearances along with the acclaimed pianist Bud Powell, who had suffered from severe mental health issues and heroin addiction. Powell and Parker fought before they took the stage, and then Powell, too sick to play, banged his fist on the keyboard and departed. Parker tauntingly cooed his name after him over and over again, which prompted Mingus to grab a microphone, protest that what was happening was not jazz, and that he was surrounded by "sick people." Eight days later, Parker was dead from the accumulated abuse his body had suffered from heroin and alcohol. Mingus had his own health issues. A collapsing marriage put pressure on him, as did habitual use of stimulants. In 1958 he suffered a mental breakdown that prompted him to check himself into Bellevue Mental Hospital, a decision he almost instantly regretted. Having checked himself in, he did not realize he could not check himself out. His recollection of the incident in his later memoir was to type: humorous, but full of sharp critiques of the racism of medicine. He connected mental illness to the insanity and brutality of society, not just individual sickness. He recalled phoning the Village Voice and Down Beat critic Nat Hentoff:

There's a Nazi-thinking Jew called Dr. Bonk or something down here saying all Negroes are paranoid and he knows just the treatment for them, which is frontal lobotomy. He's a prejudiced white cocksucker so high on white supremacy that he's blowing the whole U.S.A. scene on integration singlehanded.

²² Nat Hentoff, "Caught in the Act — Charles Mingus: Café Bohemia, New York," *Down Beat*, January 11, 1956; Priestly, *Mingus*, 265-272.

Mingus got out of Bellevue without suffering from a frontal lobotomy, but his fears, while perhaps exaggerated, were not insane; Both Bud Powell and Charlie Parker had endured traumatic stays at the mental hospital previously.²³

Mingus was a brilliant if perhaps not totally consistent thinker, so his rhetoric, symbolic choices, and music demonstrated both bohemian, integrationist streaks as well as Black nationalist sympathies. He displayed tremendous pride in the heritage of Black music, particularly the Black church and Ellington, as well as a desire to draw on whatever flavors of music appealed to him despite their supposedly racial origins. As such, the music, composition titles, and symbolism shown in Mingus' music in this era drew on a wide range of predecessors: Gospel music, blues, the compositional language of Ellington, bebop, mariachi music, and classical music. He also started including political statements in his music. Some were through his distinctively erudite composition titles, while others were included as spoken word monologues and poetry over the music. His statements included direct commentary about segregationist politics in his satirical portrait of segregationist Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus ("Fables of Faubus," and "Original Faubus Fables"), nuclear warfare ("Oh Lord, Don't Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me"), sadism in mass entertainment ("The Clown"), and a nod to third world insurrection in his celebration of the 1801 slave revolt that led to the establishment of the first independent Black republic in Haiti ("Haitian Fight Song"). He even composed and performed music for one side of an LP by Langston Hughes reciting some of his most radical poetry.²⁴

²³ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 328-336; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 103-104, 112, 142-143.

²⁴ Ira Gitler, "Mingus Speaks—And Bluntly," *Down Beat*, July 21, 1960, 29-30, 67; Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues with Langston Hughes*, MGM Records E3697, 1958, LP; The Charlie Mingus Jazz Workshop,

In his public actions and statements, he drew directly on the rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement, placing himself directly in the center of the zeitgeist. In 1960, he and his partner in heading up Debut Records, the drummer Max Roach, tired of what they charged was exploitation on the part of prominent jazz promoter and organizer of the Newport Jazz Festival, George Wein. The Newport festival, founded in 1954, was quickly becoming a model of music festival culture, the kind of platform where musicians sought to make memorable public performances. The 1958 festival was filmed for the influential documentary *Jazz on a Summer's Day* that became a model for later festival films like *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*. To assert a greater deal of control over the presentation of their music, the two musicians organized a counter-festival, also in Newport. They set up a stage off-site from the main festival grounds at a hotel called the Cliff Walk Manor, and a number of groups sympathetic to their protest played. There was a bitingly humorous tinge to Mingus' protest, reflecting the trickster edge to his personality. When he was asked by Teddy Charles, a white vibraphonist playing his anti-festival, if Mingus had booked the man a hotel room, he retorted, "Oh man, I can't get you a room in this damn Jim Crow town." Newport undoubtedly had its fair share of racists, but little about it resembled the Jim Crow South, least of all for a white musician. *Down Beat* coverage of the event was patronizing and cast blame on Mingus and Roach for fostering an anarchic atmosphere in

Pithecanthropus Erectus, Atlantic 1237, 1956, LP; Charles Mingus, *The Clown*, Atlantic 1260, 1957, LP; Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um*, Columbia CS 8171, 1959, LP; Charlie Mingus, *Blues & Roots*, Atlantic SD 1305, 1960, LP; Charlie Mingus, *Tijuana Moods*, RCA Victor LSP-2533, 1962, LP.

the ritzy town that led to rioting by 12,000 drunken white teenagers outside the main festival.²⁵

Mingus also lobbed subtle critiques of the concept of race itself in his music and public statements, revealing his conflicted identity born of his affinity for African-American musical traditions and protest even as he sought to freely draw on whatever forms of music he chose and play with musicians, of any race, who he thought would best communicate his compositions. The cover of his 1959 album, *Mingus Dynasty*, was a jokey critique of racial construction, both from the name of the album, a pun on his name and the Chinese Ming Dynasty, as well as its cover. On the album's cover photograph, he was dressed in elaborate Chinese imperial garb, wryly staring down the camera. On his 1963 album, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*, the composition titles indicated his fascination with ideas of revolution and Black emancipation, but the music, while drawing on Black-identified musical traditions, also drew heavily from romantic classical music and Spanish flamenco. The most prominent solo voice on the album, saxophonist Charlie Mariano, was white. The music was at turns sensual and bracing.²⁶

Mingus was quick to emphasize his own status as an artistic embodiment of the Civil Rights Movement, and his outspoken political behavior became part of his appeal as an artist and entertainer. Coverage of him in the press, primarily written by white critics, took delight in his larger-than-life persona, often in ways that reinforced stereotypes of impulsive, violent, childlike Black men. Mingus played along to varying degrees,

²⁵ Gene Lees, "Newport: The Trouble," *Down Beat*, August 18, 1960, 20-23, 44; *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, directed by Bert Stern, (New Yorker Films, 1960), DVD, (New Yorker Films, 2000).

²⁶ Charles Mingus, *Mingus Dynasty*, Columbia CS 8236, 1960, LP; Mingus, Charles *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*, Impulse! A-35, 1963, LP.

sometimes launching into ferocious attacks on the racism and ignorance of critics, but other times bragging about violent or outrageous behavior, much of it exaggerated or invented. In the wake of Mingus' successes on major labels like Columbia, RCA-Victor, and the ABC imprint Impulse!, he made another attempt to exert greater independence from the market. He started a mail-order record label called Jazz Workshop to try to control the sale of his own music, untempered by the commercial record industry's influence. Although Mingus was a master self-promoter, his anti-racism was undoubtedly sincere. He played benefit concerts for the NAACP and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In another instance, he showed real bravery. When he was playing a concert in tribute to Duke Ellington at Yale University, he refused to leave the stage after the venue received a bomb threat, instead defiantly playing a solo version of Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" as everyone else fled the venue at the urging of police.²⁷

In 1964, Mingus played one of his most ambitious compositions, "Meditations on Integration," at New York's Town Hall in a benefit concert for the NAACP Youth Councils that was recorded for his fledgling mail-order label. When introducing the piece, Mingus said his saxophonist, Eric Dolphy, had told him southerners were building "concentration camps" and putting up wire fences "separating the picketers, the green from the red," because "they don't have gas chambers and hot stoves to cook us in yet." He framed the composition as a meditation "as to how to get some wire-cutters before someone else gets some guns to us." Mingus critiqued Southern racism, making allusions to civil rights battles even while he advanced a belief in the arbitrary nature of race by

²⁷ Claudia Roth Pierpont, "Black, Brown, and Beige: Duke Ellington's Music and Race in America," *The New Yorker*, May 17, 2000; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 259-275.

talking not about Black and white, but “greens and reds.” The piece was intense and varied, featuring meditative flute playing from Dolphy in parts, mournful, dissonant soloing in slow sections by himself in others, and impressionistic playing from his pianist Jaki Byard. Other parts of the piece featured fiery, swinging solos from saxophonist Clifford Jordan and Dolphy on bass clarinet, who extracted mysterious, unearthly sounds from the instrument.²⁸

He was not dismissing race as unreal — he was intimately familiar with the consequences of race and racism. Still, he persisted in using the platform of his art to challenge accepted ideas of race as he attempted to exert control over his own engagement with the music market. His complexity, his familiarity with it, and the possibilities of the booming postwar economy made it possible for him to hijack a corner of the industry to realize his fullest artistic ambitions. He was simultaneously expressing solidarity with the Black Freedom Movement and creating an artistic persona that reflected his entire personality in all its complexity.

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Lloyd, Hendrix, Horne and Mingus were all able to take advantage of the booming and varied postwar music industry in different ways. For Lloyd and Hendrix, they were able to travel freely, play with and learn from established musicians, and begin to find a place as individuals in the era’s music industry. After a period of troubles, Horne

²⁸ Charles Mingus Benefit Concert, 1964, in Papers of the NAACP, Part 19: Youth File, Series D: Youth Department Files, 1956-1965, Folder 001467-007-0370.; Charles Mingus, *Town Hall Concert*, Jazz Workshop JWS-005-S, 1964, LP.

was able to assert a somewhat more independent musical personality, though one that still drew much of its appeal from erotic exoticization, and find a degree of fulfillment through more independent political engagement. Mingus, meanwhile, was able to capture the zeitgeist of the era, reveling in its contradictions and forward movement, and make major artistic statements that directly spoke to the turbulence and possibility of the times.

The mid 1960s were full of contradictions for American racial politics and the entertainment market. Undeniable, significant reforms had been won in both politics and culture. The Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act had passed; institutions were being forced to at least attempt integration all over American society. But the advancement of struggles for these reforms had also uncovered deep fissures all over American society, including within the Civil Rights and Black freedom movement. Black nationalism, as championed by voices such as Malcolm X, was increasing in visibility and influence, especially after a wave of urban uprisings stemming from Black communities in cities in the North like New York and in the West like Los Angeles. The escalation of the Vietnam war was also pushing some Americans to adopt a more global anti-imperialist politics. Young, mostly white radicals in groups like Students for a Democratic Society were feeling alienated from the mass consumer society that had developed in the postwar years, and they looked for cultural heroes and figureheads to repudiate the comfortable, conformist, and racist society they had been raised in.²⁹

In this milieu, musicians with complex racial identifications had new opportunities for expression and performance, but as much as they benefitted from

²⁹ Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016), 127-130; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 84-112.

challenges to systemic racism, they were also subject to internal community pressures for solidarity. And as much as radical movements were rocking the country, the market had in no way disappeared and still shaped the practical realities of their lives. The complexity of their identifications and stories were a dynamic force that could be exploited for fame as exotic symbols, used as a cudgel against racialist narratives, or turned back against them for not falling neatly along battle lines.

CHAPTER IV: POPULAR ETHNIC POLITICS AND THE BIRTH OF NEOLIBERALISM VS. COUNTERCULTURAL UTOPIANISM, 1965-1981

In September 1966, Charles Lloyd took to the stage of the Monterey Jazz Festival and played a set with his quartet, a group full of young and talented musicians. Things had been looking up in Lloyd's career, but in an era of trouble for the jazz economy where clubs were closing and performance opportunities were diminishing, he cannot have anticipated the intense aftermath of his set. He had developed a sound on tenor saxophone heavily influenced by John Coltrane's searching, spiritually inflected explorations, but with a lilting edge. His quartet, including Jack DeJohnette on drums, and a young white pianist sporting a budding afro named Keith Jarrett, were equally comfortable pursuing adventurous freeform explorations or building sublime, melodic grooves. The group had received a positive reception for their debut studio album, *Dream Weaver*, and Lloyd had already scored a cover story with *Down Beat*, the premier jazz publication of the day. But when Atlantic Records, Lloyd's label, put out an LP of his set at Monterey titled *Forest Flower* in February 1967, it became a minor sensation and went on to sell over one million copies, a degree of commercial success that was unusual for a jazz musician.¹

¹ Steve Graybow, "ECM's Charles Lloyd Gets Back to Nature with Revisited 'Forest,'" *Billboard*, March 13, 1999; Charles Lloyd, *Forest Flower*, Atlantic SD 1473, 1967, LP; Burt Korall, "The Charles Lloyd Quartet: Roots and Branches," *Down Beat*, June 16, 1966.

Lloyd, along with other musicians with complex racial identifications, were in the process of becoming resonant cultural symbols of a countercultural utopianism. Young people, radicals, and hippies were imagining building a new world that defied the racism and violence of the contemporary American society. Not only was this vision idealistic, it was also highly saleable. The rock and roll enterprise that arose from bohemian countercultural scenes had a lot of money flowing around it. On the other hand, this was also the era that saw the rise of popular ethnic politics, a characteristic development of neoliberalism. Not only did progressive and radical movements like the Black Power movement, the Chicano movement, and the American Indian Movement arise, but there was also a reactionary rise in white ethnic politics, which spurred deeper polarization along the lines of race. Under the pressure of these competing forces, musicians with complex racial identifications were frequently equivocal and contradictory, though not insincere.²

In the late 1960s, both Jimi Hendrix and Charles Lloyd experienced skyrocketing fame and popularity among young, mostly white rock audiences to whom they appeared to be symbols of approaching revolutionary changes that would transform the racism and cultural conservatism of American society. Hendrix also felt some affinity for the Black Power movement, and participants in the Black Panther Party pressured him to take stronger stands on the Black Freedom Movement. The enormous pressures that came with their fame took their toll, however, and neither lasted in the public spotlight long. The aesthetics of different aspects of the counterculture were commodifiable as well,

² Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

something a young white pianist, Keith Jarrett, who first rose to fame with Charles Lloyd took advantage of starting in the early 1970s. He used his own apparent racial ambiguity and aesthetic material associated with the Black Power movement as license to explore his full musical interests, and he won a popular audience. Meanwhile, after several years of hard times, Charles Mingus used his longtime cosmopolitan credentials to stage a comeback as something of an elder statesman of the counterculture centered around Greenwich Village, and Lena Horne leveraged her new independence to win a Black audience that had often evaded her.

With the success of *Forest Flower*, an album with aesthetics that were right on time for the Summer of Love in 1967, Lloyd was able to play venues typically not available to most jazz musicians. He appeared frequently at rock halls like the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, sharing bills with iconic late 1960s rock groups such as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, and Santana. His next two albums, *Love-In* and *Journey Within*, were both recorded at the Fillmore in 1967. *Down Beat*, in the tone of a spurned lover, noted that Lloyd said he no longer wanted to play little jazz clubs, preferring college concerts, festivals and rock halls. “I’m through playing taverns,” he told the magazine. “The song isn’t just an entertainment song, it’s a total song.” The magazine went on to paraphrase him: “Night clubs, which he calls ‘taverns,’ are not conducive to his kind of groove, he said.”³

³ “Lloyd is discouraged by U.S. jazz scene,” *Down Beat*, November 30, 1967; The Charles Lloyd Quartet, *Love-In*, Atlantic SD 1481, 1967, LP; The Charles Lloyd Quartet, *Journey Within*, Atlantic SD 1493, 1968, LP; Josef Woodard, *Charles Lloyd: A Wild, Blatant Truth*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2015), 63-76.

Lloyd was well-positioned to become the favored jazz musician of the rock counterculture. He had already been friendly with musicians like Robbie Robertson of The Band (who had guested on Lloyd's album *Of Course, Of Course* back in 1965), drummer John Densmore of The Doors, Hendrix, who he claimed was a "close friend," and members of the Beach Boys who soon invited him to play on their recordings. After Monterey, bassist Cecil McBee left the group and Lloyd hired a young bassist named Ron McClure, a young white man who sported long hair. The band was a natural aesthetic fit with the countercultural rock scene despite their mostly acoustic instrumentation. They played long jams inspired by Indian music as well as Beatles covers. Musical number titles like "Tribal Dance," "Love No. 3" and "Karma" hinted at the quartet's exotic presentation. Three out of the four members of the band wore afros, Jarrett included, despite his Hungarian and Scots-Irish heritage. They ditched the traditional suits of jazz musicians for more colorful, flowing clothing. Atlantic Records did not hesitate to take advantage of Black Power iconography in their advertisements for Lloyd despite his frequently gentle aesthetic. In the 1967 issue of *Down Beat* in which Lloyd won the readers' poll for "Jazzman of the Year," an Atlantic advertisement set him in silhouette, large afro contrasting with a white background. Advertisements for the band appeared not only in jazz journals like *Down Beat*, but also the new rock magazine *Rolling Stone*. A full-page advertisement for the band's record *Journey Within* appeared in just the magazine's fifth issue. An interview of Lloyd shot in 1968 featured him making statements like "I find that, ideally, I have a great desire to go out and play for

flowers and trees.” Lloyd had become the essence of a mainstream countercultural figure.⁴

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In 1966, Jimi Hendrix was still playing music with the likes of Little Richard and the Isley Brothers as a backup musician, but he had also begun to lead his own group in clubs around Greenwich Village, Jimmy James (his alias at the time) and the Blue Flames. Charles Lloyd, among others, took note of the guitarist’s fusion of blues, R&B, rock, and folk. In a much-mythologized encounter, Hendrix met Linda Keith, a model and the girlfriend of Keith Richards, guitarist for the Rolling Stones. She was blown away by Hendrix’s potential and persuaded her friend Chas Chandler to come check out Hendrix’s act. Chandler was the bassist for the popular band The Animals, but he was trying to transition out of the lifestyle of a rock star and instead break into managing others. Chandler, captivated by Hendrix’s guitar skills and his cross-genre fluidity, became convinced he could make Hendrix into a star in England.⁵

On September 23, 1966, five days after Charles Lloyd played at the Monterey Jazz Festival, Hendrix boarded a plane to England. Chandler helped Hendrix to put

⁴ “Down Beat Readers’ Poll Winner Charles Lloyd “Jazzman of the Year!” *Down Beat*, December 28, 1967; “Charles Lloyd has a message for you...” *Rolling Stone*, February 10, 1968, 24; Charles Lloyd Quartet, *Dream Weaver*, Columbia CS 9212, 1966, LP; The Charles Lloyd Quartet, *Love-In*; The Charles Lloyd Quartet, *Journey Within*; *Charles Lloyd: Arrows Into Infinity*, directed by Dorothy Darr and Jeffery Morse, USA, 2012; *Charles Lloyd - Journey Within*, directed by Eric Sherman, USA; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 69.

⁵ Charles R. Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*, (New York and Boston: Hachette Books, 2005), 131-141, 146-153; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 69.

together a group there with the white British musicians Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums. They played their first public gig on October 13 in France. Hendrix quickly became a star, drawing much of his appeal from his exoticism — a Black man in a white rock world wearing his hair like Bob Dylan. He was sometimes described in the British press as the “wild man of Borneo.” He was revered by other musicians and adoring British fans for his guitar heroics, but he became just as renowned for his stage antics that he learned from his days touring on the Chitlin’ Circuit: playing his guitar behind his back, in between his legs and with his teeth. During his initial stretch in England, Hendrix also recorded what would become his first LP, *Are You Experienced*. The music was guitar-driven rock and roll, but it included the kinds of nods to global styles of music that were quickly becoming standard in the world of psychedelia.⁶

After gaining fame in England, Hendrix made his first U.S. appearance with the Experience at the Monterey Pop Festival. His performance there would be immortalized by its appearance in the D.A. Pennebaker documentary *Monterey Pop*, which used Hendrix’s performance of “Wild Thing” culminating in him setting his guitar on fire, as its climax. It did not take long for Hendrix to become a star in the U.S. as well, though he was playing to very different audiences from those he had played for in his backup gig days. He had “crossed over,” and at least at first, he found little audience among the Black R&B crowds who had once been his community.⁷

⁶ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 155; The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Are You Experienced*, Reprise RS 6261, 1967, LP.

⁷ The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Live at Monterey*, recorded June 18, 1967, UMe B0009843-02, 2007, CD; *Monterey Pop*, directed by D.A. Pennebaker, (Leacock-Pennebaker, 1968), DVD, (Janus Films, 2017); *Band of Gypsies*, directed by Bob Smeaton, (Experience Hendrix, 1999), DVD.

Hendrix frequently addressed his race in public, if somewhat sheepishly at times. He vocally celebrated his Native American heritage, imagined or not. He had asked for the cover of his second album to make reference to it. The artist who produced it was English, however, so when Hendrix asked for his “Indian” heritage to be addressed, the artist returned with a work portraying Hendrix as Vishnu. Hendrix did not appreciate the artwork when he saw it, remarking, “I’m not that kind of Indian.” But Hendrix generally embraced the showmanship and exoticism expected of him, frequently employing lyrics that alluded to his supposed Native American heritage, such as on “Castles Made of Sand,” which told, in part, the story of a “little Indian Boy,” and wearing clothing associated with Native Americans, including moccasins. On stage, he would dedicate his song “I Don’t Live Today” to Native Americans struggling with poverty and repression on reservations, a topic he brought up in interviews as well. Hendrix became a superstar in part through the marketing of his exotic image. Sometimes he shied away from it, however. During one promotional video filmed with the Experience in late 1967, the other members of the band peppered him with questions he answered. One question from Mitch Mitchell referring to the other members of the Experience asked, “Did you put a spell on those two white boys?” Hendrix replied, “I think they put a spell on me. We’re all brothers and sisters, aren’t we?” At other times, he played up his ambiguity and wildness. After one Danish reporter asked him if he was Black or white, he replied, “I am Cuban, man. I am from Mars.”⁸

⁸ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 205; *Jimi Hendrix*, directed by Joe Boyd, John Head, and Gary Weis, (Warner Brothers, 1973), DVD; Jimi Hendrix, *Axis: Bold as Love*, Reprise Records R 6281, 1967, LP; Keith Keller, “Come to a Soul Revival with Jimi Hendrix, a Rebel from Mars via Cuba,” in *Hendrix on Hendrix: Interviews and Encounters with Jimi Hendrix*, ed. Steven Roby, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 53; Jon Landau, “Hendrix and Clapton,” *Rolling Stone*, November 9, 1967, 18; “Hendrix Hold,”

By mid-1969, the Experience had broken up. Hendrix had wanted to pursue different sounds with his group. He was the highest-paid touring musician in the world, and had three top five Billboard studio albums to his name. He headlined the famous Woodstock Music and Art festival in August, 1969, where his band included two old friends from Tennessee, bassist Billy Cox and rhythm guitarist Larry Lee, two percussionists, Jerry Valez and Juma Sultan, who had played with avant-garde jazz musicians, as well as Experience veteran Mitch Mitchell on drums. With this integrated group, Hendrix was beginning to perform more soul-inspired material. His setlist at the festival included “Gypsy Woman,” an R&B standard by The Impressions written by Curtis Mayfield, and at one point during his set Hendrix joyfully performed R&B backup choreography with Cox and Lee. His performance at this festival climaxed not with a spectacular destruction of his instrument, but instead a virtuoso guitar medley that included his iconic performance of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” complete with auditory simulations of bombs and screams.

Hendrix had been performing the national anthem on stage for about a year, and it had clearly become an anti-war meditation. Before one performance of it, he sarcastically remarked, “Here’s a song we were all brainwashed with, remember this ditty?” At some performances, after instrumentally playing the melody up to the line of the first verse that said the flag’s broad stripes and bright stars “were so gallantly streaming,” Hendrix

Rolling Stone, November 9, 1967, 21; *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*, directed by Michael Wadleigh, (Warner Brothers, 1970), DVD, (Warner Brothers, 1994).

leaned into the microphone and forcefully remarked, “Bullshit.” He was developing radical sympathies that would cause significant tumult in his career.⁹

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A series of hardships hit Mingus from 1964 on. He had been playing with a sextet that was widely hailed as one of the greatest groups of his career, and they had played a number of successful shows on a European tour. But Eric Dolphy, the flautist, alto saxophonist and bass clarinetist of the group, had decided to stay in Europe once the tour finished. Just weeks after its completion, Dolphy died of a diabetic shock that Danish hospital workers had failed to treat, by some accounts because they assumed he was a junkie going through withdrawal. Mingus continued playing and composing masterful work, but his new record label venture, Jazz Workshop, was, much like Debut Records before it, failing to turn up profits despite the brilliance of some of its recordings. He promoted the mail-order catalog in the pages of publications such as the *Village Voice* and *Down Beat*, but his humorous advertisements castigating major record labels and bootleggers failed to convince enough people to buy the records to keep the venture afloat.¹⁰

⁹ *Jimi Hendrix: Live at Woodstock*, directed by Michael Wadleigh, (Experience Hendrix, 1999), DVD, (Experience Hendrix, 2005); Mark Clague, “‘This is America’: Jimi Hendrix’s Star Spangled Banner Journey as Psychedelic Citizenship,” *Journal for the Society of American Music* 8, No. 4 (November 2014), 435-478.

¹⁰ “Charles Mingus Fingers the Record Hi-Jackers,” *The Village Voice*, December, 1966; “\$1,000 is Yours!” *Down Beat*, May 19, 1966, 36; Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 230-276.

By 1966, Mingus was barely recording at all, though he continued to play gigs around the Northeast. In November, he was evicted from his apartment for late payment, an event that was captured on film by the documentarian Thomas Reichman. The documentary provided lively performance footage as well as Mingus musing on racism, firing a rifle in his apartment, and caring for his 5-year-old daughter. He was also unable to find a publisher willing to put out the memoir he had been working on since at least the early 1960s. In the February 22, 1968 issue of *Down Beat*, critic Martin Williams was publicly asking what Mingus was up to in a column entitled “Charles Mingus: Unfinished Business.” Williams proposed that Mingus should put together a group to synthesize what had developed in the last 30 years of jazz. “I think Mingus may well have the understanding and the talent,” Martin wrote. “But beyond that, what the task needs is a stable, more-or-less permanent ensemble of musicians to work with a leader-composer-arranger... And there’s the rub, of course. Such an ensemble needs financial support of some kind. It needs audiences at least occasionally... And it probably needs somebody else to take care of all others kinds of business except musical business.”¹¹

Mingus was also somewhat out of fashion by that point as psychedelic rock, soul and folk overtook jazz as the soundtrack of cosmopolitan rebelliousness. He was publicly criticizing a number of other musicians who were receiving acclaim, success, and in some cases even substantial sales. He forcefully criticized Miles Davis’ experiments with electric instruments, rock, and funk rhythms, and he dismissed avant-garde musicians

¹¹ *Mingus: Charlie Mingus 1968*, directed by Thomas Reichman, (Inlet Films, 1968); Martin Williams, “Charles Mingus: Unfinished Business,” *Down Beat*, February 22, 1968, 10.

who identified with the Black Power movement like Archie Shepp as mediocre players. His career was in deep trouble, and he fell into depression.¹²

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After Hendrix's Woodstock triumph, he continued to experiment musically, and he expressed greater aesthetic and public alignment with the politics of Black Power. He was also chafing against the consistent marketing of him as a wild, exotic figure, and he wanted to exact greater control over his musical direction. Hendrix's desire for greater autonomy coincided with his public flirtation with the politics of the Black Panther Party. As early as 1968, he told one publication that a song he was writing was dedicated to the Panthers, and he sometimes dedicated public performances of that song, "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" to the growing revolutionary political group. He also sometimes resented the stage antics that came to be expected of him, and he wanted to be taken seriously as an artist. He switched his hairstyle from Dylan-style curls to a natural afro. At the same time, he wanted to reach a Black audience, which so far had eluded him in his superstardom. While early in his fame he had voiced support for the American efforts in Vietnam, Hendrix evolved his position, writing and performing anti-war material and talking with some reporters about the need for the Black Panthers to revolutionize life in the United States.¹³

¹² John Goodman, *Mingus Speaks* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013), 311, 314; John Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 312.

¹³ Jacoba Atlas, "Jimi Hendrix, Black Power, and Money," in *Hendrix on Hendrix: Interviews and Encounters with Jimi Hendrix*, ed. Steven Roby, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 171; Clague, "'This is America,'" 442; Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 159-160, 162-163, 283; Jimi Hendrix, "Machine

He never embraced a fully Black nationalist position, however, speaking more about his agreement with the Panthers' critiques of Black poverty and imperialist warfare, and he continued to espouse a universalist vision of race in public. The interest between Hendrix and the Panthers was mutual, and members of the Panthers attempted to recruit Hendrix to perform fundraising duties and publicly endorse the party, efforts Hendrix's managers attempted to scuttle, not wanting to alienate a broad audience who may have disagreed with the Panthers' revolutionary politics. Hendrix also reportedly felt conflicted about the party's racial politics. In some interviews his endorsements of the Panthers were heavily qualified, and he refrained from endorsing political violence.¹⁴

Nonetheless, towards the end of 1969, he put together a short-lived group that aligned with a stance sympathetic to Black nationalism. For the first time since he had won fame, he performed with an all-Black group consisting of himself, Cox on bass, and Buddy Miles, a veteran of various R&B and rock bands, on drums and vocals. The group, called the Band of Gypsys, performed a series of shows at the Fillmore East in New York on New Year's Eve 1969 and New Year's Day 1970. They were recorded to satisfy a settlement in a lawsuit with Capitol Records over an old contract Hendrix had signed, and an album named after the group was. With songs including lyrics like, "With the power of soul, anything is possible," the powerful anti-war anthem "Machine Gun," and soul-

Gun," *Band of Gypsys*, Capitol Records STAO-472, 1970, LP; Hendrix, Jimi, "Voodoo Child," *Live at the Fillmore East*, MCA Records MCAD2-11931, 1999, CD; and Sheila Weller, "Jimi Hendrix: 'I Don't Want to be a Clown Anymore...'" *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1969, 28-29.

¹⁴ John Burks, "Hendrix: The End of a Beginning. Maybe." *Rolling Stone*, March 19, 1970; For an analysis of the Black Panther Party's political stances on poverty, empire, and revolution, see Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016); Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 289; Tony Glover, "Hendrix," in *Hendrix on Hendrix*, 183-185; Rickey Vincent, *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panthers' Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music*, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 293-295.

influenced musical stylings, Hendrix was capturing a new zeitgeist. “The Band of Gypsys was a strong statement from three brothers,” Buddy Miles recalled later. It did not last long. Miles and Hendrix were rivals as well as musical partners, and according to some, including Miles, Hendrix’s management did not want Hendrix to have an all-Black band and alienate his predominantly white fan base. After a disastrous performance at the Winter Peace Festival in January 1970, where Hendrix quit playing after two numbers and was visibly in ill health, Hendrix’s British manager fired Miles.¹⁵

For much of the rest of 1970, Hendrix recorded and toured with Cox and Mitchell, but he was showing signs of exhaustion due to a taxing touring schedule, lack of sleep and near-constant drug use. Cox quit the group after having a nervous breakdown later in the year. By the time Hendrix died of a drug overdose in September 1970, he was exhausted by his attempts to balance his musical ambitions, his political interests and commercial expectations, and he never successfully resolved those competing forces in his life.¹⁶

By 1969, Charles Lloyd was also in trouble. He was exhausted by his fame and ubiquitous drug use, and his playing began to suffer. His drummer Jack DeJohnette remembers confronting Lloyd along with Keith Jarrett, telling him his playing was flat. Lloyd soon came to the same conclusion and withdrew from touring after DeJohnette moved on to Miles Davis’ group and Jarrett left to pursue his own career. Lloyd continued to record, playing flute on records by the Beach Boys as well as making his own albums. He sang and incorporated folk music to his new material, which was not

¹⁵ Hendrix, *Band of Gypsys*, and *Band of Gypsys*, directed by Bob Smeaton.

¹⁶ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, 331-333.

enthusiastically embraced by critics. Lloyd leaned hard into a racially ambiguous, new age-prefiguring countercultural image with numerous references to Eastern spirituality, and portraits of him with long, wavy hair on his album covers. Still, his earlier success eluded him. The music scene was moving on, and he knew it, so he retreated to a home in Big Sur to recover and reorient.¹⁷

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One musician whose career was on the upward trajectory, however, was Keith Jarrett. Jarrett was a white jazz pianist born in Pennsylvania in 1945. After high school he had spent time at the Berklee College of music in Boston, but he moved to New York after a year to try to make it as a professional jazz musician. He was hired by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers who in previous years had been a key group in the development of Hard Bop, a gospel-inflected variation of bebop thought by many critics to be a partial repudiation of the classical-inflected, mostly-white West Coast Jazz phenomenon. Jarrett was one of the few white musicians to ever play with the Messengers. His stint with them was brief, however, and it was with Charles Lloyd that his playing attracted more notice. After he left Lloyd, he played as a sideman with Miles Davis, one of the most commercially and artistically successful artists in the jazz world, and one of the few who, like Lloyd, was playing rock halls instead of jazz clubs. Davis, a dark-skinned Black man, was long noted as a hero to young Black militants due to his defiant attitude

¹⁷ The Beach Boys, *Surf's Up*, Reprise RS 6453, 1971, LP; Charles Lloyd, *Moon Man*, Kapp KS 3634, 1970, LP; Charles Lloyd, *Warm Waters*, Kapp KS 3647, 1971, LP; Charles Lloyd, *Waves*, A&M Records SP-3044, 1972, LP; Woodard, *Charles Lloyd*, 85-134.

towards racism and his standoffish dismissal of white critics and establishmentarian institutions.¹⁸

While with Lloyd, Jarrett grew a large afro and, curiously, audiences began to frequently mistake him for a light-skinned Black man, a misidentification he later admitted he did not discourage. He was playing with some of the most adventurous jazz musicians in the world, many of them at least tangentially connected to Black nationalist politics. In photographs on his album artwork, he was often portrayed in Black and white, further allowing the perception. In addition, composition titles on his albums, especially in the first half of the 1970s, often reflected the kinds of exoticist, third-worldist nods appearing on Black avant-garde musicians' albums, including "Ruta + Daitya," "Sounds of Peru," "Algeria," "Gypsy Moth," "El Juicio," "The Rich (And the Poor)," and "Yaqui Indian Folk Song."¹⁹

Jarrett seemed to take great pleasure in the case of mistaken identity. In an interview with National Public Radio host Terry Gross done in the 1990s, he laughingly recalled Black musicians insinuating that he must really have been Black, and he said he believed that his career benefitted from the mistake. He frequently drew on Black gospel music in his improvisations, which he vocalized and groaned along with in apparent ecstasy. It seemed to be a new echo of the pleasure derived from racial transgression that had a long history, from blackface minstrelsy all the way through Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger. In his interview with Gross, Jarrett recalled a coterie of Black nationalists

¹⁸ Ian Carr, *Keith Jarrett: The Man and His Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 1-59.

¹⁹ Keith Jarrett, interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, September 11, 2000; Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, *Ruta and Daitya*, ECM Records ECM 1021 ST, 1971, LP; Keith Jarrett, *Treasure Island*, Impulse! AS-9274, 1974, LP; Keith Jarrett, *El Juicio (The Judgement)*, Atlantic SD 1673, 1975, LP; Keith Jarrett, *The Köln Concert*, ECM Records ECM 1064/65, 1975, LP.

protesting his inclusion at a jazz festival because of his appropriation of Black music. His defense involved noting that an African man from Central Africa came backstage to tell him how beautiful he thought Jarrett's playing was. "[He was] blacker than any of the guys who tried to disrupt the stuff on stage," Jarrett recalled. In many ways, Jarrett was trying to have it both ways, making an individualist appeal to his own musical interests and desires on the one hand, and justifying it with an appeal to the authenticity of the fan on the other. In any case, Jarrett's music was extremely successful, and the album *The Köln Concert*, which featured him improvising solo piano, sold an unusual number of copies for a jazz record, and became a signifier of cosmopolitan, bohemian taste in the 1970s.²⁰

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In 1971, Mingus' fortunes began to rise again. His memoir *Beneath the Underdog*, in the works for years, was finally released on Grove Press, striking up a new wave of popular influence. It received a rave review from Felipe Luciano, a leader of the Young Lords, in the *Village Voice*, embracing Mingus as a hero of Black nationalism. It received a very different review, highlighting his more utopian visions of "colorlessness" in the much less radical *New Republic* called "Agonies of a Mongrel." He transitioned into a sort of elder statesman of the Greenwich Village countercultural scene balancing

²⁰ Keith Jarrett, interview by Terry Gross; Keith Jarrett, *The Köln Concert*; David Ake, "Race, Place, and Nostalgia after the Counterculture," in *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time Since Bebop*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 77-101.

between the “color-blind” utopianism promoted by some in the rising neoliberal order as well as the ethnic nationalism of other parts of the left.²¹

He was soon making acclaimed music again as well, including the Grammy-winning 1972 album *Let My Children Hear Music* back on Columbia Records and produced by his old Jazz Composers Workshop accomplice Teo Macero. Other records followed. *Changes One* and *Changes Two* both presented blistering music paired with strong political statements (“Remember Rockefeller at Attica” and “Cell Block F, ‘Tis Nazi U.S.A.” were typical). *Cumbia and Jazz Fusion*, an album inspired by Colombian music, was one of his last albums. Even as Mingus experienced widespread adoration from the jazz and alternative press, he had been diagnosed with ALS, and his health was declining. In 1979, in the midst of working on a collaborative project with the singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell, he died in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He asked for his ashes to be scattered in the Ganges river in India. To the last, Mingus was worldly.²²

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In the late 1960s on, Lena Horne, as an aging entertainer, made attempts to connect with a Black audience that eluded her. In 1966, that effort was an album called *Soul*; in 1970 it was a funk-inflected album with Gábor Szabó called, simply enough,

²¹ Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 299-315; Felipe Luciano, “Charlie Mingus, a nigger?” *The Village Voice*, July 22, 1971; Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*; Jonathan Yardley, “Agonies of a Mongrel,” *New Republic*, July 3, 1971.

²² Charles Mingus, *Let My Children Hear Music*, Columbia KC 31039, 1972, LP; Charles Mingus, *Changes One*, Atlantic SD 1677, 1975, LP; Charles Mingus, *Changes Two*, Atlantic SD 1678, 1975, LP; Charles Mingus, *Cumbia & Jazz Fusion*, Atlantic SD 8801, 1978, LP; Joni Mitchell, *Mingus*, Asylum Records 5E-505, 1979, LP; Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 377-384.

Lena & Gabor. Instead, she was a staple of mainstream variety shows with a middle-of-the-road audience, something that frustrated her given her simmering anger at the racism of American society.²³

In the 1970s, however, Horne began to experience a much-welcomed resurgence with Black audiences, in part because her career was finally firmly in her own hands in a way it had not been before. There was her appearance as the object of Red Foxx as Fred Sanford's devotion on *Sanford and Son*, there was her appearance in the soulful update of *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Wiz*, as Glinda the Good Witch of the South, and finally, in 1981, there was her solo Broadway show, *The Lady & Her Music*. In it she curated her favorite pop standards, and she sang them in expressive and mature jazz interpretations interspersed with autobiographical monologues. The show won rave reviews and became the longest-running solo Broadway show ever. The advance of identity-centered politics beginning in the 1970s had its drawbacks, but the advance of feminism and the gains of the Black Power movement undeniably opened space for a figure like Horne to finally secure the degree of autonomy and recognition she deserved. To be sure, her triumph was performative and hyper-commodified, but it was also bracingly honest. In it, there was one more moment of Benjamin's "weak messianic power," a triumph of progressivism, that is worth recalling despite the bleak world around her.²⁴

²³ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*, (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 355, 404; Lena Horne, *Soul*, United Artists UAS 6496, 1966, LP; Lena Horne and Gábor Szabó, *Lena & Gabor*, Skye Records SK-15, 1970, LP.

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 14; *Sanford and Son*, season 2, episode 16, "A Visit from Lena Horne," directed by Jack Shea, aired January 12, 1973; *The Wiz*, directed by Sidney Lumet (Universal Pictures, 1978); *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*, directed by Paddy Sampson, USA, 1984.

CONCLUSION

Lena Horne, Charles Mingus, Charles Lloyd, Jimi Hendrix, and Keith Jarrett were all musicians with complex racial identifications. Most came from multi-ethnic backgrounds that did not neatly fit into the Jim Crow racial order that existed in their childhoods, and some also were perceived as racially ambiguous by others. The ways in which they engaged with the music and entertainment industry from the era of the Great Depression and World War II into the Cold War years is revealing about transformations in the economy of the United States and the power of social movements to transform ideas about racial identity. Each took control of their racial complexity in varying ways, but they all attempted to leverage it for greater artistic range and forms of social critique, even as they experienced the exoticization and commodification of their personas in the entertainment market context.

Musicians with complex racial identifications did not have complete control over they were used. That much is clear. Still, they were able to use their complexities and experiences to influence the course of events in significant ways. They were able to engage the context they lived in and nudge history slightly in one direction or another.

The stories of these musicians with complex racial identifications hopefully demonstrate a few key points. One is that the ideology of race can have a powerful, even determinative influence on the shape of society and culture; concurrently, however, it is

also not a transhistorical force with a “life of its own.” Its power as an ideology derives from the history that forms it. Second, although the use of race as a tool of culture almost always carries power, it is unwise to judge all uses of it as a historical force in the same way. Considered judgements can only come from analyzing who holds power in a scenario, and even more importantly, the way those relationships relate to larger struggles between classes in society — not classes in an oversimplified economic sense, but in the sense Karl Marx deployed it “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”¹: classes as groups of people with shared experiences, interests and power both real and potential.¹

Finally, art, entertainment, and culture are worthy of public attention and critical analysis in relation to politics, by which I mean the struggle of groups of people over power and resources. Figures like Mingus, Horne, and Hendrix show us that culture can be deployed in a way that is deeply political without jettisoning humor, nuance, or beauty. In a dangerous world only likely to grow more dangerous, those are lessons worth remembering.

But other interpretations of these stories are both possible and desirable. One hope I have had in writing this thesis is thinking through narrative history as a way to educate and to illuminate present problems. The way these stories are presented here is deeply influenced by my personal history and intellectual journey, but the significance of these stories does not begin there, and it also does not end there. People who encounter these stories should apply their own knowledge and experiences to them, dispute when they

¹ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by David McClellan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

think my conclusions are incorrect, and draw new truths and powers from these stories.

Collectively, dialogue begun by storytelling can be an infinitely productive force.

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