

CULTURE THROUGH LINES

VALUES, VISIONS, AND TRANSFORMATION—
African American Music, American Culture, and Society



EDITED BY
WILLIAM BANFIELD

CULTURE THROUGH LINES

VALUES, VISIONS, AND TRANSFORMATION—
African American Music, American Culture, and Society

EDITED BY
WILLIAM BANFIELD

A Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge



Smithsonian
Scholarly Press

WASHINGTON, D.C.
2023

Cover image: African American family group. Courtesy of The History Center in Tompkins County, Ithaca, NY, General Photo Collection (D5-23).

Published by SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION SCHOLARLY PRESS

P.O. Box 37012, MRC 957, Washington, D.C. 20013-7012

<https://scholarlypress.si.edu>

Compilation copyright © 2023 by Smithsonian Institution

“The ‘Future’ of Afrofuturism: An Essay by Multimedia Artist Daniel Callahan” © 2023 by Daniel Callahan

“Interdisciplinary Modes of Presentation as Vehicles for Cultural Change in Classical Music” © 2023 by
Carmen-Helena Téllez

The text of “Holding Culture in View: Musical Crossroads at the National Museum of African American History and Culture,” by Dwandalyne Reece (pp. 75–78), and the text of “Afrofuturism in Past Perfect Tense: The Cultural Legacy of Henry Dumas,” by John S. Wright (pp. 95–113), are in the public domain. The rights to all other text and images in this publication, including cover and interior designs, are owned either by the Smithsonian Institution, by contributing authors, or by third parties.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License excluding content credited to rightsholders and third parties. For permission to reproduce credited materials, users are responsible for contacting rightsholders directly.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Banfield, William C., 1961– editor. | Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, issuing body.

Title: Culture throughlines : values, visions, and transformation—African American music, American culture, and society / edited by William Banfield.

Other titles: Values, visions, and transformation—African American music, American culture, and society | Smithsonian contribution to knowledge.

Description: Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Scholarly Press, 2023. | Series: A Smithsonian contribution to knowledge | In scope of the U.S. Government Publishing Office Cataloging and Indexing Program (C&I); Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) distribution status to be determined upon publication. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023023436 (print) | LCCN 2023023437 (ebook) | ISBN 9781944466657 (paperback) | ISBN 9781944466640 (Adobe pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Popular music—African American influences. | African Americans—Music. | African Americans—Social life and customs. | Culture. | United States—Civilization—African American influences.

Classification: LCC ML3479 .C85 2023 (print) | LCC ML3479 (ebook) | DDC 780.8996073—dc23/eng/20230629 | SUDOC SI 1.60:AF 8

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023023436>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023023437>

ISBN-13: 978-1-944466-64-0 (online)

ISBN-13: 978-1-944466-65-7 (print)

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48–1992.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction: On Meaning | v |
| PART I. CULTURAL RELEVANCE: MUSIC..... | 1 |
| Paradigms, Principles, and the People's Prophecy: Making an Aesthetic for a 21st-Century Rhythm | 3 |
| WILLIAM BANFIELD | |
| Who Stopped the Clock? | 11 |
| WILLIAM BANFIELD | |
| Culture Throughlines Theory | 17 |
| WILLIAM BANFIELD | |
| In Response: A Thinking Piece on How the Future Might Look | 29 |
| SU OZER | |
| PART II. THE ISLEY BROTHERS' MUSICAL FAMILY..... | 35 |
| Living Rock and Roll: An Interview with Ernie Isley | 37 |
| WILLIAM BANFIELD | |
| PART III. INVITED ESSAYS..... | 65 |
| Madonna Finding Freedom in "Batuka": #Blackwomenaretheblueprint | 67 |
| AMINAH PILGRIM | |
| Holding Culture in View: Musical Crossroads at the National Museum of African American History and Culture | 75 |
| DWANDALYN REECE | |
| The Throughlines: Doing Work(s) Rhythmically Does Justice to Time— An Interview with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell. | 79 |
| YSAYE BARNWELL AND WILLIAM BANFIELD | |
| "These Are Interesting Times" | 83 |
| T. J. ANDERSON III | |
| Values and Culture Throughlines in Our Traditions from Jazz to Hip-Hop: Experiences Rooted in Familial and Community Relationships | 89 |
| AJA BURREL WOOD | |
| Afrofuturism in Past Perfect Tense: The Cultural Legacy of Henry Dumas. | 95 |
| JOHN S. WRIGHT | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The “Future” of Afrofuturism: An Essay by Multimedia Artist Daniel Callahan . . . | 115 |
| DANIEL CALLAHAN | |
| Toward a Radical Popular Culture: Political and Musical Reflections | 127 |
| VICTOR WALLIS | |
| Interdisciplinary Modes of Presentation as Vehicles for Cultural Change in Classical Music | 141 |
| CARMEN-HELENA TÉLLEZ | |
| Conclusion | 157 |
| Postlude: Sing-a-Song | 169 |
| Acknowledgments | 171 |
| About the Contributors | 173 |
| Index | 177 |

Introduction: On Meaning

The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. . . . He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die . . . create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life. . . . It means that in the lives of the Negro writer/artists must be found those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today. . . . Surely this is the moment to ask questions, to theorize, to speculate, to wonder out of what materials can a human world be built.

—Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937)

CREATING VALUES

Those of us who work in the humanities, arts, and education as culture creators and writers are responding to all the shaking around us and are concerned about how we are defining culture today and moving forward. It is both a reality of our condition, and a great opportunity to do things. I must admit, I’ve asked myself, as an artist, how will the soil support the toes and heels of my feet as I walk forward in an increasingly complex and challenged world?

In other words, what matters?

Our values and cultural rituals matter.

Today, there is interest in the ways that culture and education define human ascension. The importance of being a carrier of culture and craftsmanship is absolutely critical.

The bigger throughlines connect across time, peoples, and cultures. What are the connective tissues that thread human narratives together? What are the values, heritages, and expressions that define and sustain people?

This work focuses on what I identify as cultural throughlines, delineating the ways in which contemporary artistry, new works, and creative methods can better be appreciated and seen as a “tri-vision tradition” (then, now, and when) as they harken back and tie into critical cultural linkages from our past, suggesting our future. Although that’s not so new, what is new are today’s social languages, platforms, movements, and fluidity, necessitating discussions that anticipate ever-changing cultural shifts. This discussion is necessary to avoid ending up with a stationary praxis but instead to create a dialogue about cultural practices. It’s always about living, how we do culture, what it is, what it means, and why. Then the discussion moves to basic questions about what we as artists care about and what we value (identity, creative voice, survival). How do we get there? And what do everyday people value and care about?

This book is a little cultural theory, a little ritual formation and a lot of how is any of this sustainable.

To have a collection of ideas from creative thinkers on the role of arts and ideas that define and carry societal value is important work.

We consider life a gift, and so the work people put forward to continually transform our time and celebrate the gifts in life can make a difference in the ways we actually live.

It is hoped, at least, that doing this, having these conversations, allows us to stay ahead of the beat by creating the deep value codes that we are living under and by. In this difficult era of cultural political rebirth and extended chaos, how do we now focus our work on ways that lift people up and enliven them and raise the idea of loving and caring for each other? This focus slowly became more comforting in the early parts in 2021, and into 2022, largely because of a positive political shift that was mounted on a wave of activism and public spirit that was transformative. I hope this discussion generates a working praxis that can be further fueled by this book, which features contributions from colleagues who are looking at values formation.

This work was a spurring of a wellspring of expressive actions and ideas that make being a creative person a happy place for receiving inspiration, which guarantees that our work makes sense. This provides a healthy dose of comfort when trying to assess, to understand in hope, to walk worthy (i.e., behave consistent with our ideals), and to be welcomed in a period and age in which such a fashioned identity fits the times we want desperately to wear well.

We live in a society with multiple shifting values, in which the question arises: What are the things that we experience, believe in, sing about, build, and advocate for to have a meaningful life?

This is not a rhetorical question in the way of an academic exercise. In divinity school, we are trained to address existential questions about culture and about how faith informs reality. We explored ideas relative to cultural criticism. This discussion presumes reflection, not a predetermined outcome. The machine-like noises of the traditional, dominant status quo, paradigm are the most elusive and destructive noises, and they are the root of the deadening of our senses.

I have tried in my own books, in my music, to create from the angle of praxis. These essays take the same approach. This book asks about our culture, what do we value and believe in and what must we do now? These kinds of questions, as presented here, could be addressed by exploring “sustainable cultural throughlines,” allowing a larger cross-generational dialogue on and in our shared values and traditions, images, connective narratives, and rituals that cut across our experiences. How do we define our cultural practices, ideology, symbols, and movements in culture? What is our real cultural worldview?

Readers will want to know from musicians, artists, and educators if music culture, politics, and society have shifted, and how those differences are detectable, generationally. No one group comes up from silence. We come out of trauma, from travail to triumph. We share in these essays that, principally, art is for lifting and living (and not for commercial profit based on greed and exploitation); it is a record of important heritage information and cultivation.

EDUCATION, ARTS, MUSIC, AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Education, arts, music, and cultural studies are areas of expression and study that provide examples to consider how we have addressed these various crossroads.

Let's look at Black art, music, narratives, and cultural history. Here these must be more broadly seen, researched, and preserved as critical consciousness. The aesthetic, creative craft, and artistic power, and true connection to the value of sustaining people, provide evidence (e.g., performances, recordings, films, theater, general popular culture, concert arts traditions) of so many expressions of art and culture. Artists, over time, have consciously articulated a practiced and refined art and rhetoric dedicated to these meanings and the measures of humanity. I would add that these value sets are seen throughout most of our modern American popular, spiritual, and political culture.

Additionally, the cultivation of these value sets has allowed people to aspire and provide an essential view of critical human, spiritual, intellectual, political, and social development. This is what drives and defines artists' work.

Throughlines are our way of looking at this as a broader discussion of how we are living forward today. The arts are always an active barometer and a vehicle we step into and ride forward.

Essays by Victor Wallis and Dwandalyn Reece reflect how we want to keep ideas like values, worldviews, and working cultural norms, as these are ideas that create a social consciousness, whether in critique or celebration of culture or in the construction of new paradigms and ideals.

People who transform the times make indelible marks when needed and seem to come out of nowhere with a genius zeal, inspiring messages, and a commitment to serve the community and their ideals. These ideals, ideas, and values were always cemented in the art forms, because these were the forms folks had direct access to. Their reality was in these art forms; it was their folk material, the materials of life itself. How to feel, think, absorb, reflect, dance, sing, and act out. When I began this writing, I was snatched back to a writing hero, Ralph Ellison, who illustrated the power of literature and narrative on carrying and shaping human ideas.

He wrote in his set of essays *Shadow and Act* that “[t]he act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike . . . linked to . . . depicting what really happened within our areas of American life, and putting down with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediencies that attitude and values which give [Negro] American life its sense of wholeness and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our own terms, desirable” (Ellison 2011, 19).

VALUES TRANSFER

John S. Wright, visual artist Daniel Callahan, and T. J. Anderson III contributed essays to explore the big issue here: values transformation, transfer, and translating, generation to generation, and again across genres.

Today, we are finding that the paradigms for culture and its definition have shifted. Even the term *culture* and what it implies and applies to concerns us. Recasting and reconnecting traditions as we explore, redefining values and our human and spiritual compass, is important work. Our goal is to pose, probe, and write in real motion forward, addressing the questions, the hurdles, and the engagements and asking if any resolution is possible.

Throughout these pages, there is a feeling that an enlarging gap exists between how the younger generation understands its cultural legacies and commitments. Today, significant cultural institutional structures, government and societal cultural standards, generational bonds, legal and justice systems, church, and various cemented beliefs have come unglued.

Many of the critical cultural codes have been corrupted and corroded or are eroding. It is important to hold onto rich expressions that are imbued and laced with sustainable ideas that lift our society up, transform it, and engage in the ongoing work of dialogues about living and ensuring a good life. I call this artistic citizenry, and that's what I'm committed to building and sharing.

In recent years, according to several research studies, including those by the Pew Research Center and American National Election study, political culture rancor is at an all-time high. The studies point out that the political divide is as divisive as our nation's most bitter cultural debates on differences such as race, abortion, gender, and sexuality. Studies show that even with interpersonal contact, which social psychologists believe could be good for cultural civility, many Americans increasingly live in a world in which exchange is becoming harder and harder to come by, and by choice. These cultural divisions heighten incivility as people go out of their way to avoid social contact, preferring to stick with "their own camps" in social media. Connecting is critical.

ROLES IN ARTS CULTURE

They are the harbingers, reflectors of the same life development . . . We followed Trane . . . our own teaching for new definition. We heard our own search, travails, our reaching for new definition. Trane was our flag. But, there were other younger forces, and this added other elements to the music (Ornette, Cecil, Oliver Nelson, Eric Dolphy . . .) There was a newness, defiance . . . laid out in their music . . . politically and creatively, it was all connected . . .
It was if the music was leading us.

—Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (1984)

Aminah Pilgrim and Carmen-Helena Téllez point out later, in the arts industry fields, that these contemporary themes, problems, and celebrations are critical: identity, representation, technology's role in determining aesthetic force, the ways our art is being marketed, cultural voice or corporate vice, the question of the role of arts, popular culture, the question of it being negative or positive on our worldview, the role of today's artists in advocacy of social

justice issues, economics of the recording and entertainment field, and the role of education in providing training for young people to be wholly prepared. In 2020, we were hit with one of the greatest challenges our society has had to face in generations. Were we prepared?

The main focus of the throughlines inquiry, it seems to me, is to determine in each dialogue in time, using the essential barometers (creative, politics, culture), how to define what and which are our culture codes and values. Values carry order, frame passions, cement heritages, affirm faith, live codes, and uplift communities, and thus they define the society we live within. This is important, vital stuff!

Once you determine and track these and address (but not answer), “What must we do to be saved?” (to understand the systems of survival and the rituals of life and governance), then the answers that come through this process are the tangible throughlines that show up in all the groups (generational cases).

The threads that come through, that link button to button, these are the throughlines. The buttons are the various generational cultural eras and times, and the threads are those essential, “needed” things that connect consistently through. The mystery is: What are the things that are valued in each period, and how do we understand and then maintain enough of the stuff of our values to sustain what we believe in going forward? It is what we believe in and are willing to live for and, within that belief, it is what we need to construct the various new spaces we inhabit.

The writers in this collection discuss relying on the new ideas of today’s artists, new methods of production, cultural analysis, and a new commitment to relevance. Carmen-Helena Téllez asserts that “new interdisciplinary modes of presentation of classical music can offer rich opportunities for the examination of diverse cultural and social ways of being, through the exchange of methodologies with other arts and the humanities, the artistic use of technology, and the generation of opportunities for co-creativity or interactivity between performers and the audience” (see Téllez, “Interdisciplinary Modes of Presentation as Vehicles for Cultural Change in Classical Music,” this vol.).

That’s what I love about “materials culture,” holding *culture in view*. This is how we find so many learning pathways. This shows the true picture of two things: (1) what was done and (2) how these materials were used and appreciated.

The sense of renewal, discovery, and revisiting is hugely important as historical experiences and events, which is exhilarating. It gives us glimpses of the lives, different ways to get to know these artists. These things have a very important educational, social, and political purpose, as Dwandalyn Reece shares about the power of art in museum spaces to point through to pathways that might carry some meaning of our purposes.

CULTURE SURVIVAL

This is essential for our survival, the qualifying actions, memories, and creative practices that define our humanity and make us feel worthwhile. I’m discovering that “values engagement work” is critical, because values are the seeds of what people are committed to do for the good work of what they believe in. Instill the right values and you ensure the power to

transform the world you encounter. Aja Burrell Wood describes this effect in her essay: “Experiences of jazz and its recordings are often rooted in familial values and community relationships and may transcend those of, say, simply stumbling upon an old jazz record. In other words, a record is not just any record, it’s ‘your dad’s record’ and can come to be associated with everything it means to him, to you, and to your relationship, its worth in Black values!” (see Wood, “The Values and Culture Throughlines in Our Traditions from Jazz to Hip-Hop: Experiences Rooted in Familial and Community Relationships,” this vol.).

The throughlines, we believe, help us to better relate across time to track that relating and, for the artist, that is the creative human breathing stuff that matters and defines us. Without this comprehension, there is complacency and estrangement, which is annihilation.

Many of us came up in a time in which values mattered: hard work, honesty, integrity, building character, and aspiring to become your best for the best reasons. It’s a real challenge to live in a world that is continually constructed in a “countervalue” existence.

These ideas are shared in this book,, written to encourage a cross-generational dialogue on current ideas that we face around issues of creativity, culture, and an arts praxis to develop our ideas so they may be translated into action for contemporary expression and application.

Simply, how do we, as creative people, live today to sustain cultural relevance? How does our society best represent what is important for living whole today? To this question, Ysaye Barnwell says:

We have to start in Africa. Because music is a heightened, higher form of communication. And that’s important because music carries further than just the human voice. So with drumming and other instrumentation and people singing together, we have the capability of sharing our messages, transmitting these ideas we hold over a longer distance, over and in space. And with the enhancements of drumming in African traditions, it speaks a language that people understand. If we move forward chronicling from there, we were first brought here as slaves to do somebody’s work. (see Barnwell and Banfield, “The Throughlines: Doing Work(s) Rhythmically Does Justice to Time: An Interview with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell,” this vol.)

For Black people throughout the diaspora, those chains remain as reminders that the systems of oppression still exist. And these expressions are constant in song traditions brought from the homeland created today to deal with that long-looming inequity. Sadly, the opposition to change is usually about control of money born out of the ills of misguided practices of power related to race, gender, and class, by participating egos that are challenged or threatened.

The status quo paradigm really must be changed. Most of our systems are elitist and racist, male dominated, and configured for the gain of the few, based on “one view of the table” for me and mine. The conversations must quite simply change, and who’s at the table must now be shifted so there is equity of voice and perspective at every level. The problem is we should be thinkers and doers, talking about doing. What we have is people only seeing the present, not the future, and focusing more on their needs, and not on what is needed.

The paradigm shift that several of our essayists point to circles around this economic imperialism and being wed to systems not intended for the good of those at the bottom of the social-economic ladder, and it's a global paradigm that must be looked into, as Sue Ozer does in her essay.

The writer Albert Murray put it this way:

In truth, it is literature which establishes the context for social, political action. The writer who creates stories or narrates incidents which embody the essential nature of human (spiritual) existence . . . also suggests commitments . . . which will contribute most to man's immediate welfare, and ultimate fulfillment as a human being. It is the writer/artist . . . who first comes to realize when the time is out of joint . . . determines the extent and gravity of the current human predicament, describes hidden elements of destruction, sounds the alarm, defines the villain, designates the targets, is the myth maker, value maker, identifies the conflicts, identifies the hero, the good and adequate man . . . invokes the image of the possibility . . . pre-figures the contingencies of a happily balanced humanity and of the Great Good Place. (Murray 2012)

Many of the ways in which we live are defined by complex industry-encrusted corporate models of doing things. This permeates our humanities in a poisonous, ripping way. We are losing our human-care sensitivity and are more deeply given into these cash-crop commercial models.

Politics, church, the academy, and government all need a dialogue for great changes and should commit to newer evolved models. Love is never mentioned in anyone's documents for order. What if people were confronted with what it means to love, or given the space to embrace that very simple ideal? Arts are about humans loving things. Market maneuvering for power, popularity, show, and cash growth is doing disastrous things to the way we see our social human condition.

Today, we need a "transformative investment praxis" for moving ahead, to become our best, to address these problems, and to create better designs forward.

It's a matter of being inspired by the notion of restoration, rebooting, and rebirth and always in the positive forward. A reevaluation of the current cultural-political social system we have inherited allows clarity on the problems we face. We can't change the entire system yet, but we can do relevant transformative work by agreeing on some new models, some praxis agenda, and we can get to work to creating and living positively. Our question is: What is normalcy now?

LAST DOWNBEATS

In closing, this book features explorations from writers across disciplines, traditions, and generations sharing different choices, models, definitions, stances, reasons, and reactions to shifting notions of value codes. We are purposed with exploring throughlines, discovering

what ideals and ideas are valued as inevitable, sustainable principles that we will all cherish for going forward. These throughlines define creativity, society, politics, economics, class, spirituality, and working and living governances—all the powers, languages, cultural *system-isms* of our organized society.

These essays are probes and discussions with others that have a real reach toward not only trying to say something but also listening hard to responses, while simultaneously endeavoring to understand how the current sayings and doings matter.

My teacher and mentor T. J. Anderson always said, “It’s the role of the creative person to document the culture.” As long as we are asking, then we must believe we are living forward to find and maintain the culture throughlines.

We are also particularly interested in a cultural arts narrative told in photographs, memorabilia, programs, newspaper clippings, and collected essays that present a tapestry of documented presence in creative arts accomplishments. This tapestry defines modern living through a collection of intercultural, generational, and intersectional visions and expressions in American culture. What did the people in our time value? What was their look and style? And how did their creative expressions and ideas manifest? What would it mean to further develop and extend these throughlines today?

The archives of our nation must contain the narratives that define our human condition. These are the records, the repositories that tell us of our values and worth and teach us how life is to be lived fully. I love this kind of work: it deepens our commitment to contributing to our national creative narratives in this way.

William “Bill” Banfield
August 2022

REFERENCES

Ellison, Ralph. 2011. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage Books.

Murray, Albert. 2012. *The Hero and the Blues*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

PART I

CULTURAL RELEVANCE: MUSIC

Paradigms, Principles, and the People's Prophecy: Making an Aesthetic for a 21st-Century Rhythm

— WILLIAM BANFIELD —

[W]e are sorely in need of the clarity and inconvenient truths that art allows us to tell, the conversations it sparks, the space for emotion that it makes, the questions it poses, the pressure points in an aching national body politic that it exposes . . . it is art, our ability to sit with art and all the possibilities it helps us to imagine, that is so important to our ability to value . . . But under conditions of neoliberalism, which favor the unregulated, unchecked reach of huge multinational corporations into every area of our lives, art and music and the people who produce them all become merely marketable commodities.

—Brittney Cooper, “America’s ‘Prince’ Problem:
How Black People—and Art—Became Devalued” (2016)

VALUES FOR A NEW AESTHETIC FOR ART AND CULTURE IN MODERN LIFE

A dialogue that was in search of defining sets of values for a new aesthetic for art and culture in modern life: what would that be? Because contemporary cultural inquiry is always at the crossroads of discussions and analysis of modern living, there would be “new narratives,” dynamic, intriguing “mash-ups” in culture, technology, media, current events, and ideas through cultural arts and expression. Today there is a thirst, a need to explore ongoing and forward thinking that suggests the vitality and importance of today’s rich cultural landscapes.

These narratives help us hear and understand our culture, in new music, arts, identity, biography, and critical contemporary cultural inquiries. In short, we always need a stated cultural aesthetic. It’s how art stands to be read, or at least attempted. I’m always thinking about the community share. Many of us have been struggling with how to navigate this “progressive arts identity” in a culture seemingly bereft of grounding in light of fast-shifting norms. What would a new aesthetic for us look like?

Like Addison Gayle presented in the 1971 book *The Black Aesthetic*, what young writers felt across disciplines and perspectives served as a call to current order. He opens with the Margaret Walker poem, “Let the martial songs/ be written, let the dirges disappear. Let [us] now/ rise and take control” (Walker 1989). He talks of “a new note” and beginning the

journey toward a new or current aesthetic. Many people are interested in developing and exploring the critical perspectives on the rich and always-moving multiple meanings of modern culture and arts perspectives.

This perspective requires thinking about the products of the creative humanities, fine arts, music, literature, and film, not just as art expression in time, but as significant expressions that connect. These explorations challenge, struggle, and assign meaning in our society. Today, writings that can suggest various approaches about cultural symbols, practices, intriguing personalities, movements, and histories that contribute to the landscapes of contemporary modern living are exactly what we need to create and leave for others to follow.

The conversations between academic and vernacular narratives can also bridge the current generational divides over old-school narrative forms, multiple cultural and global identities, and newer Internet-driven communications and media framings. Pulling readers into strands of thoughts and themes that make a fabric of our most compelling issues but that are shared from the eyes and experiences of today's "new lead thinkers" in the fields will be helpful.

The idea of cultural contemporary narratives and the role of media, music, and film to shape these and larger themes that consider power, ritual, identity, expression, race, ethnicity, and gender can draw many readers in and provide glimpses of what art means today. These can be seen as the "new buzz cultural aesthetic dialogues" in which the discussion and exploration of culture as living systems makes necessary the previously unseen linkages among cultural ritual(s), expression, and historical origins. This writing hopes to be one example of literature that has a framework for "new voiced" engaging artistry, with social-political spiritual consciousness connected to expressions of ideas as a way of understanding our ever-growing, fascinating, and yet sometimes fragmented and diverse society.

We don't find many places where artists are suggesting new ideas together, across disciplines, for connecting and providing answers for what the times creatively are needing. If we were to look back at this period, what ideas would help explain the signposts and art left standing? What measures are we using, what are we teaching each other, and how are we coping in the arts and humanities in the second decade of the 21st century?

How are we responding to terrorism and new global dialogues, police attacks, movements like Black Lives Matter, more mass killings, movies, billionaire presidential campaigns, and music streams that come through a computer?

Art is always carrying the creatives' conscious calling. What then does the new poem mean? How do dance, art, and music resonate? And, really, who cares?

MUSIC MATTERS

I do remember the words of the Isley Brothers' song "Fight the Power," telling me to use my music to express myself and to "fight the powers that be." The lyrics were so relevant to me; they were speaking directly to the young man I was then.

From my read, mainstream popular music today, from most sides, lacks this kind of relevant forwardness. There are fewer groups of popular songs made by young artists

who regularly create works for the popular market that teach, “tell and yell,” show, and suggest ways to be living. In general, in terms of mainstream/market impulses, little social consciousness is widely embraced as normative. Music is produced mostly based on a praxis of copy, paste, and produce. Of course, in the COVID-19 era and the era of protest consciousness, like Black Lives Matter, we are feeling some changes. I still wonder, though, about sustainable aesthetic shifts and perspectives.

The consumerist market ideology has mostly permanently replaced progressive identities and true artists' ideology. But today the technology does provide an amazing potential to creatively and powerfully shape and dispense the most beautiful range of innovative, creative expressions and ideas. Actually, it's all around us, but what generates the heat of the culture? And any person who can pay for the technology can also place a variety of expressions and ideologies in a competitive marketplace. Two problems now exist: one, commercially dispensed systems are almost exclusively tied to shameless profit gains; and, second, there is a diminished public sphere and dedication to upholding a reevaluation of substantive values in forms that are sustainable. People seem more interested in the engagement of tastes and a menu of choices. This is evident in our social, political, religious, business, and even educational institutions.

Second to the challenge of envisioning a progressive and relevant aesthetic is determining who cares and how we would sustain the interests in the marketplace when the system in place can't uphold much else. Largely this is due to an oversaturation of products and ideas and a mistrust of any new voice or ideology or leadership. The value point (price tag) for creative products has been completely lowered to almost free, as in free downloads.

CITIZENRY

In my community, there was no separation between church and state. Music was connected in church, school, community through radio am [sic]. The power of those sounds helped you remember and mark your identity. Music brings commonalities that diffuse ignorance and bigotry and celebrate our human connectedness. Part of our responsibilities as musicians is to uphold our tradition and heritages. Music has to do with how we see ourselves in the universe. Musicians' roles are defined by the work to illuminate the plight of people who are struggling.

—Leonard Brown, ethnomusicologist, in personal communication with the author

Common culture practice of citizenry has definitely declined at so many levels, and it's palpable, if we are honest. Popular culture and media projects pridefully proliferate violence as normative entertainment. National and local politics are also under the lens of scrutiny, as our leaders seem less competent and less committed to genuine leadership for the good

of the people not the party. These cultural shifts do indicate there is a hardening of the social heart and mind set. Younger citizens are operating in an era of what some see as entitlement, whereas others view this apathy as justified suspicion of a failed culture system soiled with an “old school, back in the day” approach. People largely mistrust status-quo definitions of the values of truth and see fewer public models displayed that connect. This makes consistent engagement at all levels challenging. The challenge is now adjusting “your life swim strokes,” or worldview and values, into collective beliefs that resemble what we hold up as critical in our society. We have decimated a generation’s innocence at irreversible costs. We have plugged in to problems and are now hard and well wired in. And everyday citizens, too, are spiritually tuned in only to motion on their terms, giving attention only toward their own interests and destinations.

Most of this is due to the larger economic system that plummets everyday people into poverty and all are forced into a work-for-survival mentality in which nothing seems to exist outside of survival of the fittest and care for only your own. The key concern is what are the sustainable values versus motorized trends. You see this everywhere in the streets, office management, corporate buyouts, and politicians’ rhetoric spun to keep only certain political interests in place.

How can we be directly relatable and pierce the thinking, the heart, and the consciousness of people?

[Music’s] social role as protest and resistance, . . . its musical energy and revolutionary aesthetic qualities[,] . . . [allows listeners to identify] with its social history of rebellion and revolt, and with its musical defiance to . . . challenge and contest . . . [the] co-opted, diluted, eviscerated commercialized forms [of] American pop music. “Jazz” or African American music is the revolutionary music . . . not just for America, but for the planet. (Ho 2009, 93)

Every major innovation . . . has been from musicians to attain greater and greater levels of expressive freedom through liberating the two basic fundamentals of music: time (meter) and sound (pitch/temperament/harmony). (Ho 2009, 95)

[And] the highly African blurring . . . reach[es] an emotive and spiritual catharsis—to “allow the gods [i.e., wisdom] to descend”—and thereby affirm both personal and communal humanity in the face of inhumanity. (Ho 2009, 97)

—Fred Ho, “What Makes ‘Jazz’ the Revolutionary Music of the Twentieth Century, and Will it Be Revolutionary for the Twenty-first Century?” (2009)

We are all looking for ways to move forward and live productive lives in difficult times. And there are things that need to be said. Our social consciousness has been thwarted, though, and compromised as courage to speak meaning to power has been swapped for political correctness. Today, one of the driving reasons for our escalating social insensitivity, incivility, is because we ingest so many problematic images, messages, cultural practices in

media, music, and manufacturing processes focused on market demands and prescriptions to make money. This corrupts deeply.

We notice a frayed, disrupted central core-value system that cannot sustain all the eruptions on the topsoil. I often quote a remark attributed to Margaret Mead, American anthropologist: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has" (Mead 1982, 79). Today, young people have even sharper minds and faster tools, and there are better examples for them, if they are led to choose smartly. If music and art do not address the problems, the problems don't get sung about, and if the music dies, there are fewer notes that ring out to reach out to and from the people.

This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal. I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence. Like failure, chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge—even wisdom. Like art.

—Toni Morrison, "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear" (2015)

But the art can't only be about a fuss and a fight, it must include the positive forward, and not "we had it better back in the day, rose-colored utopia dream bliss." Every generation has the right and the destiny to assemble its warriors, battle strategies, songs, art, poetry, and dance. But in that is always a prescription for its sustaining survival, not its end.

We have noticed the absence of a certain core-value system, an appreciation of communal connectivity, an upheld artistic aesthetic. The industry invests in and promotes a higher number of projects that focus more on empty commercialism, and me-ism and mine, mine, more mine, and certainly less from the mind. We can see and hear a definite shift.

No one is saying the world has come to an end, nor that empty commercialism is a new problem. But we are certainly in a different mindset now in terms of what is uni-human defined.

In short, these authors argue that studies have shown that the number one event, the enterprise that was meaningful and significant in the lives of this generation is the establishment of the World Wide Web, electronic connectivity, and social media. This means that most of the cultural codes, values, and means by which my generation obtained success are of little significance to today's young people. Many of the things we like, wanted, or got excited about can be gotten to through completely other means, or don't exist as primary interests anymore.

The shift is a major modulation. For example, you can sense this in conversations around the ethics involved in the preparation or the aspiration toward achievement. "Digital natives" may acquire things, foster ideas through tribal social networking, share content, and offer a means to get at it. Here you notice a radical shift in the value of obtaining things—goals—from a more traditional "old-school" orientation.

Original, individual thought and critical thinking have shifted to shared platforms, the speed to gather and have ease of access. The ethics that say you can achieve what you want because you have direct access has replaced the ethics that is prepared for appreciating the long haul and aspiring to do hard work to make it in the world, not it being made for you. These seem like very different rules. But how will the bridge be built that puts in play sustainable exchanges in the two worlds, where shared cultural codes are possible? That is the challenge today, because the economic, generational, and cultural gaps must be closed.

Together, we can still participate and alter or effect the thinking and actions in the world and in the communities we live in. We've seen over the years many examples of proactive creative work that changed people's lives. But that art and song, that creative dreamscape was beautiful, powerful, and compelling. It contained meaning. It was well crafted. Today, there is a change both in terms of the intentionality of things and the devastating reality and effect on young people. All of us have seen our political landscape now poisoned by mistrust and venomous attacks, and we've seen media, movies, television, and popular culture plummet in terms of content and values, while an escalation of irresponsible choices has been left for the public to scrape and sort through, all for the love of money and greed and a need to gain short-lived attention and pointless power. What's palatably apparent is the rise in this as common practice and the rise in our adapting to it as acceptable and normative. I don't believe the real must become the reality.

It's clear we cannot live in a world, a society that you can't talk about. You cannot talk about any change in that society without looking toward young people to be a part of that talk and change. But change means a real consideration of our realities, and somehow talk, walk, and change need to come together. Engage in dialogue to share and create a committed discussion about powerful and positive ideas, music and cultural happenings, and places that people are continually pushing ahead.

Make sure we engage all the young people we can, and take 10 minutes to talk and share with them a powerful positive idea. Give them—as a conscious, culturally minded adult—another idea, worldview, or view from “the good hood.”

We are suggesting it will take courageous and committed efforts to do this. As the *Ebony* magazine campaign proposed a few years ago, “take the music/arts back,” and speak up, call your local media and television, and have communities demand sensitivity, not censorship. Push for a broader mainstream ingesting of positive and powerful cultural images, stories, music, and art.

We must again sing, step, talk, and walk on the positive powerful downbeats, and together we'll be accountable for changing our society. Cultural throughlines, as we explore this idea, are the kind of workings that can keep us wide-eyed and convicted, committed to living in the world today, and substantively connected.

REFERENCES

- Cooper, Brittney. 2016. "America's 'Prince' Problem: How Black People—and Art—Became Devalued." *Salon*, April 21, 2016.
- Ho, Fred. "What Makes 'Jazz' Revolutionary Music?" In *Wicked Theory, Naked Practice*, edited by Diane C. Fujino, 91–103. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Morrison, Toni. 2015. "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear." *The Nation*, March 23, 2015.
- Walker, Margaret. 1989. "For My People." Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/21850/for-my-people> (accessed July 20, 2023).

Who Stopped the Clock?

WILLIAM BANFIELD

I think that I have always found it important to sing. Because once I became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, I found the way I wanted to live. I wanted to live being clear, and articulate as an artist about what I thought about the world, my people and the society we are living in and helping to shape. If we are a socially conscious people, and if a point of view, a system of principles and values are going to affect the space we live in, it will be most effective if we “put it out there.” We can’t talk about living in a time when we’re losing ground, and losing young people. You lose ground, when you don’t hold it.

—Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, from an interview with Bill Banfield,
in *Black Notes: Reflections of a Musician Writing in a Post Album Age* (2004)

Serving in the capacity as a research associate at the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), I am aware of CFCH’s innovative work documenting, preserving, and promoting the celebration of cultural expressions and practices on a national and international scale. Based on my creative work and research as emeritus professor of music, Berklee College of Music, and founding director of Berklee’s Africana Studies Center, I am, in short, partnering with CFCH to further the work of defining “cultural throughlines.” I argue that contemporary artistry and new works harken back to and hold onto critical cultural linkages that must be revisited to understand and hold onto tradition. I believe that this association with CFCH will deepen the current work I am doing and provide CFCH with additional visibility through my published works and artistic collaborations.

As part of my current efforts in developing my cultural throughlines concept, I am focusing my research, writing, and recording projects on the life and work of Ernie Isley and the Isley Brothers’ family band (see Banfield, “Living Rock and Roll: A Memoir of Ernie Isley,” this vol.). The throughlines found in the life and times of the Isleys, essentially defined as American Roots music, was transformed into an international rock and soul institution.

Yet, these connections are not always apparent to people within specific music communities or the wider public. As American Roots–based artists, Ernie and his family’s music helped to define Black artistry and community-based social consciousness, and its culturally defined performance aesthetic. The Isleys’ output over the years ties into threads of roots music, gospel, and social advocacy protest anthems, coming out of the traditional Black church and arriving in the national spotlight during the Civil Rights era, following and making similar paths as Woody Guthrie, Sam Cook, Aretha Franklin, and others.

As a research associate dedicated to working with the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, I want to mine the archival collections—the curatorial research, festival documentation, and the various record label collections—integrating this valuable content into the projects that emphasize the role of American roots and community-based artistry to define its collective meanings. I want to make those associations and assigned meanings relevant to our appreciation and further understanding of Ernie and the Isley family’s contribution to our music culture. Rarely are these cultural throughlines tapped into when assessing the value of mainstream popular artists for what is essentially based in community values and in the humanities, which are often overshadowed due to mostly commercial interpretations.

The goal of my research in the archives is to develop and strengthen the idea of a creative pedagogical and cultural studies theory. My current short biography and interview with Ernie Isley will look at ways to further connect CFCH’s archival holdings with several of my research book enterprises, including my work on the recent biography of Pat Patrick, *Cultural Codes*, and ethnomusicology books. My presence as a research associate will also extend to partnerships with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival for a concert production with the *Social Power of Music*, a recording project with Ernie Isley for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and additional connections with the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the National Museum of American History. For more than half a century, the CFCH has been the destination for research and education, promoting understanding that influences important national policies and their impact regarding cultural practices in the United States and around the world. My hope is to, as Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon presented, record and preserve Black Music culture, promoting its value as a national living treasure. I want my work at the Smithsonian to further extend the cultural stewardship of our generation, of those of us who are now at least a half-century old.

I call this “the anchoring aesthetic,” that grounded belief system that ties community-based music making to the roots music alignment, the throughline. So this is essentially decoding and interpreting the work of artistry, which I love, and understanding music, as carried by chosen, trained, spirit-led, and artistically gifted individuals in our society. Our community-based, folk roots artists are essentially driven by this tendency for societal advocacy.

I’m also particularly interested, as stated in the introduction, in cultural arts narratives told in photographs, memorabilia, programs, newspaper clippings, and collected essays that present a tapestry of documented presence in creative arts accomplishments. These narratives help define modern living through collections of intercultural, generational, and intersectional visions and expressions in American culture. What did the people in our time value, what was their look and style, and how did their creative expressions and ideas manifest? I would like to extend that throughline. What would it be to further develop and extend these today?

The archives of our nation must contain the narratives that define our human condition; these are the records and the repositories that tell us of our values and worth and teach us how life is to be lived fully. I love this kind of work. This work deepens my commitment to

contributing to our national creative narratives in this way. These narratives, the ancestors' wisdom and artifacts, are attributes from past generations. They are to be uncovered and revealed. I'm finding our once-believed-in, upheld-classic, or folk traditions actually shift in perspective with time, too. This is why each generation must reevaluate cultural norms and definitions and evolve. I think these observations and dialogues, as we have shared, are cultural throughlines. I wonder, though, if we have moved so rapidly that what we value is not what we hold dear, but rather what is constructed in commerce that drives our interests?

I'm hard-pressing the questions, extending our analysis to the critical questions around what culture actually does today, in the moment. I'm raising my concern that, if we don't tend to our current conditions, there will be no folk life to be had and preserved.

I'm researching, as well, why folk music was seen as such, and how much of the baseline criteria and qualifications, if any, can be transported forward to allow us to have the language that would make the more contemporary works stand with the same merit as music of the folk traditions. The main focus of the throughlines inquiry is to determine each dialogue in time, using the essential barometers (creativity, politics, culture) to define our cultural codes and values. The mystery is, What are the things that are valued in each period, and how do we understand, and then maintain, enough of our values to sustain what we believe? This is essential for our survival, the qualifying actions, memories, and practices that define our humanity and make us feel worthwhile and that we are living well.

For Black people, our various "folk music" traditions from rural church to Friday night fish fries, moved from Mississippi and Georgia to Chicago and Detroit; in essence we took our folk song traditions to the city. And while the music changed, our stories kept coming. I'm interested, too, in the transformation of those stories, and how the folks kept living and singing: cultural throughlines. So, we must (1) create and redefine what we value as culture, and thus define relevancy in that re-make of meaning; and (2) have substantive throughlines to discover what that is and why any of it really matters. Museums and institutions capture culture, but the people cultivate it. They don't surmise what it is or how they do it because their need to experience life dictates how they must create culture and ritual. We dance and recreate images, poetry, and songs to mediate life. That's how art happens, it mediates life.

As I have been digging down on this, I find it more compelling each year because I'm an educator. And my students are 40 years younger than I am and have a very different ear on music and culture than I do. I reflect on my own family heritage and transmitted values: my grandmother was the daughter of Moses O'Neal, who was enslaved. What my great grandfather saw and heard, what my grandmother saw and heard, and then what my dad (today 98 years old) saw and heard, and what I grew into, are a part of my own throughlines. But how they are transmitted and the results and the relevancy of those cultural codes, that's what interests me. If I apply many of the same age-based definitions of this time—that is folk, and this music is modern—then I arrive in most cases, with a more flexible set of songs that address similar ideas and that function as folk music for different generations of sensibilities at different times. Each generation can look back and feel old-timey. "Good-ole songs" as a definition are applicable to any music that went on before our time—our own version of "old times."

And if that music addressed the values of the people as the songwriters sang the concerns and values of those people, then when do those songs become folk, and who decides that? That really interests me, because I believe that songs do encapsulate the values, being, and lives of everyday common people, and their stories are preserved in those songs.

Even a short swipe at traditional definitions of accepted norms for “folk music culture” does not undermine this idea, and as a matter of fact it supports it. Folk music from “the mountain view,” as one looks down, is different, it sounds different, and is defined differently by every group of people looking to older songs that they value as significant and worth preserving.

And why raise this? Because I don’t believe the clock has stopped on good old-timey folk music tradition, and I think there is more work to be done on defining and bringing more music forward in this way. The 1970s are “the new old time.” What then are the songs from the folks of that era, and what do their songs tell us about how they lived, valued, and expressed their lives in song?

Black music is the experience and expression of people for whom even “when the brooks went dry,” the music in that creation flowed as the water that kept us alive had. So cultivating culture is critical. That’s why the music means so much. It’s critical culturally! I shall press forward on these questions. I believe much of my exploration into these questions lies at culling out these “people truths” in the songs, and yet also seeing the continued throughlines that have pointed us to the present. We, as artists, are always in an endless dance with how the culture provides meaning and continues its searches for comfort and truth. That’s, I think, a folk music culture question.

An important characteristic of a folk song or piece in traditional folk culture is the dependence, acceptance, and use by a community to raise up and ritualize the stories, values, triumphs, and blues that come from songs, poetry, paint, and dance. I believe this tendency morphs as it is passed on from one generation to another. As a matter of fact, as times have changed, folk music has progressed to reflect those times.

Folk songs and art tell stories and give us, as we will talk later, a snapshot of life preserved to help us assemble our values and challenges or to champion our assumptions. Folk culture highlights the living matters that a culture believes in. Some of the big American beliefs have been freedom (The Spirituals), cultural identity (Say It Loud/I’m Black and I’m Proud/I am Woman, Hear Me Roar/I’m Every Woman) religion, critique of political and social inequality, and the right to protest (Black Lives Matter). Culture then carries “the behaviors and beliefs” of our particular social and cultural constructs.

Two hundred and forty years separates the early enslaved folksingers and their indigenous songs from the designated folk songs collected and preserved by noted folklorist Alan Lomax. Is it possible to stretch the Lomax agenda, timelines, and definitions to cover a wider sample of our indigenous music? Near the end of his life, Lomax stated: “[Modern technology] now makes it possible to preserve and reinvigorate all the cultural richness of mankind.” I think “Going Back to Indiana,” “Dancing in the Streets,” and “Living for the City,” music and cultural artistry of the later 1960s and 1970s, all constitute the definition of folk songs and could be interrogated, studied, learned from, documented, and preserved

as national treasures of our culture. To stop the clock on the definitions and timeline of what constitutes folk music intrigues me, and it begs the question, “Who stopped the clock on folk traditions?” And why?

As Stevie Wonder revealed in the closing lyric to “Living for the City,” just as Lomax did, “If we don’t change, the world will soon be over.” Like Lomax, I also believe we must “preserve and reinvigorate all the cultural richness” of our music. I believe too that today there is a need to move the clock and continue to collect and define folk traditions forward in the eras post-1960. We need a more recent purge of materials that present perhaps a larger, longer stretch up through more of our current American music. This is the continuation of “folks’ narratives” and is most relevant as cultural expressions.

If we don’t look more deeply at what we are missing in these years, post-1960s, 70s, and 80s even—stopping the folk definition materials clock—we risk missing important developments and throughlines. This can be done by severing important linkages we need to capture and keep in play for the interests of contemporary generations. This generation today needs real and powerful examples of important narratives and arts traditions that hold up relevant and usable values that better help them to search for all the richness of our traditions’ collective promises.

Culture Throughlines Theory

WILLIAM BANFIELD

Social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions. The most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression. Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather the best ones do what great poetry does, transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors, and more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.

—Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams! The Black Radical Imagination* (2002, 9)

Culture helps people to know that they “have a face,” meaning, and an identity that records and affirms their humanness in the world. Dance, song, poetry, film, and art are creative expressions of humanness, history, and heritage. Artistic sharing gets directly, deeply into the central core of our human pulses and is best appreciated as the expressive result of our living in the world. Most of the music/art movements, artistry one has a passion for, call for a certain amount of “appreciate-able” values and norms that define the scope of why we care about any of this. Community, craft, the critical role of history, cultural heroes, and commitment to legacy seem to be acceptable standards and values we aspire toward.

As mentioned, few of these values appear normative in today’s very different mainstream cultural climate, which makes its most salient attributes based on more fluidity, choice, self-branding, fast access to information and technology acumen, commerciality, profit, power, and market posture. Today’s cultural expressions are mostly ingested through a very different kind of sonic, visual technological media apparatus that may and actually does call for different sensibilities. It’s easy to see how you must frame the question, the subjects, and the reason for engagement in different ways. Today definitely calls for another spin on cultural meaning and matters. Many of us are feeling the rub in our proverbial ribs to ingest and decode from all sides, and it’s challenging. Culture is bound to and by people’s positioning on the planet, origins, fashions, struggles, and triumphs. That’s the human story and without that we are invisible or erased.

We are seeing a quantifiable fracturing of generational accountability for carrying out what this means to younger people today. What’s interesting is that this classic stumbling block, this social fixture, this question of “who is” now and how we must be, is different for every generation.

MY 2017 CORNELL STUDY

Many younger people are less impressed or perhaps “trapped into” valuing what had come before. History is almost a nonissue. Upon teaching a seminar at Cornell University for high school students, and with college-age factotums (assistants) from across the country, we were addressing the question of what this generation’s students valued in terms of concrete ideals. Granted, they were all between 15 and 25 years old, but they were soundly committed to having their voices cemented around having an identity. This was during 2016–2017.

The reason this is important today is largely due to the tremendous evidence of sustaining damages resulting from the marginalization of the authentic agency and folks’ “voice.” Thoughts, feelings, and experiences that mean something and matter must come from communities. I’ve noticed that there is a missing lifeline for us today that had been there previously: appreciating our history, seeing our shared heroes, having like agendas, understanding our mutual oppression, and having a sense that ours was a shared community across generations. That’s gone today.

Many younger people are less impressed about what has come before. History is almost a nonissue, and I feel aghast at this. But a lot of younger people feel the more critical positions are the ones that give rise to the injustice they see before them today. That’s fair, but it’s not connected to, from my read, a longer view of shared values, struggles, and triumphs. Our past identities, struggles, or experiences as people of color are not really of importance to young people unless they happened recently. The critical cultural voices that most youth see representing them are the ones they have direct access to. And they enjoy and celebrate this through the choices they like most from the pool of arts and entertainment figures that are presented today.

In those discussions I mentioned, we examined what codes and values were actually involved and how they became enduring. We attempted to look at the central ideas and values as relevant cultural impulses of the times that they were defining. We created lists of value points and examined the age-old debates about generational differences and class conflicts, Du Boisian notions of the talented tenth against the Washingtonian casting down of our buckets where we are, tensions in church missions, and what’s entertaining and what’s enrichment, and we did so with all the openness we could muster, to broaden how these could be potentially reinterpreted through contemporary eyes. The students didn’t have the same passion for this as I did, nor the argument for the past, but they did have a passion for today’s impulses.

I get it, but I wish I could change my position and help people I mentor to not only have an argument for a glorious past but also a passion for an inclusive present that looks in three directions: past, present, and a better forward. This is a necessary formula but a tough one. The lyric narrative, the social contexts, and many of our cultural meanings from performance conventions to dress, to dance, and to cultural destiny are all from an era that, while birthing populist cultural standards as normative, are today outdated.

My generation is outmoded.

Many of us have spoken about a contemporary aesthetic, defining terms; an aesthetic of practice, creation, and approach; an aesthetic of pedagogy and a practical statement about what our times calls for and needs for expression, education, or a general social cosmology. I call this discovering the throughlines.

In attempting to discuss these throughlines, it's exciting to think about a new arts dialogue that is translatable, transferable, applicable, and useful for defining the times we live in and what we can expect forward.

I have indicated this in other writings of late, this thing, this inquiry to document and further discover a dialogue of meaning must be focused on bringing better connections and understandings, and a hope for more creative voices in these challenging and disquieting times. These concerns beat my brain at every moment; they are the soundtrack of every one of my dreams. But who are the "we" today, who are the folks, what do we feel is a relevant future, and what do we hope and dream and work for? Those answers would be helpful for us to identify shared throughlines. But in a mixed-up and mangled present, where distraction is the biggest preoccupation, how can we hear a consistent tone?

Photographs tell compelling stories. . . . Most people construct their experience of life by visualizing "the moment" through storytelling, film and/or television—and the photographic image. For me, the photograph is an instrument of memory, taken to explore the values of self, family in documenting everyday life.

—Deborah Willis, *Black: A Celebration of a Culture* (2004)

Artists have been mostly interested in the creation and documentation of pictures of life and culture. This reenactment can be paintings, songs, photography, stories, poetry, reflections, and movement. From our art, we most want its ability to foster introspection, dazzle, and create a sense of beauty, awe, and spiritual cleansing, offer a cultural critique, or take us to other places. An "art life" is the commitment to refine the work, to have that kind of human actualization and meaning.

It is a perpetual search for ultimate expression, the deep yearning to be understood as a sounding of existence. All art is left standing in its meaning, dripping wet with an invitation to serve the observer's need, a thirst for understanding the human life, existence, order, and condition. I'm fascinated by the meaning and commitment to cultural expression as a social force in time. As a creative, that's our oxygen, no matter the art's outcome. The oxygen of creative environments is our life living blood. I speak to my own students about "artistic citizenry" as the degree to which you see yourself primarily as a creative artist, and as a citizen, contributing through your artistic-gift to the betterment of fellow citizens and a community or society in which you live. Artistic citizenry is about giving, sharing, service, and arts' expression and cultivation. Arts carry value, culture, and human identity. Understanding the power in those acts and ideas should be sought. This understanding would allow a focus on the richest parts of the educational experience: challenging and encouraging young people to think differently

and reboot; recharging their life pursuits around caring and cultivating caring; and inspiring others to be better in their lives and the world and to use their gifts and talents to push those ideas out there.

But guess what? I'm not sure this sweet social song works with these times.

Everyone is accelerating or creating an identity to sit themselves at that "feasting table": power, promotions, me and my stuff, and what I want. You see a struggle to obtain this at economic, political, and social levels. This drives everything today, it seems. One must find comfort in their own lane, decide what camps they want to align themselves with, or decide to fight all the way to the next desirable plateau. None of this is new. What's new is the way much of this is sold, like the media diluting and simplifying. You can think of Fox News or reality television offering easy access to fame, all sold as being of equal value, as potential commodities with no boundaries or consequences. It's all you and what you want. It's a buyers' life market.

THROUGHLINES IN THEORY: THE "CULTURAL RELEVANCY" HURDLE

So this is the general values formation formula today: getting over the "cultural relevancy" hurdle. You must find footing in this and see yourself in it, the cultural mechanism. As I see it, this is the great challenge of our values placement—the challenge of cultural relevancy.

Now to our arts and humanities engagement, where does that fit or fold in? Who cares for your tones and textures these days? Who has an ear toward the poetic? How do you find purpose and happiness in that and what can you expect from engaging your art today in this largely shaped, market-ready commodities platform? As a cultural form that lives out of a time, how do you maintain the balance of relevancy, success, and meaningful sustainability? This is the driving challenge of the "cultural relevancy" hurdle.

I've reached some general conclusions and theories focusing on my years-long conundrum of how to address the issue of finding a necessary throughline to connecting generational differences on several key themes:

1. An outright generational consensus agreement about shared values and worldview is pretty much impossible.
2. Because of the accelerated technology, Internet access and use, and media and the cultural shaping of the college and high-school age generation, and ultimately all of us, most of the rules of engagement and cultural relevance have shifted dramatically.
3. What's necessary is committed dialogue to explore and create newer definitions, processes, and shared cultural experience lenses that better ensure that all involved care about similar things, experience shared values, and see the importance of art, culture, human cultural consciousness, or the affected transformative marketplace as an end goal.

Competing or contradictory generational, class, and gender values are not helpful to move a larger shared art and cultural education forward. But it's not the lack of skill sets, energy,

drive, innovations, originality, or insights. The difference I've seen is in the why and the what. Why are we doing this, and what do we care about? And what should we do? What, how, and why we "do culture" will generate many different responses.

How culture is defined and how it forms our identities has shifted away from a mainly cultivated, traditional cultural expression (in music, dance, art, faith impulses, designs, names, signs and symbols, ceremonies, and other artistic cultural expressions). These things have been integral to cultural and social identities of certain communities, which contain and transmit core values and beliefs. Now we are in today's commodified, branded, fluid, accessible creative impulses and narratives, and the definitions and reasoning for culture are vastly different among generational groups today. The platforms and delivery systems are very different, too.

RETRO, NOT RELEVANT . . .

Retro, not relevant means if it is not happening today, or perhaps yesterday, it's retro and not relevant. Because so many things are streamed online (e.g., YouTube and other platforms), and therefore are copied, visual, downloadable content, much of this idea of what matters is measured through this lens. There are many paradigm shifts around the concept of time, history, human value, and access to consumer impulses that completely drive the public mindset.

So much of our communication and idea delivery is a copy or is immediately downloadable. There is an accepted appreciation for "quick communication connection," and today it's executed through a text, social media, email, or other convenient technology- or phone-driven handheld device. Because of our dependency on these modern technological levers, if you are writing content for YouTube or a GameBox, or if a motivating factor is how many "likes" you get, or if you can download everything you need for an answer, then the methods, models, and rationale are very different. The paradigms have changed considerably. In simple terms, perhaps, the agendas in our culture have simply shifted.

Let's face it. Much of today's advances in these areas are both culturally and technologically very cool. The delight in convenience is irreversible. The power and innovation in these many tools push us to advances we could only dream about in the past. But there is a crossover impact that touches "the creative" humanities and arts community that is of concern and is perplexing. Conversations about how our arts conception is defining itself along these advances drives this inquiry. These affect the field, the art, and the definitions of what's desired and what's *art-full*, and this is what is of interest.

The main traditional cultural expressions of music, dance, art, designs, signs and symbols, ceremonies, aesthetics, and creative identity and the very definitions and acts of artistry and cultural expressions, have been critical and upheld for a long time. Being artistic contains and transmits core values and beliefs. But what are those ideals today, and what conversations can be shared about an upheld or sought-after notion of folk or popular? And then following that, what are the artistic, educational sensibilities important today?

MUSIC AS AN EXAMPLE OF ONE ARTS CULTURE CARE

All forms of artistic expression are pertinent to the many-sided sensibilities in people that need to be cultivated and revitalized . . . if we are to develop entire communities of activists. Music performance, however, has a sociality and an immediacy that can give it a distinctive role in achieving this. . . . The diversity of musical forms reflects the diversity of social formations . . . a unified communal expression which can evolve into a political force must therefore include the cross-fertilization of a wide array of traditions—not only those of different parts of the world, but also those of distinct cultures existing side-by-side within any given locality.

—Victor Wallis (“Toward a Radical Popular Culture: Political and Musical Reflections,” this vol.)

Culture, again, helps people know that they “have a face,” meaning and an identity that records and affirms their humanness in the world. Culture is, in fact, the huge connective glue that threads society together. Ethnomusicology, as a focused discipline within the fields of music, humanities, and cultural studies, is the best frame for the study of contemporary music culture. Its beginning point is interest in what has happened in the world of music and arts at large, and it looks at what types of things are happening in culture right now.

Many have said that contemporary ethnomusicology studies ponders various types of intercultural relationships and looks at how these affect music. It also makes an inquiry toward global and local cultural universals, and because it comes out of original fieldwork and explores music and its meaning in cultural contexts, it can shake out and interrogate the why of art and production processes. This creates a necessary pedagogy for how to care for and teach in culture.

I use examples of music and film biopics and documentaries as a focused lens within the fields of music, humanities, and cultural studies as a frame and springboard for the studying of contemporary music culture with students. We talk a lot in my classes and explore music and its meaning in these cultural contexts; we shake out and interrogate current artistry. American popular music, Black music, what we might call the Blues Mode and Rhythm, affected modern music conception so completely. It must be one of the most influential types of music since the beginning of the modern notions of harmony and rhythm combined. It has become increasingly important to show not only what impact this music had on the world but also how this music made a difference in the lives of the people that the music came from.

To do this is to look at artistic trends through (1) the lens of history and sociology, (2) theology and social consciousness, (3) the biographical lens of artists in time, (4) the impact of industry and technology, and (5) the relationship of art to commerce.

What’s distinctive and remarkable about arts culture is that it guaranteed or made possible life and sustained living. The idea that this is doing something that carries and

represents “the people’s voice” is a very different kind of commitment and connection with the expressions. As Duke Ellington stated: “I am trying to play the natural feelings of a people” (Tucker 1993, 44–45).

WHAT A CULTURE THROUGH LINE THEORY MIGHT BE: OF CRITICISM, SOCIAL REALITY, TRUTH, AND HOPE FORWARD

I want to keep the velocity of my exchange with the world at a high pace . . .

I see myself becoming increasingly adept at recognizing, at least from my own perspective, the epic nature of our interconnections and our problems as Americans. It is the weight and complexity of those things—how profoundly, in every way, we exist as parts of each other, how many difficult triumphs we share, and how much trouble we all have to face . . . speaking to our common humanity is the case I stay on.

—Stanley Crouch, *Always In Pursuit: Fresh American Perspectives* (1998, 3)

The world we live in is becoming a more challenged existence as new social, political, and economic chaos each day pushes us at all sides. And yet, I always say this, humans are so miraculously capable of making a broken world work. Learning to live with other human personalities is one of our most challenging, intriguing endeavors. The only way to get through it is to walk with each other until we find ways and paths together. Sometimes it means starting a journey over again several times.

The great challenge of our society today is the people problem: how we work, live with, and treat one another. The models of humanity are visibly being replaced with images and projections of human brutality and brutal uncaring selfishness. You can see it and feel it. Our distraught and dislocated values are eroding daily.

The place you can see it, like cancer, is in the innocence of young people, who are indifferent to many of the parameters of traditional everyday dealings. Second, and most abusively, you can see it in megacultural corporate political systems that create and support poisonous and damaging products and processes based on profit gain. And then there is the never-ending normalcy of global, national, and ideological terrorism. The best investment and how to combat this is through education, learning, teaching our young, and studying a broad range of humanistic examples that diffuse this suffocating current attention and spiral downward toward human social chaos. I don’t want to sound preachy or uselessly academic, but this is real.

Here, we are very interested in approaching the question, What do our cultural heritages, (narratives, ancestors’ wisdom, artifacts, and attributes from past generations) expect from us? I’m finding our once-believed-in, upheld-classic, or folk traditions actually shift in perspective with time. This is why each generation must reevaluate cultural norms and definitions and evolve. I think of these observations and dialogues as cultural throughlines.

I wonder, though, if we have moved so rapidly that what we value is not what we hold dear, but what is constructed in commerce that drives our interests?

The questions we raise are a tracking of a contemporary cultural criticism that addresses a sense of relevant ideas, not attacks or value judgments, and attempts to align values across generations.

We live in a cloud of political, mass cultural chaos, of which there seems to be no end in sight, only fear of hitting a deeper bottom. Many of us can't remember a darker time where no religion, no hero, no movement, no political action, no singing of songs, no consciousness of conversion existed or excited to lift up and give light to people. This is the worst I can remember, and I have no answer for what I'm feeling. Many of our societal norms have been disrupted, like leadership, integrity, accountability, courage, or truthfulness. So how do, where do, you, in such times move to recast normality? Where do you find accepted normality? Culture has become a reactive commerce construction, and not so much as it needs to be creatively engaged. Given the cultural context, which is turbulent from all sides, it certainly doesn't feel like the cultural norm is present for being creative as a spiritual norm of restoration or reclamation or aspiration.

Clearly today, creative, grounded people are everywhere, with powerful tools and platforms; we wonder, though, are we witnessing a form of creativity that tackles our common need to lift, or is it a next-production quota or a need to appear being occupied successfully, as a grade of *arrived-ness*, being "about it, about it"? Can we define our general spiritual-creative agency at this moment, creation, or construction? We now see all kinds of indicators for what is normative and formative, and it is not a fair formula at all. And while this is nothing new, today it's just more painful to open your eyes to a reality that sees no windows to bring in a fresh breeze.

That is the role of today's transformative education and cultural postmodern social-spiritual political directions and agendas. But who truly is cut out for such work? What is the new value prescription? That is the result of a new, needed belief in the hope of finding peace in a cultural flow that is about becoming renewed. So how do we reformulate cultural norms and standards that correct the current imperial failure?

TODAY: WHAT VALUES? TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION AND CULTURAL POSTMODERN SOCIAL-SPIRITUAL POLITICAL DIRECTIONS

If we could identify a few ideological cultural shifts and differences to chart values, the main distinctions are how community is defined and what matters today. Previous generations cared about culture, the survival of culture, and the instilling of values that underlined their concerns. Those values were equal to their destiny and aspirations forward. Today, the power of and access to technology and what the Internet provides creates a very different deliverable. This self-empowered electronics individualist ideology allows for a different work pattern, focus, priority, and new environment. The arts angles from this differ, too, including how art is constructed and conceptualized (televisual screen painting, films, ballet in a box), and there are different expectations for how it is read and received. There

is perhaps a different sense of success based on what you can achieve for yourself and community—history looking backward is less the focus than it was before.

Two books I've been referencing bring light to this cultural mash-up in which we find ourselves: *I Got Schooled* by M. Night Shyamalan and *Generation on a Tightrope* by Arthur Levine and Diane R. Dean. Both of these books focus on new educational models. They provide insight into these shifts and address who could be the worldview of college-age students today. Both agree that today's generation is uniquely wired. Both studies show that the number one event, the enterprise that was meaningful and significant in the lives of this generation was the establishment of the World Wide Web, electronic connectivity, and social media.

This means that most of the cultural codes, values, and means by which we obtained success are of little significance to today's young people. Many of the things we like, wanted, or got excited about can be gotten to through completely other means, or they simply don't exist as primary interests anymore. This shift is a major modulation. Digital natives today may acquire things, foster ideas through tribal social networking, share content, and offer a means to get at it. Here you notice a radical shift in the value of obtaining things—goals—from a more traditional "old-school" orientation.

Mainstream cultural institutions began to use different parameters and tools to test commercial sales success based on consumer demands and needs, and as the technological advance and power to reach more provided more sales, that drove the agenda; and now, "voilà eureka," here we are. This began in earnest in the 1980s, when big corporate interests replaced community activism. And once big corporate business was the mainstream frame of mind, fame and dollars won out over human needs and expression.

The sense of how these different generations have seen, defined, and given critical thought to the definition of community is the main difference. With social media access and online interfaces, the community is anyone who has direct access to you and you to them. How the term *cultural relevance* is understood is different. What determines value today, and what matters, is what is tracking meaning with today's sensibilities. All else is irrelevant. A reference to the past is a nonstarter. The macro-cultural political-social climate and context has shifted. Without dialogue and discussion of values, belief systems, and cultural meanings, there would be less hope to assess, reboot, or find solid social-spiritual footing.

Modern societies today are characterized by a changing notion of cultural relevancy. In particular, the development of new media (social media) has reshaped the perception of culture and created a significant distance to older academic conventions in the production and understanding of cultural knowledge. Considering these dramatically changed values embraced by current societies, we have raised questions in this collection of essays about the role of education, arts engagement, and popular media marketing linked to the production of larger cultural ideas.

In addressing these urgent issues, we have aimed to link value codes of previous and current generations and have proposed a platform of dialogue and understanding. This effort is based on current scholarly work, teaching experiences on cultural relevancy, and a proactive approach to the creation of meaningful artistic and wider society cultural activism.

By addressing the specific processes of creating and negotiating new knowledge as well as in the wider sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, all of the authors contribute here with perspectives and ongoing questions in the fields of creative practices, pushing for an understanding of cultural relevancy.

The intersections of race, class, economics, gender, power, and the politics of narrative expression all come to engagement points at the table to define who, what, and where we hope to be.

We were feeling our democracy challenged and the incivility of powerful public personas, and the mean-spirited and ill-advised political procedures and policies that tore at the very fibers of our national soul, which caused us to have the greatest blues anxiety remembered since the Great Depression and McCarthyism.

The economic fall was unprecedented, as millions of people lost their jobs, businesses closed, and people fell into economic depression and ruin. How do you find a song, a dance, a poem of sanity in such disruption? How then, really, do our health, race and social relations, social economics, and politics affect and now define our current notions of value and our definitions and aspirations as humans in need of living?

Where do we go from here—to community or do we stay in chaos?

The biggest question most of us are asking as we are tumbled into this zone of the unknown is, What will the “new normal” be that allows us to consider the potential of our strategy forward? That is a direction, an assessment of the current social, political, and cultural construct and how our values are shaped, shaken, shifted, and simmering.

This is especially challenging with low public confidence, poor economics, people out of work, loss of housing, lack of schooling, and a baffling political lack of leadership—community disruption from all sides as chaos is the norm. Many have suggested that our current disruption is due to a long history of classic, good old racist American ways. The COVID-19 disruptions further amplified a long history of failed and conscious policies of discrimination against indigenous people, enslaved Africans brought here, and ethnic groups that had been denied human rights, by putting in place and in play inequities in education, healthcare, economics, human rights, policies in housing, finance and loans, and social and cultural discrimination. We call this American-run and erase our memory on its biased race case and we push buttons hoped for in an imaginary democracy. A real democracy does not in fact exist in America, as it is a failed experiment never meant to give true equality to all. It was a White-men-in-power-only club from the beginning. This must change, and it will. It’s all about values recoding, and we are hard at work!

Science and machine progress going forward equal hate, colonization, cruelties, and humanity going backward. The West was blessed with opportunities to advance, but it moved two steps backward with how it (we) treated others and spread a thick disease of colonial causation, trampled the earth, and soiled the planet with greed, selfishness, and hate. And now the planet is choking and dying.

There will be no redemption for those kinds of deconstructive and disruptive tendencies.

Arts and creative exchanges actually raise the level of cooperative dialogues and sharing. On this side of the observations are the following:

1. art, culture, and contemporary artists' voices
2. politics and faith
3. citizenry and society (nationhood and neighborhood)
4. global impulse (the world cultures)
5. tools and technology (computer and the Internet world works)
6. marketplace and industry (what, how, and where they are selling what to us)

These are some of the important discussions we need to have today. These are ontological, spiritual existence questions. These are our cultural throughlines. Music, art, and the way people communicate and connect is the absolute dead center of all these things. The expressions today and going forward will be the result of addressing these concerns at the innermost impulses of human interaction and connectivity. Therein lies the first impact of cultural value codes.

CADENCE

Throughlines are simply continuous forms of conscientious conversations and the construction of sustainable approaches to identifying what people today care about: seeing how we got to where we are balanced against what things ensure an agreed-upon value of living. Creatively, how is that represented in ways that help to productively ensure our mutual lives living forward?

That has to be a social, spiritual, political, economic, and human personal identity set of real experiences. And those need to be seen, heard, and celebrated mostly in our literature, songs, art, dance, poetry, painting, and representative expressions.

Again, contemplating what kind of conversations these would be and what possibilities we would discover drive me each day I live.

And last, how do we commit to our work to connect the threads of the throughline, create a transformative impact, and hold on? There's hope in living and holding on with both hands, as the old spiritual song says, as it lands you in your promised land.

REFERENCE

Tucker, Mark, ed. 1993. *The Duke Ellington Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In Response: A Thinking Piece on How the Future Might Look

— SU OZER —

How do we go about truly and sensitively understanding this generation of 21st-century people, their values, and worldview? This was the original question posed by Dr. Bill Banfield to his mentees.

I will try to approach the difficult task of formulating an answer in terms of politics, social and economic class, arts and culture, and technology. As a disclaimer, it's important to note that my point of view is biased, because I also belong to this generation; however, I hope my perspective is somewhat enriched by my internationality, mostly because Istanbul served as a watch tower, if you will, where I could observe what was happening in G-8 countries in terms of social movements, economic activity, and cultural phenomena. To begin to understand what the future might look like in the hands of the generations to come, it is imperative to look closer at the socioeconomic position that the millennial, the Y, the Z, and the alpha generation have relative to the baby boomers in our current society.

CAPITALISM

For many reasons, baby boomers still carry immense political, economic, and cultural capital today. The congresses/parliaments around the globe are composed of baby boomers. The generations that came after struggle to find the stability of life they had. Having been born into an economically prospering society with an excess of resources and produce, they didn't have to pay student loans for twenty-five years to get a four-year education. They did not have to keep three jobs at a time to pay rent. Sadly, the baby boomers were instrumental in the implementation of capitalism into our daily lives. The life of convenience and prosperity that they found themselves accustomed to eventually meant there would be a violent rate of income inequality. The G-8 countries allowed the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. Following the industrialization of America, capitalism found a comfortable habitat to grow into the psychopathic nature it has today, extending its borders to developing countries, decreasing the cost of production, and increasing profits at ridiculous rates.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the impact of capitalism has spread all around the world and became not only the mainstream but also the bedrock of society.

The capitalistic values that we need to depend on for efficient production and technological advancement haunt our society in the forms of classism, racism, and sexism. The post-Internet generations grew up entirely within the low-cost labor era. During the 1990s, as the increasingly violent nature of capitalism was finally associated with climate change and the vast negative impact we have had on our planet, we started

to see young people in protest of the capitalist system, however unfruitful such protest was. Capitalism, as it leaks into our values and to all other pieces of our identity, becomes more than an economic system, but rather a system of values we live by, very much like a religion. It has contaminated many cultures and countries all around the world, while also exploiting their resources and labor. Countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, Turkey, and the Philippines found their economies largely dependent on richer countries that decided to put up shop there.

Apple Inc. was embroiled in countless scandals regarding production processes in their factories abroad. In 2010, Longhua assembly-line workers began killing themselves. Worker after worker, they threw themselves off the towering dorm buildings on the factory compounds to protest the working conditions inside. There were 18 reported suicide attempts that year alone and 14 confirmed deaths. Twenty more workers were talked down by Foxconn officials. The world knew this then. We still know it now. Yet, almost everyone, including myself, has an iPhone. As capitalism became more ingrained in our culture, it became the norm. Each and every one of us surrender to and facilitate capitalism in our own ways, by choosing convenience over morality. Although we might not be directly ruthless enough to reinforce the rules of capitalism ourselves, we revel in the advantages it brings. We buy from corporations that we know exploit so many people around the world in various ways. As we make the corporations even bigger and stronger, we give up more and more of our power. Of course, it is not completely fair to put blame on individuals, because living without the convenience of capitalism has become an impossible task to pull off. The more we buy, the poorer we become; however, not on a personal level but in terms of poor quality time on this planet and from depleting its resources.

MUSIC

The artists set movements. They define an era of culture with their work and social reflection. Focusing on what this means for the next generation of artists, we clearly see—from the outside looking into the postmodern era—the very virtue of being an artist, with conviction and intention toward society, seems to be lost. Or, perhaps not lost, but stunned or dormant.

Along with the aggressive expanse of capitalism and the rise of individualistic values, the music industry has no choice but to follow a commercial agenda. The quick nature of consumerism that we grew accustomed to translates to more singles over the production of full cohesive bodies of work. This perpetuates superficiality in our culture. Therefore, the new artist can't start a movement. They can only set commercial trends that lack deep soul searching and real social commentary. However, I see immense potential in generations Z and alpha to address inclusivity issues regarding racism, sexism, and classism, as well as to establish an intelligent conversation on consumerism and the ethics of making huge profit in the arts industries today. Very much like any low-cost labor economy, the economics of music are also controlled by corporations. Either record labels like Paramount, Universal, and Sony are stripping artists down to their last pennies, or

streaming companies like Spotify simply refuse to pay artists royalties. The artists, however, are becoming increasingly more independent. The Internet not only makes collaborations among artists easier but also facilitates grassroots artistic and cultural progress free from the influence of corporations.

The next generation will be more seasoned to deal with the nuances of these issues because of the reality of immigration and travel. Few die where they are born anymore. Most of us need to experience and adapt to different cultures and a different set of social codes throughout our lives, whether it is within our countries or abroad. As creators, the new generation is driven much more by the fusion and “harmony” of multiple cultures coming together than by any singular genre. For example, Latin hip-hop’s invasion of the music industry is a true testament to the bicultural direction that the future landscape of the music industry seems to be evolving toward.

If we wanted to make a prediction, we could say Eastern music is next, because it has yet to claim its rightful place in the music industry. The odd rhythms and different modes create a completely different feeling, as opposed to Western harmony and grooves that the global music industry is accustomed to today. The unexplored nature of the genre is pregnant with great potential and freedom, just as Latin hip-hop was “undiscovered.” Many commercially successful artists in the United States, as well as in Europe, have said that they have been influenced by Middle Eastern music. Beyonce publicly said that she was inspired by the legendary Lebanese singer Fairouz. Beyonce has been using samples from Fairouz’s records for her tour arrangements as well as studio albums since her early solo days. Songs that topped the charts in the last few years have hooks and grooves sampled from Middle Eastern pop.

The unmistakably oriental hook in “Talk Dirty to Me” by Florida artist Jason Derulo, who was born to Haitian parents in America, was sampled from the Israeli band Balkan Beat Box. Genres like Arabesque, Alaturca, Balkan, and Greek music, and others originating from the Middle East have a wide range of potential listeners; they’re new, unexpected, and offer a different kind of fun, both for creators and listeners. We see the proof of that in the charts. I think that the Middle Eastern influence on the music industry in America and Europe is going to grow exponentially because of demand.

The cultural and economic forces that will sustain Middle Eastern hip-hop (and the derivatives of it) are consequences of immigration. A painfully tense political environment has reigned in the Middle East since the 1970s. Aside from the overwhelming flow of refugees from countries like Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, there is also brain-power immigration. Young people go abroad for university and decide not to return. It is for this reason that bicultural genres are going to thrive globally in the near future, in the same way Hispanic music dominates the charts today. People bring their music with them, because it helps us connect and adjust to each other.

The fusion movement is a direct result of immigration. The strength of the upcoming generations of artists relies on the amazing level of connectedness that they have developed through the Internet and on countries becoming increasingly more diverse. They have access to each other’s lives, thoughts, and struggles; and they have access to each other’s

specific type of creativity, which their habitat provided, as well as the tools to mix and match among themselves. However, that same connectedness and the privileges offered by the Internet and globalization, also stand as obstacles perpetuating superficiality and consumerism.

TECHNOLOGY

It would be fair to say that the culture of convenience and consumerism has penetrated our society even deeper with the help of machine learning and social media. Technology in the 21st century has enabled us to make strides our ancestors could only dream of. And yet, nagging doubts remain that technology is taking over our lives. Technology affects almost everything we do today, and it also influences most of our plans for the future. Whether we experience the benefits of a hearing implant, use a mobile phone, listen to music and radio, surf the Internet for news, or turn on our car's navigation system, we are constantly enjoying the benefits of a high-tech life.

Mobile phones have morphed from convenient instruments of communication to personal handheld computers on which we can instantly access data and services with the touch of a button or a few taps. We can shop, rent cars, plan our journeys to work, and book doctors' appointments, all from our smartphones. Machine learning and virtual reality now dominate the entertainment space. On-demand television means that we no longer must wait to watch our favorite shows, or even make decisions about what to watch—machine-learning algorithms make recommendations based on our viewing habits. Everything is personalized and individualized. Today, corporations target people individually through ads and data collection. Instagram, Facebook, and Google customize their advertisements to the individual user, using their private data to give a “better service.” As was confirmed more than six years ago by the whistleblower Edward Snowden, who worked as an American intelligence contractor, giant business entities like Facebook (now known as Meta) market our data to intelligence agencies. Here is what Snowden (2019) said: “In the early 2000s, the Internet was still just barely out of its formative period, and, to my mind at least, it offered a more authentic and complete incarnation of American ideals than even America itself. A place where everyone was equal? Check. A place dedicated to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Check, check, check.”

Hoping to not sound too abstract, but I want you to imagine a system. It does not matter what system; it can be a computer system, a legal system, or even a system of government. After all, a system is just a bunch of parts that function together as a whole, which most people are only reminded of when something breaks. It's one of the great chastening facts of working with systems that when one part of the whole breaks, the damage is almost never the part in which you notice the malfunction. To find what caused the system to collapse, you need to start from the point at which you spotted the problem and trace it logically through all of the system's components.

Edward Snowden was one of the people who had direct access to how and where a system that had so much promise for the future of all humankind was broken. At his

surveillance job, he would be given targets to watch. He would compile a profile on each person with the help of social media entities, making all of our data accessible to purchase by big institutions and corporations. During one of his jobs, right before he decided to release classified documents to journalists, he and his team were going through the phone of a target, in pursuit of profiling him. Just when one of his colleagues was chuckling over a naked picture of the target's wife, Snowden came across a video of a child about two years old, laughing and playing. He explains that there was a moment when the child looked directly at the camera, as if she knew who was watching.

Snowden recalls this moment as life changing. Over the course of his career, it became increasingly difficult for him to continue his surveillance work. He questioned the laws of his country that promoted this level of spying but also claimed to support free speech and privacy rights. As a person whose job is to watch and target people, this child on the video was the last straw for him. He radically ended his time in the intelligence business, convinced that his country's operating system—its government—had decided that it functioned best when broken. He saw that government had become a corporation, run by people interested in profit, dominance, and ownership.

CONCLUSION

The millennial, Y, Z, and alpha generations were born into a truly violent system, where mobility among social classes is stunted, and where the concept of the American Dream—that one can find opportunities to prosper no matter who they are or where they are from—is disproven by the reality of gross income inequality. The future will be only as good as how well the upcoming generations deal with the trauma of a broken planet, broken communities, and a mentality of convenience and consumerism that is already deeply embedded in the individual and social consciousness.

REFERENCE

Snowden, Edward. "Edward Snowden in His Own Words: Why I Became a Whistle-Blower." Excerpt from *Permanent Record* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019). *Wired* (22 Sept. 2019). <https://www.wired.com/story/edward-snowden-in-his-own-words-why-i-became-a-whistle-blower/>

PART II

THE ISLEY BROTHERS' MUSICAL FAMILY

Living Rock and Roll: An Interview with Ernie Isley

WILLIAM BANFIELD

“Living Rock and Roll: Memoir of Ernie Isley,” as told by Ernie Isley, is a narrative of the life of the Isley Brothers’ musical family. In some measure, it also is a professional overview and cultural commentary on this special family, the musical times they produced in, and the impact this work had on the development of popular music globally. This story is Ernie Isley’s detailed account of “growing up Isley” and, most important, it is his impressions, stories, and commentary on the meaning of the music, what his family introduced and achieved, and the work that inspired generations of music makers and listeners.

THE POWER OF MUSIC

I teach the history of American popular music and know firsthand that telling the life stories of key figures helps everyone understand the relationship between music and culture. The music and artistry of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s forcefully defined our becoming in this critical time in history and marked the coming of age of modern popular culture. Because of the demand for fuller social equality, the voice of a new generation in the 1960s and 1970s emerged in many unprecedented ways. The time was ready for a culture of youth participants who had new technology, voices, and fashion, which blended together megaculturally in distinct and powerful ways across society. Their “shout” helped us see, experience, and complement a new world that was accompanied and defined by civil rights, women’s rights, war protests, and a new global awakening of the baby boomers, who were now in place in the 1950s and 60s. This “shout” was heard as never before because it defined, demanded, and defended the age. The music that was birthed to accompany the generation’s awakening was brand new: R&B mixed with gospel, rock and roll, soul, funk, reggae, and urban contemporary. Ernie Isley and the Isley Brothers were part of it all, beginning in 1959 and continuing into the 1990s.

THE 1950s

Music is a powerful mode of expression and is harvested from our experiences. It can inform us as to where we’ve been and where we’ve traveled, because music deeply marks human experiences in real time. Try this: Listen to any piece of music that you remember being fond of or having an emotional reaction to, and that music will transport you back to that meaningful experience again and again. And although those experiences can also be painful, the music seems, in this sense, even more powerful, like a friend accompanying us on a journey. Anyone who has spent some time living can relate to music that has affected their experiences. Music lives in those experiences. And if the music is great, this heightens devotion to the artistry, the times, and any other wonderful things they might have sensed

in their lives. In that devotion, we become not only fans but also followers of the music—true to the movement of the rhythm of our soul and ideas.

Music makers, the serious ones, resonate and live deeply within us. They participate in that great experiential calling to life that art weaves so powerfully in our lives. The experiences, the times, and our relationship with those times are the great gifts memory gives us and those beautiful experiences that accompany life. Music can be the link, the glue that holds these memories together.

Ernie Isley talks a lot about the notion of “the journey,” and in these discussions, he touches on his family interactions, music mythologies, facets of the industry, technology, and the media. He also talks about his life and working with all the great artists—from The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and Stevie Wonder to Michael Jackson and the Carpenters.

Rarely do we have artists like the Isley Brothers, whose musical and artistic career has extended so wide and lasted so long—from the 1950s through 1990s, and into the 2000s and the present day. That is an incredible accomplishment. But to hear from Ernie Isley about how he lived in and through the music as it changed is also powerful. I think his experience connects very much to the kinds of things people are interested in today: the focus of the work as artistry, the ideas about music and creativity, and the impact of music on shaping our society. Very few artists today can speak to that issue as wonderfully and richly as Ernie Isley—because he was there. His voice is direct, approachable, and warm. That comes through in his music. He has lived and played through it all, and I think it’s really fascinating to hear Ernie talk about what it was like to grow up as an Isley, as a young person with such an incredible musical family. He grew up seeing all this happen, and how he grew morphed naturally into the life of a well-known recording artist. Then he became an American icon for the soul era.

Ernie Isley is a guitarist, drummer, singer, and songwriter. He infused the Isley Brothers’ band with a Jimi Hendrix–like virtuosity that took the veteran, gospel-based R&B group into a more rock/soul, mainstream direction in the 1970s and 1980s. With this new direction, he earned 11 gold and 5 platinum albums.

Ernie was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and grew up watching his older brothers Ronald, Rudolph, and O’Kelly have such hits as “Shout,” “Twist and Shout,” and “This Old Heart of Mine.” As a teenager, he learned to play the drums, and around that time, he and his brothers moved to New Jersey. After hearing Jose Feliciano’s 1968 classic “Light My Fire,” Ernie picked up the guitar and “light a fire” he did. Ernie Isley became the legatee of Jimi Hendrix and, in so doing, not only extended the range of rock into wider categories of American music but also broadened rock in other directions, bringing back Black audiences to appreciate a rock/R&B mix that unfolded, most surely, largely through Ernie Isley’s sound. For my generation, those of us born in the 1960s, he was our Black guitar superhero. He completed his college studies as a music student at C. W. Post College in Long Island, New York and later joined the Isley Brothers. He made his debut on their album 3+3, which was issued in the summer of 1973 and from which came the hit “Who’s That Lady” and a cover of Seals and Crofts’ “Summer Breeze.” This was the beginning of a string of hits that spanned 13 years.

The history of American popular music and culture is the story of how our culture has been watered and, in many cases tilled, by great artistry. Our youth and early adulthood were most assuredly wrapped up in the musical artists who met our living experiences on many planes, who seemed like us and whose experiences reminded us of our own lives. Because we grew up in and with that artistry, the songs, the individuals, and the music that shaped us are inextricably connected to how we became ourselves, individually and collectively. When we take the time to recognize these great songs, it's like an epiphany of the soul, the mind, the body, and our sensation. It pierces us through the ears and awakens in us a social-cultural consciousness.

I think immediately of the joy I've experienced and the memories triggered by the music and artistry of Ernie Isley and the Isley Brothers—one of the greatest music families in American history and culture. Few musical groups have embodied and conveyed the musical legacy of America more than the Isleys, whose work spans more than half a century. Their story bridges genres, cultural traditions, and historical moments, from the church-based sounds of gospel through early R&B to the power of 1970s soul, 1980s pop, and beyond. Their impact touches on the political and social turmoil of the 1960s and the contemporary urgency of hip-hop. The Isleys have been heard and felt deeply.

"Living Rock and Roll" is a narrative of this remarkable family, as told through the eyes of its youngest member, Ernie Isley. This account follows Ernie's experiences of "growing up Isley" and is captured in his stories, impressions, and commentary on his family's achievements, the meaning of their music, and how they inspired generations of listeners and other music makers. This retelling has evolved from personal conversations Ernie and I have had over the past several years about his life and work.

In his sharing, it's powerful to read, in Ernie's own words, his deep understanding of the power of music, his personal sense of the connections his career and music have made, and the ways the Isley Brothers' music connected sound and culture.

The Isleys have, in many ways, been the sound of our coming of age, which has run parallel to so much of our modern popular culture, including at a time when a new generation of young people emerged in unprecedented ways and demanded social equality. The technology, the fashion, and the voice all blended in unique and powerful ways. The Isley Brothers' "Shout" helped us see and experience and feel a new world that was defined by civil rights, women's rights, protest over war, and the rise of the baby boomers. Their shout defined, demanded, and defended the age. And their music matched the birth of a brand new sound that was R&B mixed with gospel, rock and roll, soul, funk, reggae, and urban contemporary. Their songs—"Who's That Lady?," "Living for the Love of You," "Between the Sheets," "Summer Breeze," "Fight the Power," "Groove with You," "Voyage to Atlantis," "Work to Do," "It's Your Thing," "Harvest for the World," "This Old Heart of Mine," and "Shout"—were the soundtracks, the blueprints, and the marching orders for many. The Isley Brothers' music was the whole package: great songs, great singing, great performing, great style, and great social-cultural imagery and meaning that connected everyone with the times.

THE DOWNBEAT: A JOURNEY BEGINS

When I was a young guitarist growing up in the 1970s, the two prominent, Black popular-rock guitarists were Jimi Hendrix and Ernie Isley. I had to be like both. Hendrix died in 1970, and his legatee, heir apparent was Ernie Isley. I listened intently to every emotion-filled, finger-strum-guitar-crying solo on the Isley Brothers' recordings.

There are no passages as memorable and iconic as the opening and closing to "Who's That Lady," which features Ernie's R&B guitar strumming and a recording of his vocals as a backdrop to underscore the rhythm section track (i.e., bass, piano, and drums). Ernie Isley scream-sings in his guitar solo over the top of the music track. "Who's That Lady" was the signature R&B and Black rock song that took Hendrix's mix of rock and Black sensibility to the next-generation epochal sound. As I grew older, I never imagined actually meeting Ernie Isley. He was a rock guitar legend of a past generation, and the very idea of a Black pop mainstream guitarist was not embraced until 1984, when Prince Rogers Nelson arrived full force with "When Doves Cry" and "Purple Rain."

The 1980s to 1990s featured the sonic embodiment of Jimmy, Ernie, and Prince as the quintessential guitarists, rock- and soul-style songwriters, producers, and music sensations. Through this lens of guitar, soul, Black rock, songwriting, and social-writing relevance, the tremendous significance of the Isley Brothers, and more specifically Ernie Isley, can be seen.

But it is through the lens and context of education and of legacy, culture, and heritage, that my path and my destiny crossed with the legendary Ernie Isley. I was professor of Black music and culture studies at Berklee College of Music in Boston. Ernie had worked with chief of staff Carl Beatty, who was a recording engineer, and it was Carl who brought Ernie Isley to the campus. I was, of course, elated. In this context, I was asked to host Ernie in classes, introducing hundreds of young musicians to him, many who had only heard of the "old legends from the past." Some of these students may have heard an Isley Brothers' record, but now they could meet and see Ernie Isley in person.

I'm sure many of those young people during the class breaks were texting their parents and grandparents asking, "Hey, Pop, did you know a group called the Isley Brothers? I just met Ernie Isley!"

I interviewed Ernie during several of these campus talks; it was the rapper Biggie Smalls' sampling of the Isley Brothers' "Between the Sheets," that received the biggest recognition and response. (Sampling is when contemporary recording artists or producers use snippets of previous music recordings, usually by other artists.) Thanks to generational sampling with hip-hop and contemporary style, artists like Ernie and the Isley Brothers got "street cred" and were deemed to be relevant. Because somebody the students recognized had sampled older music, a connection was made.

In these exchanges, something strong developed between my idol and myself. His appreciation of the importance of education, legacy, and heritage, as well as the role of culture in carrying and shaping a generation, was always a part of the Isley Brothers' family identity.

These close exchanges happened over a period of two years, with Ernie returning to Boston and Berklee three or four times. I produced and performed with him, acting as his

music director for a concert in which we played Jimi Hendrix's "Who Knows." I was now playing backup guitar for my idol, and I felt like I was in the Isley Brothers' band. That spark of connection on stage while performing through to history in real ways made it clear that his story had to be told.

In this context of college learning, Ernie shared more about his life and, our discussions became even more robust. Throughout the 1970s, several of the Isleys had attended college. In fact, Ernie was still a college student as the older Isleys were emerging on the national and international scenes and in mainstream popular music. This emergence was happening in the middle of Ernie's college career and as he was entering more fully into the family band. As you can imagine, this story was exactly what the students wanted to hear—that is, that it was possible to go to college and pursue an exciting career as a performer.

In the course of our conversations at Berklee, I became enamored with how Ernie addressed these younger musicians. A natural and wise teacher, Ernie seemed to appreciate being with us in Boston in this capacity. As an "elder" to the generation of college students for whom he performed, Ernie hit a new stride, giving back to aspiring young people and reaching back into the extraordinary history and legacy of his family and their music. With his humanity, sincerity, compassion, and humility, he was unlike anyone I had ever met. I was enamored with him. Our friendship, our mutual interest in music and guitar, and our interest in sharing the gifts and legacy of music with younger people sparked a chemistry and developed into a series of discussions. These talks and clinics that he gave focused on the importance of understanding history, culture, and the social climate that music helped to create and explain.

It was during these engaging conversations that we decided to keep the fire going and the recorder rolling. We used this connection and reconstruction of the times to record his remembrances of his life, his family, and what they brought to the world through their music.

SHOUT: GROWING UP ISLEY

We shouldn't forget our roots, our history. . . . You first must sing for yourself, then you can reach out to others. . . . No matter what kind of songs people sing, it must come natural to them. . . . I liked the way Bessie Smith made her tones. When I was a little girl, I felt she was having troubles like me. She expressed something we could not put into words. . . . I never knew her [Billie Holiday]. But when I saw her on the 1957 CBS show *The Sound of Jazz*, I caught "that cry" from her. She looked like she knew trouble. She sounded like that.

—Mahalia Jackson, "Mahalia Jackson Finds Her Way" (1958)

Jazz music of the 1940s was "defined" in many ways by Duke Ellington's 1932 song title, "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)." This song was about an approach to *music-ing*, and it was the name of a musical period as well. Duke Ellington's swing music

was the first expression of American popular culture. It was popular mainstream music that everybody sang, dance, and fell in love to. Swing was heard everywhere by the late 1930s and early 1940s, selling an estimated \$50 million in record sales.

President Roosevelt knew that while economic recovery would take real work, the nation's spirits could be lifted with other immediate investments. As part of his New Deal, art was one such investment. Swing, as the nation's popular music, rose to the occasion. Benny Goodman's 1934 *Let's Dance* radio programs spurred on the dance-music craze and sent that groove across American radio. Big band swing music was the fashion, the culture, and the music way. By the mid-1940s, after World War II—yet another huge global calamity—things began to shift yet again. Tastes began to change as young servicemen were returning home from the war, setting in motion the global baby boom. The music needed to have sentiment and romance and to bring people back together—perhaps not by “fast swinging,” as the swing-era Lindy Hoppers needed, but by “slow drag romancing.”

The homes, families, and values of this era would become the stable, patterned, traditional American lifestyle—the suburbia of the 1950s. Several new musical forces pointed the way forward. Louis Jordan, a former big band performer, became a seminal figure and leading voice in the new, more urban Black music heard on jukeboxes in mainly Black neighborhoods. Once called race music, this sound was now in demand by returning Black servicemen. The new music of Black communities was named in *Billboard* magazine's new category of 1949: rhythm and blues (later shortened to R&B). The big bands that once had 14 to 18 jazz players and played swing music for twirling teens were no more. The music now featured homespun, blues-based, house-party, dance, and love songs, and it met its needs with three horns, a rhythm section, and songs that reflected the common folks' pastimes, fun, and romance.

Songs such as “Friday Night Fishfry,” “Rockin’,” and “Caldonna” were the craze. White teens were not far behind in being attracted to the music styles popular among Black youth. As in earlier decades, young Americans exposed to jazz music were drawn to ragtime and then to the blues, jazz, and swing. R&B eventually evolved into the next music craze of the late 1950s: rock and roll. It was not long before radio programs were following suit and catering to White youth who were attracted to the R&B sounds played on Black radio.

Artists like Lionel Hampton and Louis Jordan downsized their jazz bands and others that were into the “big beat,” the boogie-woogie bass lines, and the shuffle-boogie dance feels, which were all elements of rock and roll. Performance film shorts advertised these newer forms of music, which gave Black groups a huge crossover advantage, and they gained wider support from White teen audiences.

This music also was advanced by the simultaneous rise of independent record companies, like Chess, Imperial, and King Records, which were recording these early “race record groups” and distributing these songs to Black radio stations in the 1950s. Atlantic Records, for example, was run by the Ertegun brothers (sons of Turkish ambassadors) who were committed to collecting records and showcasing Black roots music. Big Joe Turner's 1954 hit “Shake, Rattle & Roll” says it all. A new period had emerged.

At the same time, there was religious music coming from the Black church. Gospel quartets and quintets and church groups, which were independent of the “mainstream

white gaze” and interests, were expanding Black church services to touring church circuits, conventions, and revivals across the South and North. This long-standing tradition extended from the hidden church gatherings from the institution of slavery (1750s to 1860s), which grew into minstrel show traditions (1840s) and then blues and traveling tent shows (1910s to 30s). Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Thomas Dorsey (the father of modern gospel music) attended gospel conventions and church demonstration song-selling (1930s).

Thomas A. Dorsey was the original music director for the great blues artist Ma Rainey. He wrote, arranged, and directed her shows. Gospel radio programs were broadcast throughout the South in the 1940s. Because of the northern migration of Blacks, these music programs could be heard in places like Chicago and Cincinnati, too, which was Isley territory. The Jubilee quartet and Black college spiritual groups were community-based groups that took this music on the road. In the 1930s, Golden Gate Quartet could be heard on CBS radio and also had a huge following of Black and White listeners. During the 1940s, audiences were exposed to the extraordinary career and visibility of the Mills Brothers, who were a comfortable combination of old-time barbershop harmony singing, pop-jazz song styling, and virtuosic, instrument mimicking, bebop solos and vocal brilliance.

THE BEGINNINGS

Enter the Isley Brothers. The Isley Brothers’ family grew up singing in the Cyrene African Methodist Episcopal Church and Park Avenue Baptist in Piqua, Ohio, near Dayton. They were an exceptional family of brothers and a father. This Black church tradition would be one of the major musical links connecting to the Isley Brothers’ band. Other more traditional groups grounded in gospel music emerged as well, including The Blind Boys of Alabama, The Dixie Hummingbirds, Swan Silvertones, The Soul Stirrers, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and The Staple Singers (who actually performed sacred music in clubs!). They all broke through the barriers by mixing the standards and norms of sacred, Black, popular music stylings. The Isley Brothers were born out of this mix of music.

The queen of Black gospel music was the singularly religious Mahalia Jackson. It was difficult for even Duke Ellington to get her to sing on his great, jazz-spiritual work “Come Sunday.” In a 1958 *Downbeat* magazine interview, Jackson hinted at how influential blues and jazz singers had been to the gospel icon. She stated:

We shouldn’t forget our roots, our history . . . you first must sing for yourself, then you can reach out to others. . . . No matter what kind of songs people sing, it must come natural to them. . . . I liked the way Bessie Smith made her tones. When I was a little girl, I felt she was having troubles like me. She expressed something we could not put into words. . . . I never knew her [Billie Holiday]. But when I saw her on the 1957 CBS show *The Sound of Jazz*, I caught “that cry” from her. She looked like she knew trouble. She sounded like that.

What Cornel West has called the “Black spiritual blues impulse” suggests that these styles are connected and have always been alive and well, cross-fertilizing and fermenting Black music artistry. Implicit in this connection is another great ingredient: music meant for healing and addressing the social ills of the times.

Father Isley aspired to make his mark in the well-tilled grounds of gospel music. It was the dream of many aspiring Black musicians and singers in the church to be recognized by the public and to spread the good news (i.e., the gospel) to the masses through music. Despite the fact that religious mores, attitudes, and family values were seen to be in direct conflict with the cultural values of popular blues and R&B, these musicians and singers wanted to perform.

Let’s not forget that Gospel music was, as noted earlier, born from the blues, and blues was born from the spirituals. The “dance” of the spiritual shout and the secular dance that resonates in Black culture has always been linked. The Isley Brothers came out of this cultural context. This “spiritual blues impulse” is the aquifer for their special blend that characterizes the most important aspects of their unique sound. To truly understand and appreciate the power and the purpose of so much of Black music, you must deal with this functioning duality. The Isley Brothers are the epitome of this duality, which is the core element of their power and attraction. You can’t fight “that power.”

As I tracked these ideas in the Isley Brothers’ music through my conversations with Ernie, I was compelled to hear more about his real life—the real-time narrative that emerged from this cultural–historical–social threading, as did the music. This was the challenge: How do you write a compelling narrative on a well-covered subject, allow space for a family biography, and make room for a personal memoir? The Ernie part was easier on first examination, because his telling was the freshest entity. The challenge was writing respectfully about an era that has been covered and covered and covered again and to see soul through the lens of the Isley Brothers’ musical legacy. Additionally, how can you bring freshness and cultural relevance to this concept and also create a new interest in and dialogue about the work of the Isley Brothers so that both scholars and everyday readers take note?

THE ISLEY BROTHERS’ MUSICAL FORMULA

I think the answer I was looking for came from the Isley Brothers’ special formula and formation. I think this prophetic family formula is a great stylistic soul embodiment that embraced an era, while also synthesizing great writing, great singing, and a “soul urgency.” Younger brother Ernie’s fabulous star solo, rock identity, and virtuosity was his contribution to the Isley family formula.

FIRST DISCUSSIONS

This challenge—to create a compelling narrative on a well-covered subject while also allowing space for a family biography and room for a personal memoir—had to be

approached during ongoing discussions with Ernie Isley. I wanted to start with the idea of growing up as an Isley, including the formation of the family, its beginnings, and Ernie's coming of age, while being surrounded by music during an explosive time, both musically and socially in our country.

Bill Banfield: Growing up being an Isley, what was that like? Walk me through some of your journey.

Ernie Isley: It has been quite an adventure. First, my parents—well, my mother—played piano in the church. My father was in show business—he dabbled in it a little before he met and married my mother. And just as they were about to get married, my father suggested, “Suppose we had a family and they were all boys and they continued along the lines of the singing group, the Mills Brothers?”

Apparently, there was a lot of divine grace here. They had four sons initially: O’Kelly Isley, Jr.; Rudolph Bernard Isley; Ronald Isley; and Vernon Isley. Then there was myself, Ernie, born in 1952, and Marvin in 1953.

The Isley Brothers started off as a church singing quartet, but when I was 2 years old and Vernon was 11, he was riding a bicycle to school and was struck and killed by a car. That shut the group down for nearly two years. When they picked back up, they were a trio. The first Isley Brothers’ record came out in 1957, a week after my father died. I was five years old.

THEN THERE WAS SHOUT

Hold on! We don’t need no more ghosts. We need a song. You got to sing. . . .
 You can’t be no ghost, you got to be a spirit . . . and the spirit will
 not descend without a song.

—*Bulworth* (1998)

Music is an indicator of deeper culture. Much of the talk in the education industry these days is around the importance of cultural relevancy, while also preserving the importance of the cultural narrative against the often-crushing commodification of the market-driven media industries.

It is alarming that things like reality television, the oversaturation of violence, and carelessness for the value of human life at every level socially, culturally, politically, and economically have desensitized us and made our society numb to our impulses to care and have good sense living in our times. When the camera lens is focused on our megaculture today, what do we see?

The discussion in recent years has turned to the music, specifically to its lack of quality. The debates have centered around the celebration of violence in culture, me for me, and us against them, which are exhibited in too much popular music and popular culture. The Isley Brothers' music is a powerful example, among many from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, that powerfully illustrates that when there is more great music and art, there is, at least, a social consciousness. One hopes that in the presence of such "a defining consciousness," our world could attempt to be a better place for a better reason. It is easy to overromanticize these periods as if they all were about holding each other's hands and singing "We Shall Overcome." Many parts of youthful rebellion, too, require the abandonment of many treasured and tried values, as well as a remaking of societal norms that seem to undo the notions of a consciousness of care. But cultural revolutions, the best of them, bring critical illumination to the most destructive counter-humane tendencies. These cultural tendencies, for the most part, are driven and defined by power and power abuses, which come through governmental and capitalist machinery. These enterprises are well-oiled in greed and selfishness and go against the needs of the common people. Fighting the power becomes, as we shall hear from Ernie Isley, quite the appropriate kind of song that needed to be sung.

Ernie Isley is committed to that kind of discussion and leads us through the impact that that has had on the music and thus on a shared practice among a generation of conscious music makers and entertainers. As I stated earlier, this practice significantly marks our "popular culture America branding." That "shout and testify," that song for the world, and that fighting the power is exactly what historians take seriously when addressing the meaning of culture in our times.

Amiri Baraka, the great author, scholar, poet, and thinker, implies in all of his work a core question: What do the people value or want? In ascertaining what the people valued, Baraka always argues that this is the direct meaning of what artists, in their most critical ways, are representing. And so at the end of our conversations, the most important, lasting impression should be our ability to read and understand precious culture (i.e., song), and the stories of our times should be heard through the important voices of the representative artists of every era.

Bill Banfield: Ernie, where does this all go to next: the start of the Isley explosion into popular music?

Ernie Isley: In 1959 there was, "Weeeeellll . . . you know you make me wanna kick my heels up and throw my hands up and Shout." That's the glory days, 1959, of rock and roll at the beginning. After that, in 1959, we moved the family from Cincinnati to New Jersey, Englewood, T-Neck. Then in '62 there was the first million seller, "Shake It Up, Baby, Shake It Up, Baby, Twist and Shout." Now, across the pond, there was this English band who also heard those two songs and started incorporating that [sound] into their presentation [The Beatles]. And this is why the Isley Brothers are as much a part of rock and roll as the other

great music: gospel, R&B, and funk. I'm trying to do this in chronological order, because when I was 11 years old, there was a left-handed guitar player who came through our front door, who was hired by my brothers. His name was James Marshall Hendrix. He lived in our home for approximately two years, from March of '63 to November of '65. Needless to say, there were some very exciting live shows with him in the band. At times, I'd have my social studies book open when I'd hear him playing. This was the beginning of my life in rock and roll.

I'd come out into the dining room or whatever, sit down at the table, and he's [Jimi Hendrix] playing. Sure, I've got my social studies book open, but I was not doing social studies! I was not a musician either, yet. The first instrument I went to was drums—I started at 12 and played my first live gig with my brothers in Philadelphia at 14.

The first time Jimi Hendrix was in a professional recording studio, it was with the members of my family, and he played a couple of guitar solos on the record. The song was set up to show off their hotshot guitar player and the song was called "Testify," which is on the *West Coast Seattle Boy: The Jimi Hendrix Anthology* that was released last October [2012].

THE 1960s

[Music's] social role as protest and resistance, . . . its musical energy and revolutionary aesthetic qualities[,] . . . [allows listeners to identify] with its social history of rebellion and revolt, and with its musical defiance to . . . challenge and contest . . . [the] co-opted, diluted, eviscerated commercialized forms [of] American pop music. "Jazz" or African American music is the revolutionary music . . . not just for America, but for the planet. (Ho 2009, 93)

Every major innovation . . . has been from musicians to attain greater and greater levels of expressive freedom through liberating the two basic fundamentals of music: time (meter) and sound (pitch/temperament/harmony). (Ho 2009, 95)

[And] the highly African blurring . . . reach[es] an emotive and spiritual catharsis—to "allow the gods [i.e., wisdom] to descend"—and thereby affirm both personal and communal humanity in the face of inhumanity. (Ho 2009, 97)

—Fred Ho, "What Makes 'Jazz' the Revolutionary Music of the Twentieth Century, and Will it Be Revolutionary for the Twenty-first Century?" (2009)

I was born in the early 1960s and became conscious in the 1970s. I grew up in Detroit in the midst of those riots, and we were escorted to school with tanks and army guards, up and down our streets. We understood, if not with any depth, that something was going on. Parents talked, and neighbors provided some protection. It didn't really feel immediately dangerous, like scary, as a kid, but it did feel like the older people were in an uproar.

The television was going, speeches were being given, teachers were talking, and the images were playing of the police brutality, the biting dogs, the Vietnam war protests, and the burning of buildings. I knew something was really going down! I think back on it now, and it seems surreal—we were those kids in the old media clips you would see walking down the street with soldiers on all sides.

Malcolm and Martin Luther King, the Kennedys, and these massive, much bigger-than-life political figures were declaring the need for neighbors, cities, and the country to come together. As a youth, you know there is something going on, but the promise of being a kid was still the most important thing you lived for. And then there was the thing you danced to—the music.

“Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” was fun to say, and it made you shout loudly and proudly for something. We were growing up and looking to the music to tell us about the times we lived in. “R.E.S.P.E.C.T.” was a sound and an idea. The meaning of the songs on the radio were prophetic and potent, because they made promises the songwriters said the bigger world would keep. In all this turmoil, I remember feeling that the music was the “over hanging comfort that had eyes and ears on us.” It was the place where our heroes and idols and their images and identities reigned supreme.

These were our messages, and they were delivered by people who looked and breathed like us. That’s what it felt like to see and feel yourself in the cultural realm of relevancy and to have, at the most basic level, admiration for the radio, the DJs, and the songs that said who you were. That’s not a romantic rendering. That’s what it was. These songs were the aural and spiritual banner of what it was like to be Black and to be wrapped up and sealed in by the music all around you. What then could it be like to be a young person actually making that music?

Bill Banfield: When did you begin to have some conscious connection to music playing, apart from just being an Isley? How did you get into the group, playing [and] recording at this point? Did your times having Hendrix living in your house mark you, prepare you for this? And how did the Isleys make the move from gospel to more mainstream R&B, [and make] their connections to Motown [and] popular culture?

Ernie Isley: Well, my first introduction to a professional recording studio was as the bass player on the record, “It’s Your Thing.” I was 16 in 1969. The bass player on that record is scared to death! I was supposed to be the second drummer on that song, but my brothers, O’Kelly and Ronald, liked the way I played the bass part at home in our living room.

So, I showed the bass player on the recording session what I played. But when he started playing, the music had a different feeling. My brothers preferred the way I played it. So my brothers, on that session, handed me a bass guitar. I put the headsets on, [and I] heard the engineer’s voice say, “Roll it!” I was scared to death, but I played it. That was my first time in the recording studio, and that’s the music you hear. Just 30 days before that

session, I got my very first guitar. I liked Jose Feliciano's "Light My Fire," and that was the song I wanted to play.

I got an electric guitar. I think it was a Guild. The guitar player that's on "It's Your Thing" is the same guitar player on Isaac Hayes' "Shaft" playing the wah-wah guitar. His name was Charles Pitts, nicknamed "Skip." Obviously, he's a very funky guitar player. He was a big influence on me. Feliciano was another influence on me. Before this period, "This Old Heart of Mine" was done at Motown Records—a classic Motown hit. A couple years after that, that's when they left Motown and started their own record company, T-Neck Records.

The first single was "It's Your Thing," and that was my entry as well into the Isleys. After that, we started to get away from the horn thing on our records, and we started to do, "If you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with." I'm taking care of business, woman, can't you see. "Work To Do." The next studio record turned out to be 3+3, "Who's That Lady." But as I grew, I started to really get into lead guitar, and obviously, the lead guitar player that was in our home was the major influence on me [Hendrix]. It's funny. I remember when Jimi Hendrix came back to our home one day—I [had] stopped seeing him on a regular basis—and I asked Kelly, "Where's Jimi? What's up with Jimi?"

And my brother Kelly said, "Oh, Jimi wanted to do some other things, and he appreciated the hospitality and all the embrace that he received. We talked about it, we parted on friendly terms, but he just asked one favor: he wanted to take the white Stratocaster guitar that we bought for him with him."

That Strat, last November, was auctioned in England, I think for like \$400,000, the Isley-Hendrix Strat was his first Strat. Anyway, he [Hendrix] came back by the house before Monterrey Pop, and this was in late '66, something like that. But then all of a sudden he's there back again at the house! My brother Marvin and I are looking at each other and Marvin said, "Is that Jimi?!" He was dressed differently now.

Instead of having patent leather shoes on, he had boots. Instead of, you know, regular pants, these pants were crushed velvet—wine-colored bell bottoms! He had a belt around his waist with loops in it, the belt sash, ruffled shirt, a vest, a bracelet here, rings on every finger, scarf, necklaces, hat cocked to the side. My brother Kelly said, "Man, Jimi is killin' 'em in England!" At that time, none of his stuff that he was doing had come back to America. But of course when it did, the next time I saw his image was in a record store, and he had a poster maybe hanging from the ceiling like halfway down, it was like a mirror, a warped surface mirror. What an experience, yeah, that was him.

So when the guys at my school, the players that were into music got all excited about this guy, they were saying, "Oh, man, this guy, this new guy, player, oh, he's incredible!"

I'm like, "Yeah, I already knew that." So they were talking back and forth and back at my school and one day, somebody had a magazine and read in that particular issue that Jimi Hendrix played with the Isley Brothers.

They asked, "Uhh, Ernie? Did you know Jimi Hendrix, did he play with your brothers?" I said, "Yeah, yeah he did."

"Well, why didn't you say anything?"

I said, “Cause y’all know everything there is to know about Jimi, and you’re getting your information from the magazines that you’re reading—you never asked me anything.”

They said, “Oh, man, wow, how well did you know Jimi?”

I said, “He lived in our home. If you had come by the house a year and a half ago, you would have seen him coming in and out of the front door on a regular basis.”

THE GREAT MERGING OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS: THE 1970s, 1980s, AND 1990s

THE 1970s

When you open up the Isley Brothers’ album jacket, 3+3 on T-Neck Records, you are immediately struck with their images, both collectively and individually: six Black men powerfully dressed, including O’Kelly Isley, Jr., Rudolph Bernard Isley, Ronald Isley, cousin Chris Jasper, Marvin Isley, and Ernie Isley. You are struck by the act of performing music—it’s a band. You observe the presence of a musical family—the Isleys are dressed for the period of sweeping changes. They are adorned in modern African American urban-soul dress with the glitter, the hats, the silk- and polyester-patterned shirts, the moccasin leather string jackets, the bell-bottom pants, and the slick and fancy patterned shoes and belts, and an energy is in the air that something brand new, Black, and beautiful has arrived. It’s different and yet familiar. It’s important to understand the change of direction in the style of social consciousness. The 1960s was “look at us, we matter.” But with the 1970s, it was the manner and meaning of the period that did not dream but demanded “we will do and do as we see fit” for our survival and our cultural heritage. This change of mindset signaled a new style, approach, voice, and temperament. The social state of things was reflected in the music. The dress, hair, and symbolization were different. It was radical and revolutionary at all costs.

Soul has been described as the “essence of the human spirit, a shout, emblem of uninhibited self-expression.” In *History of Rock and Roll*, Bruce Springsteen states, “Everything we did came out of soul music . . . spiritual intensity, going for both your spirit and your gut.” It was not just about abandoning yourself to the songs, but about believing in the rationale and the reason that society was changing and about being committed to the energy and the sounds that were sure to change it. It was honest and that honesty was tied to gospel music, which some people called secular gospel music.

This was a musical/style category that was tied to race pride, social and civic responsibility, and accountability. This period can be thought of as the Black popular music that many historians say ushered in the civil rights movement in America. The 1970s went far beyond just civil rights in Black popular music. This period deeply represented an industry investment in a rich diversity of musical persuasions not yet seen in mainstream music. During these years, some of the music and the faces represented included the Isley

Brothers, The Spinners, Patti LaBelle, Chic, Barry White, Four Tops, Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Supremes, L.T.D., Billy Preston, War, Diana Ross, The Temptations, Booker T. & the M.G.'s, Atlantic Starr, Peabo Bryson, Roberta Flack, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, Bill Withers, Rufus and Chaka Khan, Lionel Richie, Donny Hathaway, Ohio Players, Aretha Franklin, Lou Rawls, Cheryl Lynn, George Benson, Stevie Wonder, The Jackson 5, Donna Summer, Sister Sledge, Kool & The Gang, Johnnie Taylor, The Dramatics, The Crusaders, Otis Redding, The 5th Dimension, Wilson Pickett, B. B. King, Sly and the Family Stone, Jeffery Osborne, Earth, Wind & Fire, Natalie Cole, Patti Austin, James Ingram, Teddy Pendergrass, Minnie Riperton, The Chi-Lites, Bob Marley, Commodores, Rick James, The Pointer Sisters, Curtis Mayfield, Ashford & Simpson, Cameo, Whitney Houston, The Emotions, The Brothers Johnson, Gil Scott-Heron, Brian Jackson, The Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes, The O'Jays, Luther Vandross, Parliament–Funkadelic, The Whispers, The Gap Band, and more. In all of music production in history, never before had a period been so rich with such artistry. This is simply the most musically tuned time in modern history, particularly in mainstream Black popular music.

In terms of Ernie Isley and his brothers, their music was a powerful mixture that connected to a dazzling array of other counterculture punchers. Their uniqueness has to do, I think, with their “super combination” of styling, talent (both vocal and instrumental), messaging, and great songwriting.

Together, the Isley Brothers were the best example of soul-gospel singing, impeccable songwriting, and band playing. Their lyrics were powerfully poetic. They were a masterful blend of social consciousness and an evangelical call for the times. They featured sensuous, romantic, blessed ballads, as well as gritty, mode-funk, dance groves.

Ernie Isley introduced that song-scream, string-sing component of solo guitar, rock virtuosity. He brought familiarity and acceptance from Black audiences, while also harkening to a Jimi Hendrix of the 1960s. But his crossover appeal to new, White mainstream audiences was now comfortably in sync with Black music identity. This was a new day in American popular music. Other Black groups to cross over into the mainstream and engage this mix of music, meaning, song, and performance style, included Sly and the Family Stone and Earth, Wind & Fire. All three groups were concerned with social activism, love, and a higher self-consciousness through music.

electric music is the music of this culture and in the breaking away . . . from previously assumed forms a new kind of music is emerging. the whole society is like that. the old forms are inadequate . . . and the new music . . . is still creation which is life itself and it is only done in a new way with new materials.

so we have to reach out to the new world with new ideas and new forms and in the music . . . it is the true artistic turn on . . . music is the greatest of all the arts for me because it cuts through everything . . . it simply is.

—Ralph Gleason, liner notes (capitalization in original),
Miles Davis, *Bitches Brew* (1969)

The Music itself, rapid motion during this period. Trane's leaving Miles and his graduate classes with T. Sphere Monk put him into a music so expressive and thrilling people all over tuned in to him . . . So that on the one side the quiet little gurgles that we get as *fusion* also come out of Miles (all the leading fusionaires are Miles' alumni) as well as the new blast of life that Coltrane carried, thus giving us the Pharaoh Sanderses and the Albert Aylers and the reaching, certain direction, but that direction was a reflection of where people themselves, particularly the African American people, were going. It is no coincidence that people always associate John Coltrane and Malcolm X, they are the harbingers and reflectors of the same life development. (Baraka 1984, 175)

And we heard our own search and travails, our own reaching for new definition. Trane was our flag. But there were other, younger forces coming in at a time which spoke of other elements of the African American people [Ornette, Cecil, Oliver Nelson, Eric Dolphy]. (176)

It was also coming out of people's horns, laid out in their music . . . There was a newness and a defiance, a demand for freedom, politically and creatively, it was all connected . . . It was [as] if the music was leading us. (177)

—Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (1984)

Bill Banfield: Everyone, I think, remembers the 1970s because of how much great music there was. What do you remember about growing up and being right in the middle of all that?

Ernie Isley: I remember that we started college in September of 1970, and that was our first priority, our education. Chris, Marvin, and myself. So we had these records that we did, and when "Who's That Lady" came out, [on] the 3+3 album, it was in the fall of 1973. I was in my senior year of college, and all of a sudden my actual likeness is on an album cover. I noticed that a lot of the kids at school stopped talking to me. I didn't know why that was. "Who's That Lady" was out and I'm the guitar player on that record! I had a philosophy class that I liked, and the professor was talking about Socrates and Plato, and their envisioning of a "just society."

There was this guy in my class, and one day he came over to me and said, "Do you have that Socrates stuff in your notes?"

I said, "Yeah." I thumbed through my notebook, and I found it.

I shared whatever it was and then his next question was, "Is that you playing guitar on that Isley record?"

I said, "Yes, is that what you wanted to talk about?"

He says, "Yeah!"

"Ok, well, what do you wanna know about the class notes?"

Instead of asking about Socrates, he asks, “Hey, man, was that a Strat guitar you were using. . . . What kind of amp was it. . . . How the did you get that tone, that sound?”

And so every time after that as we had this class, we would talk about guitars and music. One day he even brought in the album. He wanted me to sign it. And so the irony is, I’m signing an image of me!

The music professors at that time were clueless as to what we were doing because we didn’t do any of that, “look at me, show-off stuff.” I remember as well, there was this one guy who sat at the front of a class. There was a piano there, and he rushed to the front of the class, three, five minutes before class start and finds a chord and says, “Bennie, Bennie, Bennie, Bennie,” as he was trying to get the fingering for the correct voicings of the song. Then, and he comes back again, “Bennie, Bennie,” and the professor says, “What in the world?! Get off of that piano, get outta here!”

“Oh, no, no rock and roll!” They hated it. But then they found out that my brothers and I were on the radio, and that blew their minds.

“Uh, Ernie, . . . uh, Mr. Isley. I understand that you’re all on AM, FM radio now?”

I said, “Yeah, we have been, and we are now.”

“So you guys have a hit album, a hit record?”

I responded, “Yeah.”

And then my professors checked out the song—“Is that you?”

I said, “Yeah.”

“And you’re sitting in my class paying attention and doing the work?!” That would just blow them away.

I would say, “Uh, Professor Markson, I’m gonna be late for class on Monday.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, because I’ll be coming back from a show in Los Angeles.”

My professors would just say, “No problem, Ernie.”

Then it got to be, “Uh, professor, I’m gonna be late for class on Monday and then . . . I’m gonna be out of class, I’m not gonna be here, Thursday or Friday.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have a show in Houston, Dallas, and New Orleans. But I’ll be back Tuesday.”

“No problem, Ernie.”

Their sense of respect increased when they found out that we were actually in the class paying attention but on the radio simultaneously at the same time. So, of course, I was not able to attend my graduation to get my bachelor of fine arts degree in music.

But my professors then responded, “No problem, Ernie, we’ll send it to you in the mail. Good luck!”

So, musically, we’re moving now well into the 1970s, and our song “Fight the Power” [1975] marked this. “Fight the Power” was controversial because of the lyric, the word *bullshit*. In those days on the radio, we would hear “with all this ‘bleep’ going down.”

But, eventually, some stations on FM radio took the plunge into politics and played it, and so it got through. I initially expressed my concern for the ears of grandmothers

throughout America that would melt when they would hear, “With all this bullshit going down.” I could see all these little kids getting paddled, “What did you say?!”

“That’s what he said on the record, mommy.” I had originally written the word “nonsense” and my three older brothers were unanimous in their counsel.

They said, “Look at the lyrical content of the song. You do wanna say “bullshit,” don’t you?”

I said, “Yeah.”

Okay, then. That’s why I sang “bullshit.”

In other words, they were saying, “Ernie, be true to what you feel. If they don’t accept it, at least you didn’t chump yourself off by trying to make it acceptable. Never mind that; the idea is you were true to what you felt, and you expressed it in that way, and there are folks that will understand it, and maybe there’s some folks that won’t. Later on, they’ll come around. That’s what you’re writing, so therefore that’s why we’re gonna go with that.”

In those days, being in the same studio at the same time with Stevie Wonder, Carole King, or The Beatles was a very special kind of exchange. Well, first of all, they were all very talented artists. Before we recorded a note of the 3+3 album, we came down to the studio and Stevie Wonder was in the studio singing “Don’t you worry ‘bout a thing.” I was ready to go home after I saw that, because the music was so deep with him. He had just released one album out the previous year, with *Sunshine of My Life* and *Superstition*, and now I’m hearing him singing this song called, “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout a Thing.”

I was so grateful that when we walked in he was not doing “Higher Ground.” All that was killer stuff! But when the engineers we were working with found out what we were doing, “Who’s That Lady,” they said, “Wait a minute, the Isleys are doing a dynamic record, and Stevie Wonder is doing a dynamic record.” In short we were both in the same studio with the same engineers! One of the guys was at the engineering board and the other one was on the couch when it was Stevie’s turn. Then when we came in, the two switched.

So, that was an intense more or less 24/7 recording experience. That predates CNN and headline news, like, it didn’t stop! Stevie was doing his, and no sooner than he would leave the studio, we would come in right behind him and do what we were doing. Then no sooner than we would leave, here Stevie comes back, and that was the way the recording session went on at the time.

THE 1980s AND BEYOND

Sometimes it seems really funny, but it’s also quite sad that is surveying [Black] America through its music in the eighties, much of the discussion revolves not around music but skin color, cosmetic surgery, and the rejection of Negroid features. . . . After all it might help you achieve that most tempting symbol of eighties assimilation: an MTV video.

—Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (1988)

When folks talk about music beyond the 1970s and 80s and into the 90s, there are a lot of references to the “art downsizing” of music. But actually, there is still a lot of great music from all sides to talk about. Black mainstream popular music continued to be shaped by advances in recording technology and electronic innovations that broadened the scope of the music, the narratives, and especially the sound. New forms now considered urban contemporary grew, such as funk and techno funk, and were driven by an even harder beat, with a more dominant rhythm section, including electric bass, punctuating guitar, drum, synthesizers, and funky horn sections.

This music had strong vocal leads that revolved around a repetitive, driving, syncopated feel, which was surely created largely for social dance parties and has continued through today’s forms.

Dance to [the] music, dance . . . forget your trouble and dance/ forget
your sickness and dance/ forget your weakness and dance . . .
We’re gonna dance to [the] music”

—Bob Marley and The Wailers, “Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)” (1974).

The human experience in popular music was also created to address many of the social demons that destroyed and damaged the young lives of such artists as Robert Johnson, Parker, Holiday, Janis Joplin, Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Marvin Gaye. We are not completely romanticizing the era. Seduction, drugs, and suicide still plague artists’ lives today, as Amy Winehouse and Kurt Cobain remind us of the tremendous battles these artists wage. The creative, far-reaching vision of artists like Stevie Wonder, in masterpieces like “Songs in the Key of Life” or “Hotter Than July,” says a lot about the ministry of arts. These artists continually and artfully wove social and musical themes and were “in tune” equally with the commercial aspects of their product and performance. All this reflects the musical dynamics of the period, which is referred to broadly as Black popular music, and that was the work Ernie and his brothers continued to do.

Bill Banfield: Some have said that the “great movement” in music came to its death in the 1980s. How did the Isley Brothers make it through the storms of these changes into the next years?

Ernie Isley: Well, as we got towards the ‘80s, we were doing various funk things, and then we decided to do a down-tempo song, “Don’t Say Goodnight.” That was a number one record, platinum album. Later on, there was this commercial, which is on YouTube now, Channel No. 5, “Share the fantasy,” with this woman at one end of the pool and this guy at the opposite end who dives in the pool, swims towards her, and comes up visually through her legs. “Share the fantasy.” And I love that commercial. I had the sound muted and I started playing these chords on my guitar. “Hey, girl, ain’t no mystery, at least as far as

I can see. I wanna keep you here laying next to me, sharing our love between the sheets.” [That song was the Isley Brothers, “Between the Sheets.”]

Well, the thing was, when we did all this music [in the 1970s and 1980s], it was very well embraced by the public; these were hits, gold, platinum, and all that, but nobody had a crystal ball in terms of the technology. So when the technology came along and got into the mix, we noticed that there were younger folks starting to use our music as a musical foundation for their own stuff.

I was in Los Angeles getting ready to turn onto Sunset Boulevard, and I heard this familiar music, and then I heard this guy say, as I’m messing around on the radio, “I love it when you call me big papa, throw your hand in the air if you’s a true player.”

So I’m saying, “What is he talking about?!”

“You got a gun up in your waist, please don’t shoot up the place wha’ . . . I see some ladies tonight they should be having my baby, baby.”

I thought it was Fred Flintstone! I just burst out laughing. I said, “Whoever this dude is, man, he’s gonna have a hit,” and it was bigger than ours! We weren’t mad at that, but it turned out to be his signature thing. Ice Cube used, “Footsteps in the Dark” [and sang] “Today was a good day,” and Aaliyah recorded, “At Your Best (You Are Love).” We never released that as a single, but that had a strong emotional connection to her. And you know, the rappers and all, they embraced us, they showed they were willing to embrace our music, and we embraced them back.

I’ll tell you this funny thing—we were in New York at Hot 97, the biggest station there. It was a rap and hip-hop station, and they did not play any music with the exception of say, Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind & Fire, and the Isleys.

So the jock there, actually the program director, told us, “Man, you won’t believe this, but a couple of weeks ago we played ‘Between the Sheets’ [Isley Brothers], and somebody called in to the station and said, ‘Hey, yo, man, look, wassup? I wanna know, why did the Isley Brothers start to sing Biggie’s song, you know what I’m sayin’? I mean, the Isley Brothers are old school man. I don’t think it’s right that they should be singin’ no Biggie, you know, ‘cause Biggie’s is the one at the joint.’”

The DJs cracked up and said, “Look, man, go down to Virgin Megastore, or go down to Tower Records, and go into the CD section, go to the letter, I-S-L-E-Y, and you’ll find a record, a CD called *Between the Sheets*. If you look on there, you’ll see it’s 1983! Biggie got his musical foundation from the Isleys, not the other way around.”

So, yeah, it’s educational.

DIFFERENCES IN GENERATIONAL VALUES MOVING FORWARD

In reference to Ernie Isley’s reference to music discussion being educational, one of the pressing things that keeps us moving forward in the dialogue of making these connections with today’s youth and times is the question, What are today’s generational values? The linkages, like music, that make culture possible have helped unite, in many ways, those

seemingly rough edges of intergenerational dialogue, especially around cultural standards. But today, perhaps, the generational divide is helped and lessened by the intersections of the digital apparatus (e.g., Internet, cell phones, Facebook). The idea of shared values across generational lines is difficult, and it may be through music that critical connections are being made, even if we can't see them yet. Ernie approached the idea of "applying the makeup," as a code for making changes and preparing for the times, quite forcibly, as our discussion turned toward what this current generation is facing.

Bill Banfield: What is your prescription, from the angle of telling younger musicians, creative people in general, what to do with their own questions and struggles about how to move their work and ideas forward today?

Ernie Isley: I think the time is actually ripe for somebody that has done their homework to be able to "apply the makeup," the way they see it musically, because it's really the people, the audience, the folks that appreciate real music and are hungry for a change today. I can give you an example. When Natalie Cole sang her father's songs, "Unforgettable," kaboom, she had the biggest record of her career. You say, "Oh, that's Nat King Cole, if you listen to it, it's great music!" Wonderful, I mean, we hear Nat King Cole every year, "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire." I mean, but he's got "Mona Lisa, Mona"! This is music!

That's what I mean when I say somebody today has the potential to "apply the makeup," the way they see it. The world is hungry for that, and yet they don't know it. That's the challenge. Nobody's actually gonna stop singing; forget about it. I wouldn't care how many rappers there are. Nobody's gonna give the singing thing up. That's gonna always be there one way or the other, and nobody's gonna give up the ability to play an instrument if you're practicing it and practicing it and learning it and [it's] becoming a part of your personal expression. I believe the music can come around again—just like our music came back in a way that we did not expect and could not have foreseen. There's music that's gonna come, you know, like pop to the surface again.

If you wanna do your own thing and find your voice, you're gonna have to, since you're not invited—that's the first thing, you're not invited, so you know what you do? You have to crash the party. You say, "How do I do that?" Well, the Isley Brothers crashed it; they weren't invited. Elvis Presley crashed it; he wasn't invited.

The Jacksons crashed it; anybody that's in the music business, there was no engraved invitation. They crashed it. So, The Beatles crashed America. They crashed it, and when they crashed it, it was like, "Oh my god, everything's gonna change now." They had done their homework, they could play, they were fully prepared, and once they got the access, the only thing that was displayed was growth. And they spread a wide musical net. They got their roots deep into American music, which includes the Isley Brothers in their résumé, and they were prepared, but they crashed it. And once you crash it, then you have got to deliver.

ERNIE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

[W]e are sorely in need of the clarity and inconvenient truths that art allows us to tell, the conversations it sparks, the space for emotion that it makes, the questions it poses, the pressure points in an aching national body politic that it exposes. . . . it is art, our ability to sit with art and all the possibilities it helps us to imagine, that is so important to our ability to value. . . . But under conditions of neoliberalism, which favor the unregulated, unchecked reach of huge multinational corporations into every area of our lives, art and music and the people who produce them all become merely marketable commodities.

—Brittney Cooper, “America’s ‘Prince’ Problem: How Black People—
and Art—Became ‘Devalued’” (April 21, 2016)

The most enduring outcome of our exchange, at this point, is that we make the promises of real meaning in music, in life with people, and within the generations. That impact has a great measure of worth. The presence of music and musical artists in life and society is the measure of its humanness. It is this yearning to connect with that which you seek at deeper levels that compels you to move your body, swing, and think with others, makes you smile, or causes you to believe in something. That’s what aestheticians, religious and social leaders, and teachers and students of social causes and movements make noise about. These are the discussions artists spend lots of time on when they are away from music. What do my notes mean to me, and who else cares? The concern for making music by music makers and their concern with inspiring generations is huge for performing musicians. John Coltrane put it this way, “To be a musician is really something. It goes very, very deep. My music is the spiritual expression of what I am, my faith, my knowledge, my being When you begin to see the possibilities of music, you desire to do something really good for people. To help humanity free itself from its hang-ups”(Porter 1998, 232, 16n4).

Only three of the Isley brothers are still living: Ernie, Ronald, and Rudolph. Their road is made up of many milestones and has been paved in gold. It has included many painful twists, from health and legal challenges to imprisonment (e.g., Ron for tax evasion), family splits, and several reorganizations of the family band trust. These experiences, no doubt, have had an impact on Ernie and Ronald’s lives, as they are still performing and still thinking. The fact that their group is the only popular music group that has had successful charting music in every decade since the 1950s is tremendous. Throughout that working history has come hard-learned lessons. I am arguing that out of this dance through the decades, from all of the fruits—whether blossoming, hanging, withering, or bursting—of their labor, emerged an approach, a method, and a learned ideology; an aesthetic, a pattern, and a view of living that worked with and developed from that life of music. This is what this dialogue delivers us.

Bill Banfield: Considering the range of decades of successes and changes, in the larger culture, how has this impacted your life, [such] as business struggles and family decisions, deaths of family members? What kinds of practical or “live within” insights and wisdom shape your current philology on music and life? And, continuing, do these life lessons come out in songwriting [and] lyrics?

Ernie Isley: Philosophy? Well, that’s a heavy question. You must, if you can, cast as wide a net as possible and appreciate music and life as a whole. Don’t get caught up in categories. In my CD collection is the Rolling Stones, James Brown, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Chaka Khan, [and the] Carpenters. A musical philosophy is to love it, appreciate it, and be committed to it—to live with your music, the music that you’re trying to create. A musical philosophy, it turns out, could be your life philosophy. My life is so strongly connected to music that without it, I’d have a totally different life, period. I don’t know what that would be. I mean when I said I wanted to get into music, my older brother said, “Naw, man, don’t do that. It’s too hard. Be a lawyer.” Lawyer?! Be a lawyer? Why would I want to do that? That’s not something I wanna do. I don’t feel that. I felt the music.

There’s a quote from Winston Churchill, and this is for when it gets hard and when things get difficult. He said in short, my own words, “If you’re going through hell, keep going. Don’t stop. Why would you be going through hell and stop?” Whatever that is, emotional hell, psychological hell, physical hell, if you’re going through hell, keep going, because—eventually, Lord willing—you will come out, and by going through that journey, it’ll give you a thicker skin, you’ll have experience, and you’ll be a stronger person for it. Music breaks down barriers between people, period. And that’s what makes it so powerful, and that’s why sometimes you can go back through history and see in different societies that they would say, “don’t sing that song,” or “don’t play that song,” or “we’re not allowing any concerts,” “we’re gonna stop that, we’re controlling it, what’s being played and what isn’t being played, what’s being sung, what isn’t being sung.” It’s powerful, it breaks down barriers, and it is a true communicator to all of us who are involved. That’s a marvelous thing that we do have. So, somebody may not speak the same language as you, but if you have a song, they’ll understand that. So music does that, and that’s a marvelous thing to have at our disposal. The Isley Brothers cast a wide musical net, and we changed when the music changed, when the musical climate changed, the terrain changed, and it will change. It doesn’t stay the same.

Some artists are in a zone while that zone is there, and they don’t necessarily change. So there’s some people that got on board when they heard, “Between the Sheets,” but there were some people that were on board when they heard, “This Old Heart of Mine.” It changed, you know, and of course, American popular music, in America and in the world, changed. It did not—it does not—stay the same. It cannot. So there was “Shout,” and then the music changed; then the twist era, that’s “Twist and Shout”; then there’s the whole Motown thing, and then you know “It’s Your Thing”; and, uh, late 1960s, early 70s,

the singer-songwriters started to come to the front, and so James Taylor, Carole King, Laura Nyro, and we were listening to everything and then trying to incorporate it into what we were doing. So therefore we would do—Seals & Crofts, we covered “Summer Breeze”—humongous record, humongous hit. We did it in 1973 and Seals and Croft sent us a telegram saying, and I’m paraphrasing, “Wonderful job, I think the song belongs to you guys now.”

THE GREAT THING ABOUT INSPIRATION

To hear her speak, you can’t believe your ears. She is ten thousand years old. She is as modern as tomorrow, a brand-new woman every day, and as endless as time mathematics. Living with her is a labyrinth of ramifications. I look forward to her every gesture . . .

Music is my mistress and she plays second fiddle to none.

—Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (1973, 447)

Bill Banfield: Ernie, after all that time in music, how does/did the music come to you?

Ernie Isley: The verses, the music, it comes to you in the same way, not all at once, but it can come to you a verse at a time, a line at a time, you know. For example, when I wrote, “Fight the Power,” one day I jumped in the shower and started singing, “Time is truly wastin’, there’s no guarantee, smile’s in the making, we gotta fight the powers that be.” I stopped myself and jumped out of the shower, and the faucet went that way, and soap went that way, and my foot went that way. I grabbed the piece of paper dripping wet, grabbed the pencil, scribbled what I wrote and literally took that with me that afternoon to Disneyland in my hip pocket. I did not tell the brothers about that song until two or three months later. That song, of course, became “Fight the Power,” one of our biggest hits.

If you get writer’s block, who doesn’t? Think about in the kids’ story “Jack and the Beanstalk,” when the giant says to the hen that lays the golden egg, “Lay!” It’s like, “Oh, you’re just waiting for the eggs?” Well it’s a living creature—maybe if you were kinder to it, maybe if you let it naturally do its thing, the gold that you’re talking about will naturally come. It’s like that with music. You can’t force it. Well, you can, but you might have something that’s lousy. But if it comes another way, if it’s the natural way, then you should have what you want the first time. And that’s the great thing about inspiration: when it’s inspired you don’t have to do that over, you know, you’ll get it right the first time.

Give me a can of paint, put me on the freeway, and I would be painting those lines; “when it’s inspired you don’t have to do that over, you know, you’ll get it right the first time.” From Boston to Miami, if there’s a highway that runs through, I would be the guy

out there by hand, doing that. That's probably where I would be. It feels like that's where I would be, not doing some laborious, monotonous thing with no flavor, no fragrance, no color, no edifying, spiritual interior food. Music does that for me.

Bill Banfield: After all this, what have you hoped most for in your life in music?

Ernie Isley: I believe that we took full advantage of the foundations and moved all this forward. The Isley Brothers, according to *People* magazine, are the only artists—Black or White, male or female—who charted in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and into the millennium with hit records. Nobody else has done that. Nobody. Everybody knows “Shout” and “Fight the Power.” That’s huge! I apply it this way.

Even if that’s the little voice inside of you, doubt, that’s the power. You have to fight it. You fight that power. At a certain point you’re out of the diapers, you’re not a baby, and you’re in the world—if you’re in this world, if you have claws, if you have fangs, if you have teeth, and if you’re not willing to use them, you’re running. You’re running in a panic, because that’s the way the world is. You know today, wherever it’s gonna go, at least as a foundation, the present generation has everything available to it to draw from. Rock and roll, you know, it’s more like “a major history marker.”

I’ve been to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum. The Isley Brothers were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in January 1992. It’s weird, because a lot of the names that they’re calling, these folks aren’t here anymore. And I’m walking in there and I see my name, and I’m alive still. I see my name and my physical likeness and it’s like, it’s kind of, you know, it’s kinda scary.

President Kennedy said we are all mortal. I’m still grateful to be here, but whatever goes on with the music today, it’s gonna be up to this present generation. So the idea is that the present generation can embrace that—the whole thing that somebody else did—and it’s possible for them to get something out of it that the artists didn’t know was possible. They must take full advantage of the foundation that’s there and keep moving forward. That’s what I mean by living rock and roll.

SUMMARY OF THE YEARS

The decades-long history of the Isley Brothers began in the 1950s. Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, they started out after their father’s “prophetic wish,” and thus the elder brothers O’Kelly Isley, Jr., Rudolph Isley, and Ronald Isley began the musical family’s legacy. As I mentioned, that legacy meant making music and cultivating one of the most enduring, influential, and diverse musical careers in modern popular music.

O’Kelly Isley, Sr., was a former U.S. Navy sailor and vaudeville performer from Durham, North Carolina, and their mother Sallye, a Georgia-reared piano player, guided the early

singing of the Isley Brothers when they were at church. The brothers began performing officially, says Ernie, in 1954. After performing on many circuits, at churches, and on local radio programs, the Isley Brothers began touring and performing up and down the eastern seaboard. The group began as a gospel family ensemble after moving to New York City in the late 1950s. The Isleys then had early charting recordings, and in 1959, their single “Shout” emerged, written by the brothers. “Shout” eventually sold more than a million copies. In addition to the fact that several rock groups have covered that song, many films and popular culture references to rock and roll have included “Shout,” marking this iconic early rock period. This is why Ernie titled his memoir *Living Rock and Roll*. His family represented the birth of the movement and is still squarely inside of it.

The next stage of their career began in the 1960s, when the group recorded for a number of early labels, cutting even more popular songs, including the top 20 single “Twist and Shout” in 1962. Then they recorded the Motown single, on their new label, “This Old Heart of Mine (Is Weak for You)” in 1966. The family moved to and settled in New Jersey and obtained an independent distribution deal, which allowed them to record on their own family label, T-Neck Records. Their albums were distributed by Buddha Records for a new release of “It’s Your Thing,” which was a huge soul hit in 1969.

We all danced to this song and shouted the lyrics, seeking a new kind of mind liberation of being independent in Black communities: “It’s your thing, do what you wanna do. I can’t tell you who to sock it to.”

In the 1970s, the Isleys became even more determined to be a part of the times, and they began to consciously experiment with many musical styles, including rock, funk, contemporary R&B, and sensuous pop ballads. This era, as stated earlier, expanded the family trust and now included younger brothers Ernie Isley, on guitar and drums, Marvin Isley, on bass guitar, and Rudolph’s brother-in-law, Chris Jasper, on keyboards and synthesizers.

The Isleys entered the 1970s as a soul, rock, and funk band. Their defining record was 3+3, which was released in 1973.

In the 1980s, the six-member lineup of the band splintered, with Ernie, Marvin, and Chris Jasper forming a spin-off group called Isley-Jasper-Isley. They produced a well-remembered video, which was digital. The band members were walking on a green screen along Ernie’s guitar strings. It seemed weird then, but this was in step with MTV.

The eldest brother, O’Kelly, died in 1986, and Rudolph and Ronald released a pair of albums as a duo before Rudolph retired for a life in Christian ministry in 1989.

In the 1990s, Ron put the group on a brief break while he recorded solo material. In 1991, Ron revived the group, and Ernie Isley and brother Marvin returned. That year, they released the album *Tracks of Life*.

In 1996, Ron Isley gained popularity as the video villain Frank Biggs (or Mr. Biggs) in a music video for R. Kelly’s hit “Down Low (Nobody Has to Know),” which featured the Isley Brothers. The success of the song and its video helped the Isley Brothers’ 1996 album *Mission to Please* reach platinum. This hit endeared them to a whole new generation of hip-hop and urban contemporary listeners some 40 years after their initial entry into American popular culture.

Some other steps into “hip-hop fan-culture love” came in 1993 when the Isley Brothers’ song “Footsteps in the Dark” was sampled by hip-hop artist Ice Cube for his hit single “It Was a Good Day.” Then in 1994, the Isley Brothers’ song “Between the Sheets” was sampled by The Notorious B.I.G. for his hit “Big Poppa.”

In 1996, Marvin Isley’s career ended tragically after a bout with diabetes, which forced him to have both of his legs amputated.

In the 2000s, Ronald and Ernie would realize mainstream success again with the albums *Eternal* (2001) and *Body Kiss* (2003), with the former album spawning the top 20 hit “Contagious.” In 2007, the Isleys’ career was interrupted by Ron Isley’s three-year prison sentence for tax evasion.

Ron was released in 2010. Of course, this identity with “the real” made him an authentic character in hip-hop lore, solidifying his modern “pimp daddy” identity. Ron Isley then released a solo album, *Mr. I*, in 2010. A year later, Ron and Ernie reunited and have since performed on the road. This year also marked the death of Marvin Isley.

As of 2016, the Isley Brothers continued to perform under the lineup of Ronald and Ernie and have since carried on as a duo to this current day in 2017, as I’m writing their story.

Throughout their career, the Isley Brothers had four top 10 singles on *Billboard* charts, and 16 of their albums charted in the top 40. The brothers have been honored by several musical institutions, including the Berklee College of Music, which awarded them honorary doctorates in 2016 (I was there). They also were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1992, cemented onto Hollywood’s RockWalk, and inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame.

REFERENCES

- Baraka, Imamu Amari. 1984. *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*. New York: Freundlich Books.
- Beatty, Warren, dir. 1998. *Bulworth*. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1998.
- Cooper, Brittney. 2016. “America’s ‘Prince’ Problem: How Black People—and Art—Became Devalued.” *Salon*, April 21, 2016.
- Davis, Miles, vocalist. 1970. *Bitches Brew*. Recorded August 19-21, 1969. Columbia Records.
- Ellington, Duke. 1973. *Music is My Mistress*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Ho, Fred. “What Makes ‘Jazz’ Revolutionary Music?” In *Wicked Theory, Naked Practice*, edited by Diane C. Fujino, 91-103. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jackson, Mahalia. “Mahalia Jackson Finds Her Way.” Interview by Studs Terkel. *Archives: Jazz History According to Downbeat*, *Downbeat*, December 11, 1958. <https://downbeat.com/archives/detail/mahalia-jackson-finds-her-way>.
- Marley, Bob, vocalist. 1974. “Them Belly Full (But We Hungry).” By Bob Marley and The Wailers Recorded 1974. Track 3 on *Natty Dread*. Island/Tuff Gong.
- Zimmerman, Paul D. “The New Jazz.” Porter, Lewis. 1998. *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

PART III

INVITED ESSAYS

Madonna Finding Freedom in “Batuka”: #Blackwomenaretheblueprint

AMINAH PILGRIM

Jazz, as a Negro music, existed, up until the time of the big bands, on the same socio-cultural level as the sub-culture from which it was issued. The music and its sources were secret as far as the rest of America was concerned, in much the same sense that the actual life of the black man in America was secret to the white American. The first white critics were men who sought, whether consciously or not, to understand this secret, just as the first serious white jazz musicians (Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Bix, etc.) sought not only to understand the phenomenon of Negro music but to appropriate it as a means of expression which they themselves might utilize. The success of this “appropriation” signaled the existence of an American music, where before there was a Negro music.

—Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (1963)¹

In the above epigraph, the late icon and a founder of the Black arts movement, Amiri Baraka, talks about what was once secret—Black life, Black music culture, and its sources. We are long past the era he described in his book. Social media leaves nothing to the imagination. There are no more secrets. The spirituals, jazz, blues, and genres of the African diaspora, such as salsa, flamenco, samba, zouk, morna, and hip-hop, are the soundtracks of people the world over. Genres that once exclusively held Black pain as well as persistence—revealing to the world Black humanity and resistance—have been rearranged and remixed to global appeal.

This essay focuses on one example of diasporic Black music, performed by Madonna and cowritten with her Malawian son David Banda. Their 2019 single “Batuka,” a blend of the Cabo Verdean (Luso-African) genre Batuku and Afrobeats, was met with worldwide acclaim. It simultaneously raised questions of cultural appropriation and the issues Baraka discussed in his classic text. “Batuka” and its video were met with overwhelmingly positive reviews. Perhaps this was due to the genius of invoking the African tradition of call and response and the universal appeal of storytelling, or perhaps this had something to do with the power of resistance that the genre represents (i.e., a kind of “blueprint” for freedom and reclamation that the predominantly female-identified art form embodies). Arguably, it is due to all of these things.

Released at a time when the world saw an increase in expressions of fascism and oppression, Madonna’s collaboration resonated with many people. This resonance was

1. Baraka, Amiri (Jones, LeRoi). *Black Music*. (New York: Capo Press, 1963), p. 13.

seen clearly in the social media response to the premiere, its reception among Cabo Verdeans and other Lusophone peoples, and its acclaim worldwide. Madonna and Banda's storytelling in "Batuka," as seen in the video and as told in the lyrics to the song with its imbedded political message (a feature typical of the genre), cleverly acknowledges suffering while urging listeners to unite and resist. A spiritual element adds hope and love. These attributes of the song are missed when the song is heard out of context, without knowledge of its backstory.

Months before the release of the song in summer 2019, I was in Cabo Verde. In February 2019, I co-led a learning journey to Cabo Verde, where delegates—guests of then Boston Mayor Martin Walsh—studied Batuku as one of the most important genres of Cabo Verdean music culture and most critical examples of African female resistance. We gathered at Cidade Velha (translated as "Old City," which was the first city established by Europeans on Africa's West Coast and a site of the trans-Atlantic slave trade), stood at the Pílorinho (a slave post the Portuguese erected as a symbol of power and a central location for torture and trade), and listened to Batukadeiras tell their stories in their own words. After that experience, upon seeing Madonna's video, many different thoughts went through my mind. Was this the kind of White privilege and cultural appropriation—or even worse, pirating of Black culture—that bell hooks wrote about? What was Madonna's fascination with Cabo Verdean music? How did the song come to be? I watched with skepticism. Yet upon learning about the origins of the song, that initial doubt turned into appreciation for the throughlines that I now know can be highlighted.

With its origins in oppression and struggle and overcoming, Black music culture holds liberatory power and revolutionary love in its DNA. It is no wonder, then, that a mega-superstar like Madonna would seek to "play in the dark" over and over again, turning to Black music culture for inspiration and creative expression.² This has not been without some harsh criticism. The late bell hooks wrote a well-known scathing critique of Madonna's passion for Black music culture and Black people generally in her 1995 essay "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister."³ She explicitly charged Madonna with exploiting her White privilege, appropriating Black culture, and pirating Black sensuality, among other offenses. Having read that essay over 20 years ago, I was biased when I first watched Madonna's 2019 video release of "Batuka" from her 14th studio album entitled *Madame X*. Yet, at closer analysis, resurrecting bell hooks' critique of the then 34-year-old artist and applying it to Madonna's "Batuka" would be too easy. Claiming "Batuka" is merely cultural appropriation ignores many facts of the origin

2. Referencing Toni Morrison's book by the same name, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, 28), in which she wrote about creating a roadmap, a framework for analyzing patterns within the so-called White literary canon that uses blackness (Black characters, historical references, racialized moments between Blacks and Whites to evoke certain emotions or mark particular themes). bell hooks wrote: "I am interested in what prompts and makes possible this process of entering what one is estranged from," and here I am suggesting that there is a parallel in Madonna's foray into the world of the Batuku tradition and the world of Cabo Verdean music in general.

3. bell hooks, "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, ed. Gail Dine and Jean McMahon Humez (Newbury Park: Sage, 1995). p. 28.

story of the music and robs the people of African descent involved in its genesis of their due agency.

“Batuka” was performed by Madonna and the Orquestra Batukadeiras (a group of all-Cabo Verdean women) and cowritten by Banda, who owns the rights to the lyrics he helped write. The song was produced by the Luso-African musician Dino D’Santiago (whom Madonna calls her “musical plug”), who organized the project with the Cabo Verdean Portuguese musician Kady Spencer. Ultimately, “Batuka” pays homage to the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and recognizes African women and Black women as voices of resistance. If Madonna found freedom of expression in “Batuka,” Black women gave her the blueprint.

Using William Banfield’s idea of “griotology,”⁴ one might reflect on the storytelling in “Batuka.” The lyrics carry an imbedded political message about the moment in which the song was released (a feature typical of the genre), as does the entire *Madame X* album—signaled by its title, presumably a nod to the John Singer Sargent painting of the same name, said to signify opposition.⁵ *Madame X* was released two years after Madonna relocated to Lisbon, Portugal, in 2017, in search of the best soccer opportunities for her son. This was also when Trump was in office and some speculated that perhaps Madonna—like so many others—fled the United States in response to political turmoil. The phrase “long day” in the song, as well as the mention that “things have got to change” are said to be reactions to the election of the 45th U.S. president. Sixty-one-year-old Madonna has evolved quite a bit since bell hooks’ review. She is the mother of international, “transracial” adoptees and is a consummate artist and philanthropist. Her global civic engagement and service—particularly on the African continent—has earned her the affectionate embrace by Malawi as “daughter” of the South African country.

“Batuka” is not Madonna’s first foray into Cabo Verdean music. In the 1990s, after attending a concert in London by the archipelago’s most famous songstress Cesária Évora (known as “the Barefoot Diva”), she proposed a duet with the singer and even invited her to perform at her wedding and at a birthday party. Although these performances never materialized, they were said to be mutual fans.⁶ Of “Batuka,” Madonna boasted of doing her homework, learning lyrics in the Cabo Verdean Kriolu language, and offered a sense of humility at having the opportunity to sing and jam with the Batukadeiras (the name for the women drummers who typically perform the traditional style of music). Madonna described the music and tradition as she first experienced it at a bar with Dino D’Santiago, the Cabo Verdean musician/Portuguese national responsible for the “Batuka” *collabo*:

It didn’t seem terribly rehearsed; it seemed like second nature to them. They were like a family, a community of women. I marveled at the age range of the women—

4. I’m using the term “griotology,” coined by William Banfield on his Jazz Urbane “Griotology” web page (<https://www.jazzurbane.com/griotology>) to describe “West African musicians, artists/storytellers/ culture and tradition bearers.”

5. For a brief description of the John Singer Sargent portrait at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see “Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau),” The Met, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/12127>

6. Achy Obejas, “From Cape Verde to the World,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1997.

from teenage girls to women who looked like they could be grandmothers. It was an amazing, immersive, musical, familial, matriarchal experience. The music was mesmerizing and hypnotizing and it blew me away. We just sat there, stood there, with our mouths hanging open. I'd never seen anything like it before. They were joyous and enthusiastic. There was an abandonment, for lack of a better word.⁷

In other interviews about her encounter with Batukadeiras, Madonna describes a spiritual element to the music and to the group play.

Blending call and response with rhetoric and a summons to consider solidarity (with the question “Will we stand together?”), “Batuka” could be read as a rallying cry for the moment in which it was released—a call for empowerment and for taking a stand, which is true to the origins of the art form. K. Carter and J. Aulette have written about the origins of Cabo Verdean Batuku and women’s expression: “[B]atuku was an important feature of the lives of women in Cape Verde. . . . They stated that the words expressed were the most important part of the dance and provided vehicles for the expression of strong feelings. The words allow them to speak of important issues in ways that express deeply held beliefs and experiences.”⁸ The authors go on to discuss the fact that participants in the dance/tradition describe it as a form of freedom. Arguably, Madonna shares that feeling of freedom as she is seen improvising the dance in the video.

Furthermore, the spiritual element of the lyrics captures this transcendence and freeing of the self/the singer who gets caught in rapture.

Social media reactions to the video support this interpretation. The video begins with a scene of laundry hanging on a clothesline, flapping in the wind, and cuts to a scene of church ruins. We see a statue of a cross looking over the Atlantic Ocean. Next, a quote appears on the screen stating that “Batuque is a style of music created by women that originated in Cape Verde, some say the birthplace of slave trade.”⁹ Next, several members of the Orquestra Batukadeiras are rushing to shelter, while holding their head scarves, because of the strong Atlantic winds, as another quote informs us of the history of this genre: “The drums were condemned by the Church and taken away from the slaves because it was considered an act of rebellion.”¹⁰ Next we see raw black-and-white footage of Batukadeiras on the coast of Lisbon, Portugal, a *mostra* [demo] of the raw art form in its traditional setting.

As another quote appears on the screen, “The women continued their singing and dancing and the Batuque lives on today,” closeup shots of the Kriolas’ faces are seen, some of which are somber and others simply resolute.¹¹ The Batukadeiras are wrapped in gray

7. Joe Lynch, “Why Madonna Brought 14 Cape Verdean Drummers on Tour—And What They Taught Her,” *Billboard*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/madonna-batuka-sisterhood-9388115/>, 3.

8. K. Carter and J. Aulette, *Cape Verdean Women and Globalization: The Politics of Gender, Culture, and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 124.

9. Madonna and David Banda, “Batuka.” *Madame X* (Interscope Records, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU2eApGw_TU

10. Madonna and David Banda, “Batuka.”

11. Madonna and David Banda, “Batuka.”

blankets and clutch the blankets for warmth. A scene of the Atlantic waters shows ghosts of slave ships and then we see two women holding hands—one White hand and one Black hand. It looks to be Madonna dressed in all black on the left side of the screen (but we can’t see faces yet) and a Kriola Batukadeira on the right (we see a piece of the green, Cabo Verdean Pano skirt she wears and the iconic waist wrap that is customarily worn during this ritual). Madonna’s video reflects what Banfield has suggested in his Griotology blog: “the beat teaches and the song reaches.”¹² Indeed, social media influencers such as @claytoncrispim, @gabrielmahalem (both Brazilian pop culture critics), and others talked about their emotional reactions to the video and noted the ways that the video raised awareness of the history of Portugal in the trade of the enslaved. Furthermore, all commented on the power of the rhythms that make up “Batuka.”

The video continues . . . the beat starts. We begin to see some of the Orquestra Batukadeiras, now outside and out of their blankets, beginning to clap and chant faintly. Some look to the ocean and others look at one another. Images alternate between seeing hands clap and seeing the performers march and walk, beginning with one Kriola carrying a basket atop her head. Enter Madonna’s voice, the loudest, leading the traditional call and response that defines Batuku. In this sense, Madonna is taking up the role of the griot; the Orquestra Batukadeiras answer each call with their response, echoing what she sings and narrates.

Through the Madonna, Banda, Mirwais, Dino D’Santiago, Orquestra Batukadeiras’ “Batuka” project, several throughlines emerge. These include revolution and liberation. Voice and power are evident—in particular, the power of African women as culture makers, griottes, and masters of ceremony. Additional throughlines include the always-present innovation and improvisation, work and long suffering, call and response, irony and humor, and hope and overcoming. Certainly, these are universal themes. And yet, if we analyzed this song from a strictly U.S. perspective, when examined through the Black–White dichotomous lens, it may be read one way (akin to bell hooks’ argument). However, in the context of the African diaspora, specifically the Cabo Verdean diaspora, the possibility of other frameworks exists.

Banfield’s framework of Black music cultural codes and his mention of a “reassessment” that looks toward Africa is useful in this regard. He writes: “The modern-day griots use music to maintain a sane view on the world. As one poet writes, ‘My heart is my soul which I nourish and follow.’ Through this poetry and music, we realize that Africa still drives a formidable and connective cultural aesthetic and shares in the construction of the people’s songs. This is the reassessment of the casting of the codes, a look toward Africa.”¹³ In “Batuka,” we experience Madonna looking to Africa and accessing the connective tissue/DNA that is the heartbeat of all music. She taps into the griot tradition—the

12. Bill Banfield, “A Statement About Making Music in the World,” *Griotology*—Bill Banfield Music, <http://www.billbanfieldmusic.com/griotology>.

13. William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy, An Interpretative History from Spirituals to Hip-Hop* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 91.

political critique and women's empowerment that has often marked Batuku. She does so, perhaps, to free herself, and in collaboration, she gives space for her Malawian child, for Cabo Verdean women Batukadeiras, and other coconspirators to reflect freedom as well. The Cabo Verdean musicians who guided Madonna to Batuku share the griot tradition, and as impactful as this record and the video are, more could have been done to recognize the African musicians involved.¹⁴

Banfield defines *griotology* as the work of West African musicians, artists, and diverse storytellers who are “culture and tradition bearers.” In his work, he highlights the contributions of several women artists who embody the griot tradition and yet have not received the credit they are due. It is within this category that I’ll place Cabo Verdean Batukadeiras—Kriolas Poderozas (powerful Kriolas or Cabo Verdean women).¹⁵ Although many Cabo Verdeans were thrilled with the Madonna–Orquestra Batukadeiras release, I was concerned that the Kriola drummers who accompanied her were merely seen and not heard.¹⁶ We need to know their names and record their legacy. As Candida Rose, the Kriola musician, music educator, and creator of Cabo Jazz (a griotte in her own right), has written: “From Morna to CaboZouk and Doo-Wop to Hip Hop, Cabo Verdean women have left their mark on the music scene around the world. However, it wasn’t until the early 1990s that they began to become rightfully noticed for their contributions. Unfortunately, up until this point, the Cabo Verdean music scene, both in Cabo Verde and in the United States, was dominated by men, with women only being acknowledged for their lead singing.”¹⁷ Rose and Cabo Verdean Women’s Studies scholar Terza A. Silva Lima-Neves, along with many others, have written about the “Queen of Finason/Batuku,” Nha Nacia Gomi, in their work, acknowledging her legacy as a master griot. Nha Nacia Gomi appeared on the cover of the Smithsonian’s catalogue book for the 1995 Festival of American Folk Life. “The Cape Verdean Connection” was one featured segment/exhibit in which Batuku was highlighted and written about by the renowned linguist and historian Manuel Da Luz Gonçalves. Gonçalves highlighted Batuku as evidence of the power of the Kriolu language as a tool of resistance, transnationalism, and diaspora cultural connection.¹⁸ Although Madonna managed to harness some of the power of the genre in her rendition, the Kriolu language was missing. The Batukadeiras’ voices in Kriolu would have added additional weight to the liberatory throughlines in this music. Nevertheless, the impact is clear. As

14. Please note that the purpose of this article is to offer a discussion and analysis that centers on cis-women and looks at particular artists that function within the role/tradition of the woman griot, or “griotte.”

15. “Poderozas” has become a popular euphemism for empowered Kriolas or Cabo Verdean women in Cabo Verde and in the multicountry Cabo Verdean diaspora. It is a reference to the Poderozas International Conference on Cabo Verdean Women, a project, biannual conference, and movement cofounded by myself and Terza A. Silva Lima-Neves in 2016. For information, see <https://www.poderozaconference.com>

16. Lynch, “Why Madonna Brought 14 Cape Verdeans on Tour—And What They Taught Her.”

17. Candida Rose, “Kriolas di Muzika: Not Just for Men Anymore,” In *Cabo Verdean Women Writing Remembrance, Resistance, and Revolution: Kriolas Poderozas*, eds. Terza A. Silva Lima-Neves and Amina N. Fernandes Pilgrim (London: Lexington Books, 2021), 27.

18. Manuel Da Luz Gonçalves, “Cape Verdean Kriolu in the United States.” *The Festival of Folk Life Catalogue* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 27–28.

Berklee College of Music student Chris Powell explained about African American women's contributions to the blues, jazz, and other genres of Black Music, "Black women are the blueprint."¹⁹ Banfield reminds us that the study of Black Music traditions "enables us to examine how people, through Black music, foster worldviews, establish patterns of lived normalcy, neutralize oppressive systems, and create shared cultural values."²⁰ It is through this lens that I have interpreted "Batuka." In "Batuka," we see Madonna and collaborators fostering a worldview and affirming a shared cultural value. Perhaps it is Ubuntu (I am because we are). One can see the larger project as resistance through solidarity—the African tradition of Batuku remastered for a global audience in need of liberation and unity. The beat beckons us home.

19. Crediting Berklee student and musician Christopher Power, presenting about Ma Rainey and the importance of Black women in the blues and jazz traditions.

20. Banfield, William C. *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 87.

Holding Culture in View: Musical Crossroads at the National Museum of African American History and Culture

DWANDALYN REECE

I've been working in museums and nonprofits for many years. I have a deep interest and appreciation of American music, folk music, and musical theater; my dissertation was on Ethel Waters. I did my internship while in a graduate program at the Smithsonian Institution about 30 years ago. It was during the time when the Smithsonian acquired the Duke Ellington collection. As an intern, I was one of those people pulling the awards, photos, and music items out of the boxes. And that's really where I found my niche for loving research and telling the American story. But I also found directions to working to educate people and opening up lines of communication with principles of equality and social justice. And that's the love I bring to telling the story of music and using it as a tool that communicates the breadth of African American music making.

When I joined the museum 12 years ago, it was as the first curator of music at the Museum of African History and Culture. I had an opportunity to take my life and professional experience and put it to the test: to tell the important stories about the history of African American music.

A couple of things have really shaped my worldview. One of them is not having this story being pigeonholed and just put into boxes labeled "African American." I was not interested in, and fought against, categorizing the culture in the same ways. Fighting this kind of categorization told me about the assumptions people have, and that throughline pushed and allowed me to say other things about this culture of music making.

When I had the opportunity to build a collection, we knew what people generally think about jazz, gospel, R&B, and hip-hop, but there is a larger story to tell. And that larger story is African American music making, which is really much more inclusive than anything else because of the breadth, depth, growth, and development of music culture in the United States. This music has a 400-plus-year history, having been created from every part of the country, in every genre, using every innovation, while speaking to the world not only through a performance lens but also as a cultural ecosystem—a way of sharing history and culture through art.

In the work of cultivation, exhibits, programs, and collections, I've wanted to tell that story not just of composing, or what you are singing on stage, but also of the Black colleges that foster that development, the churches, the music teachers who came to your home to teach you piano, the business of music, and the work in the industry. This work of artmaking is also about identity, community, and social justice.

The full picture, no matter the genre, is what we can communicate to audiences to really look behind and within the stories that we deal with. That's the philosophy I bring to this work.

What then is the landscape? What is important about this complete story that this museum has to tell? We wanted to do a better job of documenting classical traditions. Our collections can fill the niches of inspiring appreciation of composers and singers and of telling stories about our ancestors.

MUSICAL CROSSROADS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Musical crossroads is an exhibit in the cultural gallery of the museum, which includes visual arts, cultural expressions, film, television, stage, dance, and, of course, musical crossroads. The design is deliberate. When we talk about "boxes and genres," this allows us to tell a more comprehensive story, but it is not encyclopedic. We can't include everything; it's not a hall of fame but a story of the artists, a story that is illustrative of a view of the Afro-American arts experience.

In this collection, we see Chuck Berry's Cadillac, an iconic object, juxtaposed with George Clinton's Funkadelic Spaceship. These are the center points of the exhibit for a couple of reasons. These are stories of "objects of the culture." This is the car he drove across the stage of the Fox Theater, in the film *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, but it is also the theater that turned him away as a young Black child. This fact helps us to think about the narratives of freedom and of movement with an automobile. We can experience the object that carried the Black man who was the architect of rock and roll and to experience what that symbolizes. This is the throughline of mobility and travel. The collection showcases the mother ship, George Clinton's Funkadelic Spaceship, one of the most recognized stage props in the world of Black music. The messages are of "Afro-futurism" and of finding universal liberation. These themes are rolled through all parts of the exhibit.

In various areas, we meet people where they are and help them move beyond. We have exhibits of the banjo as the quintessential African instrument. We have exhibits that focus on Africa, on 19th-century itinerant associations that feature minstrelsy, and we have exhibits on White Appalachia. We note how Black culture reclaimed the banjo, including Black players Dom Flemons and Otis Taylor. We take back that narrative and share it with the world. This 6,200-square-foot section of objects of jazz, classical, and sacred music allows visitors to explore and to spend time in deep reflection.

Hip-hop culture. Regions, place, and identity. We experience go-go in Washington, D.C., but through hip-hop, we can look at many other regions and places. Looking at cities across the country, you can find stories of "rootedness" in place and identity through this music, from Washington to New Orleans, Detroit, Chicago, and Memphis.

We talk about the global impact of music: expatriates, Blacks traveling the world, the roots, and routes in the African diaspora. These ideas and this movement didn't just start in the 20th century, but rather they harken back for centuries.

We look at venues, at television, and how the roles have presented and represented inspiring images, projecting entrepreneurial aspirations and accomplishments.

One of my favorite spaces in the exhibit is in the neighborhood record store and in the blending of old school with new school. We talk about this as a “safe space.” When you think about people in the communities in the 1930s and 40s, these are the neighborhoods with Black professionals, churches, and schools. Record stores in those days had all types of music and were places that people felt safe, could browse, and could talk and learn about and enjoy music “in community.” This is one of the things a museum can get at by having a space to illustrate what “being in it” feels like. There is a touch exhibit that links the series and genres across a timeline that situates all of African American popular music and productions of Black music in the country.

WHAT WE COLLECT IN OUR COLLECTIONS

As we are looking at the roots of African American music, which, of course, are very deep and old, it is also a story we tell in African cultural objects. These were not, at first, unfortunately, valued in the past as they are now. We look for the objects that tell the story of the continuation of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans. Sacred music is at the heart of that story. This is the indigenous music created in this land. The printed music of the spirituals. This allows us to look at religion and spirituality from a broad perspective—for example, a printed book from the colored sacred harp traditions. One of our more recent acquisitions is an alto horn owned by the great jazz legend Charlie Parker.

When we move onto more contemporary objects, we have track notes from hip-hop recording sessions, from behind the cues of Queen Latifah, illustrating the creative and producer role of women in hip-hop. This is a little-known story that doesn’t get the due it deserves. These are all learning experiences for our audiences. We also have sheet music from Francis “Frank” Johnson, renowned 18th-century composer and band leader from Philadelphia. In our exhibit, you don’t talk about him as a player and a composer only, but about his connection to the city of Philadelphia, a center of Black classical music and gospel. Jazz and rhythm and blues are all living in these epicenters that are being created again in major American cities.

The Hall Johnson collection is a treasure trove of information, of culture. It is a fascinating collection, because you see that artists are all in communication with each other. Letters, images. . . . It’s a story of a culture, and during these times, the correspondence was about the role of the spirituals, in notebooks, photographs, letters, and programs.

The collection features opera concert singers, like Mattiwilda Dobbs and Shirley Varrett, Marian Anderson’s gowns, Charley Pride’s work, Sammy Davis’ tap shoes, and Curtis Mayfield’s glasses. It was very important to me that these “other streams” were a part of the exhibit, to provide a fuller African American story. It includes Fats Domino’s shoes, taken from his home after Katrina. That’s an example of the more inclusive, true voice of the culture. Again, through time, the themes of places and space allow us to talk about how music out of New Orleans is still moving forward.

That's what I love about materials culture. By holding culture in view, we find so many learning pathways. This collection shows the true picture of what was done and how these materials were used and appreciated. The sense of renewal and discovery is hugely important as historical experiences and events, which is exhilarating. It gives us a glimpse of the lives of these artists and a way to get to know them from different views. These things have important educational, social, and political purpose.

MOVING FORWARD

As we look forward, we are interested in increasing the ways we look at the African diaspora, instruments, composers, songwriters, the LGBTQ community, women, trans-Atlantic stories and influence, institutions, and organizations. We have to be more intentional today, in that all facets of the story need to be included. The community is at the heart of Black culture. What will our collection look like 50 years from now?

I end with a meaningful quote from music historian Eileen Southern, which is featured on the wall in the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville: "The enduring feature of Black music is neither protest nor self-expression. It is communication, and one cannot imagine a time when Black musicians will have nothing to say either to others or God."¹

1. Eileen Southern, "2021 American Soundtrack: Vanderbilt developed a collaborative partnership with the National Museum of African American Music," Vanderbilt University, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/150/150-stories/community-engagement/american-soundtrack/>.

The Throughlines: Doing Work(s) Rhythmically Does Justice to Time— An Interview with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell

—— YSAYE BARNWELL AND WILLIAM BANFIELD ——

Bill Banfield: One of the leading artists, teachers, and “walking historians” of Black music practice today, Dr. Ysaye Barnwell served as the foundational bass for the world-renowned Sweet Honey in the Rock. I asked her these questions relative to her current thoughts on culture and values:

- How has Black music carried the values of our culture? How do you teach and share this (African song, folk, protest) culture in your song-teaching sessions?
- What is the importance of spirituals? How have these spiritual-musical values connected us as a people, as a nation? How do you see music as critical to our social-cultural-political landscapes?
- What were the fondest memories you have from making these connections in your performing history?
- Does redemptive music have a place now in society?
- How [are values and] what values are in carried in our music?

Ysaye Barnwell: We have to start in Africa. Because music is a heightened, higher form of communication. And that’s important because music carries further than just the human voice. So with drumming and other instrumentation and people singing together, we have the capability of sharing our messages, transmitting these ideas we hold over a longer distance, over and in space. And with the enhancements of drumming in African traditions, it speaks a language that people understand. If we move forward, chronicling from there, we were first brought here as slaves to do somebody’s work. Doing work(s) rhythmically does justice to time.

Whether we were planting seeds, chopping wood in time, rhythm was important in terms of how much we were going to do in time. We were able to talk about how we felt in the time, what we said in words, in time, in the speed of rhythm, [and we could] slow it down or speed it up. All of those aspects of what went into the music that accompanied living, to accompany, modify, or propel what we were doing.

Bill Banfield: How was that carried forth?

Ysaye Barnwell: Music continued to be the chief mode of communication, for sharing with other people, and for documenting what we do. We documented our life culture in our

songs. How do we know we were picking cotton when nobody was writing about what that felt like or meant to us: we sang about that “all the day long.” Getting up at sunrise, what the tools were, what they meant and symbolized, with every blow of the work we documented. All of that is in the stratosphere of how and what we did.

Critical values, work, child care, the bible, our feelings about the work/“massa,” our identity—these were major in how we communicated these values to each other. Religion, a spirit-God faith, is what was guiding. There was [a] stronger, bigger sustaining power that was informing us about what we needed to do to take care of ourselves.

Bill Banfield: How do you teach this . . . teaching of songs?

Ysaye Barnwell: Creating music in this way, you need to make a list of things you do, and teach them how to sing, your tasks. Understanding what this process is, means, having them sing that to each other, put that in a song you sing.

Professional life is most impactful. I saw this in the 25-year-plus history of Sweet Honey. But it first started for me in college, where there were eight Black people on the campus. My mother was a registered nurse. She had a friend that never straightened (wore a natural) her hair, wore a net over it. This woman gave me my first books on Negro history, which I still own. On Saturday mornings she would gather the neighborhood kids and talk to us about our history. That’s where my Negro education started. I knew what work songs were from her and [what] the values of these songs were. The books were full of photographs of Black folks; we knew who these people were! We learned what they were like so we could survive.

Every Saturday from 9 to 12, between the ages of 8 and 14, we would have these conversations, read, and look and talk.

That was where a lot of my early information began to come from. My grandmother’s sister was living with us at 99 in 1959. She used to talk and tell us about how things used to be, about slaves and the songs. That taught me a lot. It gave me a respect for how she survived and brought that forward. She told us what Black folks went through and were about, how they lived, [and] how they socialized. I really listened, and I received.

Bill Banfield: Ysaye, what about redemptive, value-based music? How do you see those messages being received today?

Ysaye Barnwell: Well, messages are transmitted in several ways. Information and historical history are preserved in a number of ways, and the most major, dramatic way for us has been through Black music. The very histories that are put in songs are like a history book.

The music is the throughline; [it] gives the freedom to respond to what is continued today and needed. It’s important to internalize, instill values, on all these levels. I do this in the classroom. Allowing people to move and have physical freedom, to express, and to move in space and place, that is then understood in a song. We have internalized that in

movement and dance, because we have incorporated and internalized these ideas in our bones. The marches! And we can't let that go. We can't let that movement forward go.

The greatest joy as an artist I have had is being with Sweet Honey—being with a group of women who knowingly were drawn together to try to recapture our history through music. And they illustrated how we understood—the rhythms, the harmonies, the songs that tell of the joy and the meaning of who we are.

"These Are Interesting Times"

————— T. J. ANDERSON III —————

To greet you by saying “these are interesting times” is a bit redundant. My worldview seems to be generated within a historical context. My travels, musical listening, and book reading mediate my experience and engagement with time. To point to one group of events negates a whole history that contains an entire litany of traumas. To call these “interesting times” places the emphasis on the present. We live in the time of COVID-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and Water Protectors (WP). Simply replace “COVID” with another disease and it becomes apparent that, while any of those names may change, the impact remains basically the same. And we must recognize that the struggles of BLM and WP have always been present. For the poet and musician, time is a way of measure and can be played with. Maybe it’s more appropriate to say that there is “a change in the wind,” as this speaks to a kind of ancient shifting. Maybe it is that same wind that blew open the sails of great ships that transported harvested human beings? So, I feel I’m writing to you at the edge of yet another set of crossroads, asking Papa Legba (a Vodou spirit who stands at the spiritual crossroads to ease people’s journeys) to open up the way or at least give me the wisdom to straddle both worlds.

Lately, I’ve been obsessed with thinking about how the production of art has changed during this period. I’m not so much talking about the production, but more about the dissemination of work. As a poet, I saw those live audiences evaporate. Readings became mediated by video platforms, shoulders hunched down over computers, and the worry of unstable Internet connections. What does the computer’s camera lens convey but a disembodied figure trying to communicate his/her/their humanity through a sea of electric buzzing? Something about the communal nature of art is kind of holy. I’m sure you’ve experienced that moment when the room was with you. Everybody bringing in a different sort of energy and how you felt buzzed and energized after the event. Then came March 2020, and people were talking about isolation and pods and vaccinations. It sounded very Orwellian, and I wondered if I would be able to find that energy that is powered by human presence—the whispered comments, the furrowed brow, the clearing of throats.

This period gave me the opportunity to become cognizant of the energy that comes from isolation and contemplation. However, I know that there needs to be a balance, and one condition defines the other. We’re social animals, but we also crave privacy. Maybe that’s a very Western view. Nevertheless, those energies are symbiotic. Of course, I’m talking as a poet, not as a scientist (there I go splitting occupations). There needs to be a balance. I guess I’ve come to think in those terms. I’m in a period of making, and I think at some point, I’ll move to a period of showing. I’m excited to see how it will emerge. We can’t physically transform like the caterpillar and the tadpole. Our chrysalis is our work, our making. Will it be the same types of venues? Will people be masked? All that is unknown,

but perhaps I'll remember what I learned during the introspective periods and put my practice into balance.

Writing this now, I realize that being an artist isn't about what you make. It's about the process, all the things that lead you to this moment. Someone once asked me, "How long did it take you to write that poem?" I responded by saying, "62 years!" (my current age), and I meant every single moment of that. First I had to acquire language, learn an alphabet, discover grammar and spelling, and then learn how to write it all down. Skip any part of that long process, and you end up with nothing. Our art will speak through our masks and will create new venues. I've become aware that wearing a mask has increased my capacity for listening, and our society can certainly do with more of that!

I ran track in high school. The event I enjoyed the most was the relay race. There are four runners, and a baton is passed after an individual runner finishes a leg of the race. I remember going with my dad to see the legendary DC Striders in the 1970s and observing the choreography of the race. It's almost like you're watching a centipedal human. For me, the magical moment is when the baton is passed, with both runners running at the same time, and you witness that blurring of legs and arms—the handoff, the eye contact, and the simple belief that the hands of the runners will both be in the appropriate position to pass off and receive the baton. It is in that moment when the spark of a shared unity of experience is ignited. It's not the firing of the gun that starts the race. It's the moment of human contact. One runner is approaching exhaustion, and the other one steps into that power and pushes on. It's propulsive!

I wasn't necessarily aware of the relay race as a metaphor while I ran track in high school or watched the DC Striders that spring day. Although I'm no longer lacing up my track shoes and feeling the give of the track, I have come to realize that it is the ancestors who hand us the baton and make it possible for us to be here. Those people who experienced countless sacrifices so we could go about doing the work. They have handed us the baton, and it is imperative that we do better and create a legacy that brings joy and hope into the world. Maya Angelou, in "Still I Rise," talks about bringing "the gifts that her ancestors gave." She is the "dream and the hope of the slave."¹

Dr. Angelou enters being trailed by the ancestors—that undeniable pride that announces her arrival! She says she doesn't just call on blood relatives, but also calls on mentors and people who have been kind to her. This respect for kindness and sacrifice and knowing that these qualities don't come solely from us makes us humble and grateful. I've been doing a lot of calling this past year. I'm thankful to be alive, and my intent is to bring about art that comes from the deep reservoir of love.

I've also been thinking a lot about pedagogy. It would seem obvious that the professor side of me would contemplate such things, particularly now that I'm teaching classes online. But that's not what I want to get at now. Sure, I struggle with how to connect with my students and how to think about the ways we respond to art when we're in a virtual classroom, but I'm also beginning to think about self-pedagogy. What was it that I needed

1. Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise," in *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems* (New York: Random House, 1978).

to learn? What are the methods I need to employ? Who are the artists I connect with? What are the voices of my artist ancestors telling me? The poet Charles Olson once wrote a piece called "Curriculum for the Soul." The print versions I've seen show a circular text in Olson's handwriting. It seems to bypass the coldness of typescript and moves more toward the intimacy of a signature. The piece includes different nodes (phrases) for self-exploration. Interestingly, several of his former students got together and explored each node and responded with a poem or text of some sort. I believe that by engaging with our artistic ancestors and mentors, and by mindfully examining books, paintings, and music, we participate in an immersive experience that is both cerebral and physical. This can be used in a way that instills in readers a life competency that enables them to view and participate in the human community with a compassionate and finely tuned critical eye. A method that calls attention to the embodiment of knowledge is crucial, because our continual reliance on technology is fostering a growing disengagement with human-to-human interactions. All art comes to fruition through a process of collaboration. It is the communion of community and not the sole product of one individual—at least, that has been my experience.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I went back to some old favorites, like Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [Notebook of a Return to the Native Land]. First published in 1939, Césaire's epic poem is arguably one of the most important literary works of the 20th century. It documents his return to Martinique after living in France. The idea of return is certainly complicated. Césaire uses the colonial tongue to cannibalize the language and to demonstrate how it responds to the trauma of enslavement, colonialism, and the continual mushroom cloud of racial oppression. The other text I return to is M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* Philip's work is part inventory and part incantation. My experience with that text is like listening to a talking book—not those staged audio recordings, but the text as a sonic and divinatory book (talking drum/book). It's a book I struggle with and one I always return to. Both of these works are heroic and have something to teach me.

Of course, I listen to things. How many of us listened to John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* this past year? Come to think of it, how many of us listen to it continuously? "A love supreme. A love supreme. A love supreme" has become my morning mantra. In truth, some voice said, "go to your elders and see what they left for you." And while I certainly champion contemporary work because that's "on the ground" so to speak, I have to look back and hear those ancestral voices that might show me how they survived (I want to write "thrive" here as well). I've been drawn to Lázaro Ross. He's an Afro-Cuban singer whose music is rooted in Lucumi culture. The album that I've been most engaged with is called *Yemaya*. He made several records, each one dedicated to an Orisha, a Yoruba spirit. It is music as ceremony. Maybe it's music as spectacle. I'm using "spectacle" as it relates to something visual, while I am also talking about listening. The invocation, the batás, Ross's voice, and the congregation carry me way back. I find immense power in that music. I have no idea what Lázaro is saying. Yes, I can recognize a few snippets of Spanish, but he is speaking creole and an African language I don't know. That's a powerful umbilical cord. The tongues that crossed the Atlantic and the tongues that were in the United States—I don't have access to that moment of merger. Nevertheless, I hear it in the music.

My dad always says that it is the responsibility of the artist to document the culture, because that's the only way it can be preserved. My dad's vehicle is music, mine is poetry, and I am well aware of how interconnected these two forms are. We try to categorize and simplify complex ideas and relationships. Let's pull back on that one and go back to a time when perhaps no distinction was made between the two. We are products of an overly taxed mind that is concerned with categories. For me, the operative words are community and conversation. What vocabulary do we use to document the culture, and who is around to hear it? Some indigenous cultures have the awareness of planting things for the future generations: looking outward, finding the articulation of your vision in a place that is always in motion, and always engaging in the process of transformation. In the same way that art can transform an individual, it can also transform a culture. There is no question that we are creators, and what we put out presents an opportunity for examination.

My perspective emerges from being a son of Black, intellectual parents who saw themselves as part of progressive 1960s America—people who took several risks to integrate all sorts of spaces. That strikes me as a kind of bravery I can't fully fathom. Their choices caused them to leave their communities. Thankfully, we kept up with all of our relatives and would spend summers with them. We lived in the White suburbs of the mid-1970s, and family was important, as well as service to the community. Ancestrally, that comes from W. E. B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Paul Robeson, the pantheon of family heroes. Those brilliant people made some choices. I believe their self-agency spoke to me and informed me as a writer and how I see myself. I have my parents to thank for a lot of things. They taught me to actively explore the world. They opened me to many experiences that shaped who I am. They gave me the gift of "curiosity." And that curiosity led me to many things, both real and imaginary. I'll say it as a poem:

This desire to look
black/back and trace a place to ~~wear~~/where
the first drummers
extended their hands
across the drum's mountainous geography
to where to ~~hear~~/here
i discover myself
fingers tapping
in ~~reference~~/reverence and imitation on
an electrically charged keyboard
a portal of recall
a way of return
a ~~seefaring~~/seafaring vessel of reunion.

Decades ago these same fingers drummed
the hammer keys of an Olivetti

typewriter

& ~~persuasive~~/percussive beats brought me
down to chanting an altogether different
sound that stretched its
way back to those first
taps on smooth skin, on dark wood.

May I cultivate this music.
May I employ and excavate with these

tools of witness: camera
lens, computer, musical
score, and painter's brush
to the remembered dream

where once again the loa

have mounted me
with the vibration of ~~calibration~~/collaboration
where imagination becomes
my way of communion
so I become fully entranced
by the medicine and magic
of that collective call

and ancient music.

—© T. J. Anderson III

In his remembrance of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison writes about the history of American disasters and the connection with the progress of Black people. He mentions the Civil War and Roosevelt's response to the Depression with the establishment of the Works Progress Administration. Ellison points out that this program gave several Black people the opportunity to self-identify as artists. I got to thinking about other moments in U.S. history, more specifically the slave trade and its relations with the police and law enforcement, COINTELPRO, incarceration, and unemployment. The list is overwhelming, and the physical and psychic toll that we have undergone is immeasurable. No wonder why we are innovators and use art as a means to connect to both community and individual.

These times have forced me into a place of deeper reflection. My isolation as an artist has shifted. This has given me the opportunity to measure the quality of my life as an artist. It has been my experience that the seed of creativity constantly whirls around us, and all that is needed is for one to tap into that energy. The moment calls for the world (all of us) to recognize our common humanity. And while this has certainly been a time of great suffering, it has also been a time of triumph. People have made love, learned new languages, cooked new foods, learned new instruments, watered their plants, and more consciously played with their pets. There is something in the attention that this moment provides. It has given me time to reflect and honor my connections.

Values and Culture Throughlines in Our Traditions from Jazz to Hip-Hop: Experiences Rooted in Familial and Community Relationships

AJA BURREL WOOD

In 1991, American hip-hop group A Tribe Called Quest (ATCQ) released “Jazz (We’ve Got)” on their second album, *The Low End Theory*, which featured a sample of Jimmy McGriff and Lucky Thompson’s live version of “Green Dolphin Street” from their album *Concert: Friday the 13th—Cook County Jail*. In addition to the prominent sample, the lyrics proudly proclaiming “we got the jazz, we got the jazz,” point to an already present and burgeoning interrelatedness between hip-hop and jazz, despite the latter’s waning popularity among young African Americans.

Now, more than 20 years later, the first generation of jazz artists who came of age in an era when hip-hop had a strong presence in American popular culture are emerging as leaders of a new school. In tandem, a new jazz audience is also emerging that is highly responsive to and enthusiastic for the progressive exploration of harmony, rhythm, and melody infused with styles from the hip-hop, rock, and pop music of their time. Furthermore, the use of digital technology to disrupt leading practices in the traditional recording industry has led to burgeoning online communities and innovative live presentations of jazz that embrace tradition while boldly forging new paths for future possibilities.

As a person who came of age in a time when hip-hop was emerging as a popular genre across the nation, first in urban, predominately Black American communities and then globally, I (like many in my peer group) developed a strong relationship to the music that seemed to express our present experiences and reality. Conversely, jazz was something that my parents and grandparents shared with me through special guests, theme songs, and music cues on *The Cosby Show*. It was something to enjoy, respect, revere, learn about, and even celebrate as a part of my cultural heritage, but it was not exactly something that I felt was “of my time,” despite the fact that I was aware that new jazz was happening all the time.

When I started working with jazz musicians and audiences in New York years ago, I began to consider continuity and change as they relate to the “scene” by considering both physical and digital space. As I found myself supporting a vast range of incredible work in a living genre that many may speak of in terms of the archaic, I found that tradition and modernity operated in tandem in fresh and innovative ways. This piece shares my initial thoughts that explore the impact of these shifts in aesthetics, tradition, transmission, sound, industry, and new forms of technology on audiences and approaches in the digital era. After discussing some early examples of the connection between jazz and hip-hop,

I look at a few recent projects that build on this legacy: the Revive Music Group, pianist Kris Bowers' cover of Kendrick Lamar's "Rigamortis," and Lamar's album *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

In early hip-hop, samples and other musical references were more commonly associated with funk and soul—such as the frequently sampled catalog of James Brown—than with jazz. However, an interesting trend took place in the mid-to-late 1980s and into the 90s that has been coined as "jazz rap." Examples of this trend include Cargo's *Jazz Rap, Volume One* (1985), Gang Starr's single "Words I Manifest" (1989), Stetsasonic's "Talkin' All That Jazz" (1988), ATCQ's "Jazz (We've Got)" (1991), Digable Planets' *Reachin' (A New Refutation of Time and Space)* (1993), and Nas's *Illmatic* (1994), as well as the work of The Roots, Guru, Common Sense, Madlib, Fat Jon, and Dilla.

For both jazz and hip-hop, the record is an important object. In jazz, it is invaluable as both art and artifact, offering sonic information as well as marking an important time, development, memory, or moment. In hip-hop, the record is also valued in those same ways, and given that the turntable plays an integral role in musical production, it is important not only as a playback technology but also as an instrument. Vinyl, in particular, is as much art and artifact as it is a means by which to demonstrate musical knowledge and musicianship. Plainly speaking, for both lovers of jazz and hip-hop, the record can be vital and quintessential.

We see a meeting of these perspectives on the importance of the record with the single version of "Jazz (We've Got)." On the album cover, the Jive Records logo and members of ATCQ are pictured within cover art that references classic Blue Note albums from earlier eras, rather than reflecting trends in the cover art or design of its time.

In the world of a genre that fully engages with recorded sound, jazz recordings, in particular, can serve as endless sources of musical ideas, phrasing, and sonic material. But they also do something else. The use of and references to jazz recordings in hip-hop firmly link past and present, sonically and often visually connecting the two as integral to the African American musical continuum.

Experiences of jazz and its recordings are often rooted in familial values and community relationships.

Beyond the use of recordings as in "Jazz (We've Got)," personal relationships and musical training have also played a role for some hip-hop artists in the turn to jazz as a source of sonic material, technique development, and conceptual approach. Biggie Smalls learned diction and phrasing from jazz saxophonist Donald Harrison, Rakim played the saxophone and notes John Coltrane as an influence, Ishmael Butler of the Digable Planets has described his access to his father's jazz records, and Nas is the son of jazz musician Olu Dara. All these examples are not happenstance or coincidental; the relationships to jazz for these hip-hop artists and others are evidence of a much more general trend in urban, African American communities. Experiences of jazz and its recordings are often rooted in familial and community relationships and may transcend those of, say, simply stumbling upon an old jazz record. In other words, a record is not just any record, it's "your dad's record" and can come to be associated with everything it means to him, to you, and to your relationship, it's worth in Black values!"

At the same time that hip-hop artists were looking to jazz, jazz artists were also paying attention to and engaging with hip-hop. Important examples include Herbie Hancock's *Dis Is da Drum* (1994), the collaboration between Branford Marsalis and Gang Starr's DJ Premier in *Buckshot LeFonque*, and Ronny Jordan's *The Antidote* (1992) and his Blue Note debut *A Brighter Day* (1999), which features DJ Spinna and rapper Mos Def.

The *Jazzmatazz* series, produced by Gang Starr's MC Guru for Chrysalis Records between 1993 and 2007, was an important studio album project connecting the two genres. One of the major contributions of this album series was that it presented rap over live jazz, a development that had not yet been fully explored in hip-hop. In a way, the series stands as a quintessential representation of the overtly hybridized "jazz rap" movement and a pivotal moment with respect to what happens next for the interrelatedness between jazz and hip-hop.

Like ATCQ's single, Guru's *Jazzmatazz, Vol. 1* (1993) cover art references the cool aesthetic of classic Blue Note albums. Specifically, the artwork stands as a likely homage to Art Blakey's *A Night at Birdland, Vol. 1* (1954), featuring the live sets of a pre-Messengers lineup, which was released as a series and influential as a breakthrough in modern jazz. Just a quick look at some of the personnel from *Jazzmatazz, Vol. 1* gives a sense of the musical range, depth, and intersection represented on the recording, as it is both forward-looking and grounded in a distinct knowledge of tradition. Performers include Roy Ayers, Carleen Anderson, Donald Byrd, Lonnie Liston Smith, N'Dea Davenport, Branford Marsalis, and Ronny Jordan.

Although "jazz rap" and the practice of utilizing jazz samples fell out of popularity and came to be viewed as outdated, the relationship between jazz and hip-hop never truly ended. Pressing the fast-forward button about 20 years or so, we are now living in a time period in which hip-hop would have been an ever-present part of a younger jazz artist's soundscape. And like their predecessors, young musicians continue to root their music in tradition while exploring and adapting the popular music of their time and embarking on their own paths.

AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPRESSIVE ART FORMS AND HISTORY

Around 2006, Revive Music Group (RMG), first branded as Revivalist and Revive Da Live, was founded by Megan Stabile, who has since risen to much well-earned acclaim as a successful and groundbreaking entrepreneur. Revive Music (<http://revive-music.com>) is an online hub presenting both rising and established jazz artists to new and younger audiences. RMG is currently the jazz extension of Okayplayer (www.okayplayer.com), a leading online community for hip-hop artists and audiences since its inception in 1999. The almost familial relationship between RMG and Okayplayer is a digital manifestation of the continuing interrelatedness between jazz and hip-hop. It demonstrates a keen awareness of musical kinship and a sense of community among artists, producers, supporters, and audiences.

Revive's impact is illustrated by its mission statement, which asserts, "By illuminating the renewal of retro and classic music with that of new emerging genres, we are the center of

a cultural resurgence of live music” (“About,” *Revive Music*). Much innovative and exciting content is available online, but the question of what is happening offline remains. What’s become of New York’s jazz scene of yesteryear? In a time when a great many jazz venues in New York City have closed or changed formats entirely, RMG has become a leading presenter of distinctive live performances that reimagine jazz in a contemporary sense and create entirely new music in New York and globally. Every week in Greenwich Village, RMG hosts the Evolution Jam Session at the Zinc Bar, and the group regularly presents its homegrown Revive Big Band, led by trumpeter Igmar Thomas.

The band also features rapper, turntablist, and Berklee College of Music professor Raydar Ellis. Of Ellis, jazz writer Willard Jenkins has said: “The soul of the RBB’s hip-hop perspective is rapper—‘turntablist’ Raydar Ellis, who is completely immersed in the form, has the in-the-pocket cadence and couplets down, has the requisite moves & stage presence, but sans the hard guy/male diva/I’m-a-gazillionaire-and-you’re-not posturing persona of so many rappers.”¹

Of Revive’s commitment to the relationship between jazz and hip-hop, Ellis himself notes: “Revive is just trying to show the world it’s not so much a divide[;] it’s just a family reunion and that’s what makes it both individual and shared” (Raydar Ellis, pers. comm., April 2, 2015).

The existing relationship between hip-hop and jazz, the importance of records and recording, and the rise of a digital space to build communities as well as to market and promote performances created a perfect and well-received storm for jazz to be interpreted and presented by a younger generation to new audiences.

Other examples of such genre-defying jazz artists are Robert Glasper, Kris Bowers, Thundercat, Brandee Younger, Ambrose Akinmusire, Christian Scott, Mark de Clive-Lowe, and Marcus Strickland.

The relationship between jazz and hip-hop was recently exemplified by keyboardist Kris Bowers’ cover of “Rigamortis” by rapper Kendrick Lamar, whom Bowers has counted as a personal favorite. Bowers makes musical choices and utilizes techniques that demonstrate a close listening to and command of jazz, hip-hop, and even 20th-century prepared piano techniques. The video of the performance can also be read as an homage to his mentor and former teacher, pianist Eric Reed, given that Lamar’s version makes use of Reed’s composition “The Thorn” from Willie Jones III’s album *The Next Phase* (2010).

Like any kinship, however, everything isn’t a sunny day in the park. Lamar’s use of “The Thorn” is pending litigation because it was not cleared for the track that was originally released on a mixtape and later achieved great commercial success.² This case stands as an illustration of both the ever-increasing compatibility between the genres stylistically and the ongoing conflicts over intellectual property rights. With any luck, this case is well on its way to a resolution, with artists justly compensated.

1. Dan Michael Reyes, “5/12: Revive Big Band Live at the Blue Note Jazz Club,” *Revive Music* (April 29, 2014).

2. I am currently unaware of any developments or outcomes regarding this case.

Still, Lamar's continued interest in jazz, as well as jazz artists of his time, is extremely apparent on his latest album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), which some keen listeners have astutely pointed out could be considered a jazz album in and of itself. The album features a virtual who's who of next-generation artists—Robert Glasper, Bilal, Lalah Hathaway, Kamasi Washington, Thundercat, Ambrose Akinmusire, Ronald Bruner, Jr., Robert Searight, and Chris Smith—who contribute greatly to the album's distinct musical qualities, which have been extremely well-received by fans and critics. Greg Tate, for instance, writes with great insight in a powerful and thoughtful essay, "The Compton MC's second major-label album is a masterpiece of fiery rage, deep jazz and ruthless self-critique" (2015).

It is yet to be seen what will come of the new music and artists of our time in both jazz and hip-hop and how they will be discussed and interpreted by future generations. However, something exciting is happening that is already quite worthy of consideration, discussion, and debate. My personal hope is that these current artists and their music will continue to make strong impacts and inroads and to cover more ground in a continuum rooted in rich African American expressive art forms and history. The declarative phrase, "We got the jazz," expressed by young hip-hop artists was a reverent nod to the past and certainly foretelling of today. It continues to beg the question: who's got next?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"About." *Revive Music*. <http://revive-music.com/about/> (accessed April 9, 2015).

Deshpande, Jay. "Jazz Pianist Robert Glasper on His Role in Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*." *Slate*, March 27, 2015. http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/03/27/kendrick_lamar_s_to_pimp_a_butterfly_robert_glasper_on_what_it_was_like.html (accessed March 30, 2015).

"Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly': A Track-by-Track Guide." *Rolling Stone*. March 16, 2015. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/kendrick-lamars-to-pimp-a-butterfly-a-track-by-track-guide-20150316> (accessed March 17, 2015).

Mitchell, Gail. "Kendrick Lamar Collaborator Bilal on 'To Pimp a Butterfly': 'A Lot of This Is Kendrick's Genius'." *Billboard*. March 17, 2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6502408/kendrick-lamar-bilal-to-pimp-a-butterfly-interview> (accessed March 17, 2015).

Reyes, Dan Michael. "5/12: Revive Big Band Live at the Blue Note Jazz Club." *Revive Music*. April 29, 2014. <http://revive-music.com/2014/04/29/revive-big-band-live-blue-note/> (accessed April 8, 2015).

Reyes, Dan Michael. "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly—Meet the Musicians Who Made the Album Possible." *Revive Music*. March 17, 2015. <http://revive-music.com/2015/03/17/kendrick-lamar-pimp-butterfly-meet-musicians-made-album-possible/> (accessed March 17, 2015).

Schloss, Joseph G. *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*. Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

- Stewart, Earl, and Jane Duran. "Black Essentialism: The Art of Jazz Rap." *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 7, no. 1 (1999): 49–54.
- Tate, Greg. "To Pimp a Butterfly." *Rolling Stone*. March 19, 2015. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-20150319> (accessed March 21, 2015).
- Williams, Justin A. "The Construction of Jazz Rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music." *Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 4 (2010): 435–459.
- Wood, Aja Burrell. "Kris Bowers Covers Kendrick Lamar's 'Rigamortus.'" *Revive Music*. February 25, 2014. <http://revive-music.com/2014/02/25/kris-bowers-covers-kendrick-lamars-rigamortus/> (accessed April 2, 2015).

Afrofuturism in Past Perfect Tense: The Cultural Legacy of Henry Dumas

— JOHN S. WRIGHT —

Speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture—and more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called “Afrofuturism.”

—Mark Dery, “*Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose*” (1994)¹

The *past perfect*, sometimes called the *pluperfect*, combines past tense with perfect aspect; . . . [and is] used when referring to an event that took place prior to the time frame being considered . . . [which] may be stated explicitly as a stated time or the time of another past action.

—*Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*

The shifting landscapes of African American cultural history embodied in this collection of “throughlines” inevitably evoke the echoes of submerged personal biographies, artistic movements, and moments of creative crisis upon which our sense of a useable past and a productive future depends. In that spirit, and as part of the conversation that Professor Banfield has sparked, I welcome the chance to revisit an earlier meditation on Henry Dumas that I hope might reframe our understanding now of the contemporary Afrofuturist insurgency. One way to reframe this understanding is by reimagining its origins in terms of the life and death of an artist too often left relatively obscured in current exchanges about the past and future possibilities of Black art. Accordingly, some half-century ago, as best we know from circumstances that still remain unclear, on May 23, 1968, while seated unarmed in a Harlem subway station, a 33-year-old father, husband, teacher, and emerging writer named Henry Dumas was confronted by a New York City Transit policeman who, in what may have been a case of mistaken identity or imagined provocation, summarily shot him dead. If, in the nationwide tumult that had followed the assassination of Martin Luther

1. Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose,” in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

King, Jr., six weeks earlier, such a death seemed journalistically un compelling at the time, the coming years would make it painfully clear that Henry Dumas's extraordinary artistic gifts and achievements make this particular loss tragically unique, as well as compellingly ironic. For Dumas's own posthumously published creative works infuse this American syndrome of deranged fatality with mythic and ritual meaning that haunts relentlessly the New Millennium that Afrofuturism and its devotees currently confront. That Dumas's spiritual godfather and supreme mourner had been Sun Ra—the mystical Egypto-space Arkestra bandleader and self-proclaimed extraterrestrial who had become a “silent partner” in Black arts innovation—underscores both their dual roles as progenitors of Afrofuturist multidimensionality and the interpretive angles of vision that this re-rumination invites.

Twenty years after Dumas's death, a 1988 special Henry Dumas issue of *Black American Literature Forum*, orchestrated by Eugene Redmond, his friend and literary executor, commemorated Dumas as a Black arts-movement visionary and innovator of near-sacred import. A cross-generational galaxy of writers that included Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, Jayne Cortez, Stephen Henderson, Pinkie Gordon Lane, Haki R. Madhubuti, Ethelbert Miller, Larry Neal, Arnold Rampersad, Ishmael Reed, Eleanor Traylor, and Quincy Troupe delivered a spectrum of homages that reveal the more precise ways in which, as Redmond remarks, Dumas has come to be “idolized and emulated by a growing diasporan tribe of storytellers, critics, multiculturalists, Africanists, folklorists, mystics, students of the occult, linguists, songifiers, ethnomusicologists, and poets.”² “A cult has grown up around Henry Dumas—a very deserved cult,” Morrison proclaimed in the course of welcoming ardent new proselytes, such as Angela Davis, Melvin Van Peebles, and John A. Williams, and she offered a devout rationale for their fervor: “he had completed work the quality and quantity of which are almost never achieved in several lifetimes. He was brilliant. He was magnetic, and he was an incredible artist.”³

Henry Dumas had been born in Sweet Home, Arkansas, on July 20, 1934, the son of Southern-born parents who, amidst the continuing northward migration of disaffected Black fugitives from Dixie, transported him into the mid-1940s Harlem community. Although it no longer had the allure of a Renaissance-era “Negro Mecca,” Harlem still offered prospects less manifestly threatening than those “down home.” Dumas graduated from Harlem's Commerce High School in 1953 and attended City College briefly before marrying in 1955 and entering the Air Force, in which he served until 1957.⁴ By then the father of two sons, he enrolled at Rutgers University, studying theology, etymology, sociology, and English while immersing himself increasingly in the Civil Rights Movement and in the writers' groups and little magazines that were seedbeds for the emerging Black arts movement.

Black arts advocate Larry Neal—another of the movement's guiding lights destined for premature demise—remembered meeting Dumas, then a virtual unknown, at Harlem's

2. Eugene Redmond, “The Ancient and Recent Voices Within Henry Dumas,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 143.

3. Toni Morrison, “On Behalf of Henry Dumas,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 310–311.

4. Carolyn Mitchell, “Henry Dumas,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 41 (Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research, 1985), 90.

famous Liberation Bookstore in the mid-1960s, when Neal was still writing for *Liberator* magazine and had just begun assembling *Black Fire*—the manifesto anthology he would publish with LeRoi Jones in 1968.⁵ Dumas had sent some manuscripts to *Liberator* for a short-story contest that never materialized. But his querying Neal about the fate of his submissions served as the contact that would lead to the subsequent publication in *Black Fire* of three of Dumas poems—“mosaic harlem,” “knock on wood,” and “cutting down to size”—plus the riveting tale “Fon.” In the entry he supplied to Jones and Neal for *Black Fire*’s list of contributors, Dumas offered the following capsule autobiography:

Born in Arkansas, came up to Harlem age of 10, Air Force and all that—spent a year in the great Arabian Peninsula—lived in New Jersey while attending Rutgers University. I am published in *Freedomways*, *Negro Digest*, *Umbra*, Hiram College *Poetry Review* and *Trace*. I have just finished my first novel, which is long overdue. I am very much concerned about what is happening to my people and what we are doing with our precious tradition.⁶

Jones and Neal shared his concern and had designed *Black Fire* especially to showcase the talents and outlooks of emerging young Black writers of the moment; the title they first proposed for the collection had been *Voices of the Black Nation*.⁷ Cultural nationalism was at an apex, and Dumas’s work debuted as part of *Black Fire*’s carefully orchestrated warrior uprising of “the wizards, the bards, the *babalawo*, the *sheikhs*, of Weusi Mchoro,” who were engaged in the “conscious striving (*ji*had) of a nation coming back into focus.”⁸ Recently attracted to Maulana Ron Karenga’s “Kawaida System,” LeRoi Jones had renamed himself Imamu Amear Baraka and, in a self-consciously spiritual phase, had become a Kawaida minister. The terms Baraka employed to describe the young wordsmiths he anthologized also *invoked* their powers of magic, song, divination, theology, and ancestral blackness as weapons in a holy war for righteousness and justice. *Weusi Mchoro*—“the black scribes” in Kiswahili—was a phrase that reverberated in African American communities across the country at the time, as the tenets of Julius Nyerere’s “African Socialism,” and the allure of Afro-Arabic languages and literature penetrated cultural nationalist theory and practice. In Baraka’s, Neal’s, and Dumas’s Harlem three years earlier in 1965, a coalition of activist artists who called themselves “Twentieth Century Creators” had presciently adopted the new name *Weusi* [the Black Ones], along with the corollary objectives of creating Black art for Black people, of developing a new iconography and visual vocabulary which—like those evolving in sister arts collectives, such as Africobra—could define and express a propulsive Black aesthetic.

5. Larry P. Neal, “Henry Dumas: Literary Landmark,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 313. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2904524>

6. Henry Dumas Biography, in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 661.

7. Theodore Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1973), 37.

8. Ameer Baraka, Foreword, in *Black Fire*, xvii.

More than any other work of fiction in *Black Fire*, Dumas's "Fon" demonstrated just how verbal analogues to the new iconography and visual vocabulary of Weusi Mchoro might operate. But the exhilarating weirdness and sense of the bizarre that seemed, in so many minds, to mark this and other fiction by Dumas somehow eluded the powers of decipherment within the Black arts orbit at the time. From today's vantage point, five decades later, it is easier to see that, beyond any sort of insular, self-referential "blackness," Dumas's revolutionary literary form and content bespeak an eclectic, hypermodern sensibility that fuses motifs of pan-African ancestralism with the futuristic premises of science fiction and "crosshatched" fantasy tales, or with political discourses familiar on the countercultural New Left. In the works published over the next two decades following his death, we find Dumas interlacing traditional Southern Black folklore, legend, and myth with occult histories of the world. Elements of Gothic romance, the ghost story, biblical parable, the psychological thriller, and inner-space fiction blend with the naturalistic lynching story, the folkloric devil tale, local color reverie, or Black nationalist apocalypse.

Today, rereading the stories excavated by Eugene Redmond from *Ark of Bones and Other Stories* (1970), *Rope of Wind* (1979), *Goodbye, Sweetwater* (1988), and now collected in successive editions of *Echo Tree*, it would be hard not to recognize the extent to which Dumas's conceptual breakthroughs to a new Black literary sensibility were facilitated by devices appropriated from the maturing international post-World War II literature of the fantastic, including supernatural fiction and "magical realism," but without, as Baraka noted, being "euro-literary." Although critics before Tzvetan Todorov have conventionally associated the whole realm of "the fantastic" with political escapism, it is no less apparent that Dumas was resolutely putting the manifold devices of the uncanny and the marvelous to the service of Black revolutionary moods of the time. These revolutionary moods recognized, at least intuitively, that creating profound shifts in political structure is predicated on visions of an alternate reality possible, primarily through acts of artistic imagination.

Although "Ark of Bones" has become the most widely recognized single story by Dumas, it was "Fon" that first opened the window to his distinctive fictional world and style. So, to understand the patterns of action, character, imagery, and language in many of his works that followed it into publication, we might approach "Fon" not so much in terms of its genre elements, as revisionary ghost story, or subverted lynching tale, or salvation parable—each of which it certainly incorporates—but as a more comprehensive cognitive and spiritual "giant step," to borrow a metaphor from John Coltrane, toward self-conscious mythopoesis. As Larry Neal eventually concluded, behind much of the Black arts movement's strident literary nationalism lay a more quiet and contemplative, but no less intense, search for harmonious values, ontology, and self, a search that perceived Blackness as ultimately "embracing the Universal in man," and that employed the language of religious reform and the symbolism of ritual experience and spiritual transcendence.⁹ Alongside Baraka, Stanley Crouch, Paul Carter Harrison, Ishmael Reed, James Stewart,

9. Larry Neal, "The Black Contribution to American Letters: Part II, The Writer as Activist—1960 and After," in *The Black American Reference Book*, ed. Mabel Smythe (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 776.

and Charles Fuller, Henry Dumas had become intrigued, Neal observed, with the aesthetic uses of African and African American cosmologies and mythological systems and their manifestations in music and the folk spirit.

By Neal's account, the Weusi Mchoro discovered Western precedents for their spiritual quest in such 19th-century cultural nationalist endeavors as the European folk research of the Grimm Brothers and the Germanic mythology of Richard Wagner; in the Celtic Revival and Anglo-Irish Renaissance of Yeats, O'Casey, Synge, and Joyce; and in the American transcendentalist forays and local color folk experiments of Emerson, Whittier, Whitman, Bret Harte, Joel Chandler Harris, and Mark Twain. No less significantly, they discovered in the mid-century Francophone literature of Negritude and the 1950s and 60s postcolonial poetry, drama, and fiction of emerging Anglophone African and Caribbean writers ways to step out of the Western frame altogether. While Negritude poets like Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique had turned to the African oral tradition of the *dyelis*, or griots, for the canonical forms of a useable past, they seemed to have maintained symbiotic ties to the formal literature and philosophical systems of the West. Negritude, nonetheless, like the concepts of Black power and the Black aesthetic, remained a *defensive* frame, Neal conceded, shackled to the psychic resolution of cultural identity crises brought on by conflict with the West.¹⁰

This appeared to be less the case with the newer African writing that C. L. R. James spurred *Black Fire* contributors like Calvin Hernton to study: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ayi Kweh Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*, Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*.¹¹ As in classical African art and oral tradition, many of these works mixed realistic, mystical, and fantastic modes, and almost none were constituted to deliberately challenge or contradict the "reality" of mythological or religious or folkloric sources. Some of them, like *The Radiance of the King*, effected symbolic religious quests that fused fantastic animist beliefs imperceptibly with meditative koranic parables; others, like *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Tutuola's even more extravagant *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), presented examples of a modern African tradition of the fantastic not rooted in Euro-American myths and legends, and not preoccupied with the colonial or neocolonial other. Although often filled with creatures and contexts beyond credulity, such works were not "fantasies" in the Western sense—they were not "invented" worlds and were not fairytales. Like Western fabulation, magical realism, surrealism, and science fiction, they often employed myth to occupy the ontological space between the "weird" or "uncanny," on the one hand, stories in which belief-defying events are overtly assigned a natural explanation, and, on the other hand, the "marvelous" stories in which events beyond credulity are clearly attributed to supernatural forces.¹²

10. Neal, "The Black Contribution to American Letters," 774.

11. Calvin C. Hernton, "Introduction," in *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*, ed. Janheinz Jahn, trans. Marjorie Grene (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), xi.

12. John Clute and John Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 335.

Revealingly for the Black arts movement, the need to adapt or reinterpret classical African myths and legends led writers like Chinua Achebe to discover their own instructive affinities with Yeats, as well as those mythopoetic attitudes of the Irish Renaissance, which embraced interplay with supernatural creatures and the dead or the “living dead.” For Henry Dumas and the Weusi Mchoro, as it had for the writers of the Celtic Revival, myth and folklore could provide a kind of “hygiene of the spirit”—that is, a means of seeing, of disciplined cognition and perception—that contravenes Cartesian science, capitalist materialism, and Anglo-Saxon abstraction.¹³ The Irish Renaissance had revived the illuminist tradition of the 18th-century Pagan Enlightenment and a theosophical cosmology saturated by hermetic dream and symbol, together with the spiritual and political possibility of a Neoplatonic return to sources, to the roots of the Trees of Knowledge and of Life, as well as the possibility of recreating the Irish nation. Yeats believed, moreover, that mythology endows a race with its primordial unity, “marrying” it “to rock and hill,” and rendering geography—“places of beauty or legendary association”—psychically and symbolically multivalent.¹⁴ Clyde Taylor argues that, in an analogous way, Dumas became the first African American writer to burst through “the Veil” of nature, to master nature “as a subject for poetry on his way toward seizing an African conception of natural being” that takes as fundamental “black folks’ reverence for fields, woods, and waters” and “our fabled love of coon-hunting, catfishing, our respect for root doctors.”¹⁵ Nature perceived as “an infinite order of balances, free of the sharp polarities of Western thought—good/evil, death/life, present/past”—merges in his world with a universe that is “relentlessly spiritual, never separated from a ‘secular’ order; and the deeper spirits frequently manifest themselves through the shallower spiritual texture of other living things—goats, birds, or blades of grass.”¹⁶

Yeats blended Celtic myths with a global potpourri in the course of fabricating his own private cosmology, which drew eclectically from his membership in Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society and the hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; from intense study of Asian religions, occult philosophies, magic, astrology, the Hebrew Cabala, Neoplatonism, and the mystical “correspondences” of Blake and Swedenborg; and alongside the revelations of spiritual masters communicated to him through his wife’s automatic writing.¹⁷ No single orienting tome akin to Yeats’s outlandish and admittedly phantasmagoric *A Vision* (1925) would emerge from the Black arts movement. But Neal’s brief compilation of “some sources for a poetic framework” was capable of guiding the visionary explorations of Dumas and his peers and included two conceptual points of reference: first, Baraka’s “seminal” ethnomusicological compass, *Blues People* (1963), whose “Herderian idea has had a profound impact on the recent generation of black writers”; and, second, Maya

13. “Myth in Twentieth-Century English Literature,” in *Mythologies*, Vol. 2, comp. Yves Bonnefoy (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 783.

14. “Myth in Twentieth-Century English Literature,” 783.

15. Clyde Taylor, “Henry Dumas: Legacy of a Long-Breath Singer,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 356–357. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2904534>

16. Taylor, “Henry Dumas,” 357.

17. “Myth in Twentieth-Century English Literature,” 783.

Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (1953), which performed the feat, Joseph Campbell later declared, of delineating the Haitian religious tradition and its ritual choreography, "not anthropologically—as a relic of primeval ignorance and archaic speculation—but as an experienced and comprehended initiation into the mysteries of man's harmony within himself and with the cosmic process."¹⁸

Neal urged the Weusi Mchoro on to Cheikh Anta Diop's *The Cultural Unity of Africa* (1959), which had instigated an international "Afrocentric" revolt against European misinterpretations of African history by debunking underlying theories of matriarchy and patriarchy propounded by J. J. Bachofen, Lewis Morgan, and Frederick Engels. Closer to home, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The World and Africa* (1947, 1965), reprinted two years after the world-famous scholar's death in 1963, looked back from the "collapse of Europe" in World War II to "remind readers in this crisis of civilization, of how critical a part Africa has played in human history, past and present, and how impossible it is to forget this and rightly explain the present plight of mankind."¹⁹

Janheinz Jahn's *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing* (1968) followed up his earlier pioneering exploration in *Muntu* (1961) of Dogon, Yoruba, and Bantu cosmologies and aesthetics with a global analysis of Old and New World African languages and literature that stressed continuities across space and time. Calvin Hernton, author of *Black Fire*'s essay on "Dynamite Growing Out of Their Skulls," recalls that reading *Muntu* "revealed a rich, 'hidden' landscape we had not recognized before. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, by Amos Tutuola, no longer appeared 'foreign,' 'strange,' or 'weird'; it was no longer thought to be some kind of African 'fairy tale.' We grasped the profound agency in Black culture of song, dance, and rhythm."²⁰ To provide an offbeat complement to *Muntu*, and a Black arts bridge to the underground tradition of occultist scholarship, Neal proffered Godfrey Higgins's *Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or an Inquiry into the Origin of Language, Nations, and Religions* (1829, 1965). This work of 19th-century comparative Masonic mythography broached a contra-Hellenist theory of the Afro-Asiatic origin of Graeco-Roman civilization in accord with what Martin Bernal, the author of the *Black Athena* series, would subsequently refer to as the Greeks' and Romans' own ancient model of their cultural origins and development.

In practice, this cluster of divinatory erudition constituted sources not only for a poetic framework but also for the edifice that would sustain prose fiction tales like "Fon" and Dumas's draft novel, *Jonah and the Green Stone*. The intended trilogy was planned to be an epic exploration of mid-20th-century African American experience, which he had initially named *Visible Man*, as a generational counterpoint to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. But "Fon," in the much-less-than-epic compass of a mere dozen pages, assimilates almost all of the loose Black arts conceptual framework with an immersion in Islamic scripture,

18. Joseph Campbell, "Foreword," in Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, N.Y.: McPherson, 1984), xi.

19. W. E. B. DuBois, *The World and Africa* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thompson, 1976), xi.

20. Hernton, "Introduction," xxiii.

mythology, and language. This immersion had begun the year Dumas spent in the Arabian Peninsula and eventually led to his being informally christened “Alhaji Samud.”

“Fon” participates demonstrably in Todorov’s “literature of the fantastic”; but it is not “fantasy”—certainly not as escape or psychological safety valve. J. R. R. Tolkien argues that, even in that special form of the fantastic called fairytales, what the reader experiences is not so much a flight *from* reality as a liberation *into* a wider reality. C. S. Lewis makes the corollary assertion that “escape” in any case is a criticism of the reader rather than the work and maintains that escaping into *realistic* fiction is just as feasible psychologically.²¹ Indeed, “Fon” is very much about matters of the real world, but it conflates that world ambiguously with an alternate, transformational reality. As Todorov observes about the fantastic in general, “Fon” obliges the reader “to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described,” and at the same time, to reject allegorical or “poetic” interpretations.²² What begins as a seemingly familiar dirge of Black victimization metamorphoses into a mysterious tale of avenging Black ancestral spirits infiltrated or “astro-projected” into the framing structure of an otherwise naturalistic lynching story set at twilight on a back country road in civil-rights-era Mississippi. Its opening is both enigmatic and emblematic: “From the sky. A fragment of Black rock about the size of a fist, sailing, sailing. . . . CRAACK! The rear windshield breaks.”²³ Behind the windshield sits an archetypal Southern “cracker” named—ideographically, like so many Dumas characters—“Nillmon” (no man). He carries with him a triptych of cultural icons—a pistol, a half-bottle of whiskey, and a stick of dynamite—along with a murderous hatred of “niggers” that immediately targets the first Black beings in sight, a group of children behind a billboard picture of Uncle Sam saying “*I Want You*.” Nillmon runs off in pursuit of the children but loses sight of them at the edge of a cottonfield canebrake, where he instead confronts three inhabited shacks and the vague figure of an old granny on a porch, plus “the illusory tilt of a cross barely gleaming on top of a wooden church far away.”²⁴ Forestalled momentarily, he glances back to the roadside billboard, sees a gigantic Black youth behind it on whom he can now turn his wrath and, at pistol point, forces him into the car, after first extorting the young man’s name—“Fon,” short for “Alfonso.”²⁴

Uncertain from the youth’s veiled responses whether Fon is arrogantly in need of a brutal “lesson” or merely a half-wit (the young giant carefully averts his eyes from the White man’s), Nillmon summarily decides the former, that he “has a nigger that needs a thorough job” and drives home toward the White town to assemble a like-minded cohort. Along the way, Fon calmly tells the White man that he didn’t break his window, that “nobody *threw* that rock,” and that what he was doing behind the billboard was “teachin his brother to

21. Quoted in Gary K. Wolfe, ed., *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 31.

22. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 33.

23. “Fon: A short story, from Echo Tree: The Collected Short Fiction of Henry Dumas,” The Free Library, Institute of African-American Affairs, 2014, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Fon%3A+A+short+story%2C+from+Echo+Tree%3A+The+Collected+Short+Fiction+of...-a0393059762>.

24. “Fon,” 2014.

shoot his arrows.”²⁵ Nillmon subsequently becomes distracted at a roadside cattle crossing by fond recollections of spilling Black blood with impunity during his days as Sheriff Vacy’s deputy, and Fon quietly slips out of the car and away from Nillmon’s untender mercies. Silently cursing “all dead niggers,”²⁶ the brooding White vigilante continues on to town, where he recruits two eager coconspirators. The story Nillmon tells of seeing Black folks at the canebrake shacks is disavowed by an old White man who warns him that the canebrake shacks are haunted, that “there ain’t no niggers livin in them shacks,” that none have lived there since the days of a flood years earlier, when “the nigger woman put hoodoo on Vacy’s papa.”²⁷

Unbelieving and undeterred, Nillmon and his confederates drive back through the dark to the three shacks, torch the second, and then head for the third, where they confront Fon on the porch, still unafraid, not far from an observing crowd of Blacks in front of the wooden church tower. The Whites force Fon, once again, into Nillmon’s car—but this time to a cheer from the Black worshippers “such as the white men have never heard”²⁸—and then take him back to the billboard where they prepare a lynching with dynamite and torches. Told again, at the point of death, to confess throwing the black stone, to divulge his brother’s whereabouts, and then to pray before going to Hell, Fon instead repeats that the rock came from the sky. He defiantly declares that he is neither going to Hell nor in need of prayer—“prayer is for people who want help”²⁹—before advising the White men that his brother is in the trees somewhere. As one of the would-be lynchers slaps Fon in a last ugly preliminary, deadly arrows from unseen hands pierce, in succession, the necks of each White man. Fon, revealed ambiguously as a possibly transmundane being on a salvific mission known only to the worshippers, stomps out the torches of the slain lynchers with his bare feet. The tale closes as he muses silently about the weakness of his adversaries and about the secret apocalyptic scourge with which he, his “brothers” in the canebrake church tower, and unnamed forces from the stars are patiently preparing to “set the whole earth on fire.”³⁰

Here in “Fon,” as in later stories like “Ark of Bones,” “Echo Tree,” “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?,” “Rope of Wind,” “Rain God,” and “The Metagenesis of Sun Ra,” Dumas is engaged in the conscious fabrication—or refabrication—of myths in an effort to “remythologize” human experience in reaction to the forces of dehumanization. This essentially mythopoetic attitude is rooted in a mental or spiritual state that impels certain artists to imagine “a metamorphosis of condition that allows them to free themselves from all controlling forces” and to live in a space and time that has become “reversible.”³¹ Dumas’s *Black Fire* missive is designed to create a moment of enchantment for the reader that restores

25. “Fon,” 2014.

26. “Fon,” 2014.

27. “Fon,” 2014.

28. “Fon,” 2014.

29. “Fon,” 2014.

30. “Fon,” 2014.

31. Max Bilen, “The Mythico-Poetic Attitude,” in *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, ed. Pierre Brunel (London: Routledge Press, 1995), 862.

“the ineffable, the secret, the hidden, the sense of transcending the human condition and of returning to a primal language that enables us to experience an absolute freedom and mysterious beauty possible only outside the contingencies of ordinary life.”³² Disinclined to such transcendental hope, Nathaniel Hawthorne used Shakespeare’s dour dictum in *King John* that “life is as tedious as a twice-told tale” to frame a collection of 19th-century supernatural fictions in which the protagonists live in bondage to their nature and condition, and are “twice-told” in their conviction that nothing they do can release them from guilty reenactment of that which damned their ancestors and will damn them as well.³³ In a decidedly antithetical way, Dumas employs the supernatural to foreground the existence of a horrifically oppressive legendary past to transform it into a story of liberation *from* bondage. Ghost stories and hauntings, Gillian Beer suggests, almost always have more to do with the *insurrection* than the *resurrection* of the dead. In “Fon,” the Black dead that Nillmon curses are the generations of African ancestors—“four centuries of black eyes burning into four weak white men”³⁴—who are still alive in nature as meteorites, sunbeams, moonlight, and stars and are engaged in an insurrectionary struggle between sky gods and earth gods over human destiny.

Dumas’s research in African and African American history, ethnography, and oral tradition led him—along with Baraka and many of the Black arts intellectuals—to Melville Herskovits’s *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941). Herskovits mounted the first scientific case for the widespread survival of specifically identifiable “Africanisms” in the New World, which led to his later cross-cultural analysis, *Dahomean Narrative* (1958), still the most authoritative study of religion, cosmology, and myth among the Fon people of present-day Benin.³⁵ The kingdom of the Fon has exercised greater fascination over Western minds than perhaps any other West African people.³⁶ From its remarkable 17th-century genesis in the context of the expanding trans-Atlantic slave trade, to the ceremonial complexities of its royal court and the warrior ethos of its vast army and fabled Amazon cohort, the Fon kingdom invited endless speculation about its religious continuities with ancient Egyptian solar theology and the pantheon of sky, earth, and thunder gods. From this pantheon, worship of ancestral Vodou had first been derived and then spread throughout the New World, with the importation of vast numbers of Fon slaves. Fon sacred narratives center on the cosmogonic myth that the universe was originally partitioned by the dualistic creator-god Mawu (“body divided”), typically female or androgynous, with the eyes of the female aspect forming the moon and the eyes of the male aspect forming the sun.³⁷ The lunar-solar sky god Mawu divided the realms of the universe among her offspring—the gods of the thunder and earth pantheons—and then retreated to the dominions of the stars, which was

32. Bilen, “The Mythico-Poetic Attitude,” 862–863.

33. Clute and Grant, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 968.

34. “Fon,” 2014.

35. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1941), and Melville Herskovits and Francis S. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1958).

36. Henry Dumas, “Fon,” in *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mankind*, Vol. 5, ed. Richard Carlisle (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1984), 631–633.

37. Harold Scheub, ed., *A Dictionary of African Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142.

infinitely more populous than the relatively insignificant earth. The thunder god, Sogbo, represented ichnographically by a ram-warrior painted red and armed with lightning, then quarreled relentlessly with the earth god, Agbe. The cycle of earthly floods and droughts developed as a consequence of this ongoing cosmic conflagration.³⁸

Henry Dumas's tale is a "twice-told" version of Southern oral and literary lynching-burning rituals that, in the retelling, are transformed mythopoetically into a modern reenactment of ancient Fon cosmological verities. As envisioned by Fon myth, in the primal struggle between good and evil, between sky gods and earth gods, human actors must regain their lost connections with the heavens to discover the god in themselves and to right the balance between cosmic drought and flood, between apocalyptic fire and healing waters. They must build towers to the sky to reestablish communion with the divine. If so, heroes will again hold sway over heaven and earth, ensuring that the culture they embody has heavenly sanction. Sublime or not, triumphant or not, they provide the promise of reunion with the messengers of heaven. As a portent, a flaming stone falls from the sky—an analogue of the koranic *al-hajar al-aswad*, the Black Stone of the Ka'bah—and a hero emerges in its wake. In the course of events, this flaming stone immolates in the face of evil, and from the bows of the thunder god, arrows ultimately rain down. At the beckoning of the sky pantheon, the hero has come out of a cosmic egg/omphalos to struggle with the earth devil/god for ascendancy. Accordingly, he makes a home in the sacred waters of the wilderness and establishes a community faithful to its heavenly ancestors and origins. A figure of priestly contemplation and inner calm, his secret strength is in his shadow, and as long as his secret remains safe, he plays the role of savior god.³⁹

So it is written in the book of destiny by Legba, the Fon divine trickster, the sacred linguist and transgressor of boundaries, the Vodun god of crossroads. And so in Dumas's remythologizing tale, "Alfonso's" name carries double meanings—mundane and spiritual—that identify the two planes of reality and ethical order in contention. Dumas incorporates the Fon/Dahomean sacred narrative mythopoetically—as a spiritual adventure that shares impossible experience in the form of *grace*, which brings salvation and limitless freedom—rather than merely allegorically—as a fixed scheme of *ideas* in one-to-one secular correspondence. As literary artist, Dumas's primary mythopoetic signatures are onomastic and metaphorical. The names of his solar hero and mundane antagonist connote their essential natures. When the hero first appears—a silhouette descending from the heights, "almost liquid in his giant movements . . . swinging across a shaft of sunlight like an acrobat"—he bears the markings and colors and armaments of the High God, the "bands of fading light" that "make perfect angles and spears across his red shirt and black arms."⁴⁰ Like the Fon thunder deity, the only child of Mawu, who in one telling of the myth is sent to earth to teach unseeing men the arts of living, Dumas's reincarnated spirit-warrior confronts a fallen world of human vice and victimization. Like the ancient Afro-Asiatic solar god whose

38. Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology*, 224.

39. Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology*, 348.

40. "Fon," 2014.

side was pierced while on the sacrificial cross, and whose “Christian” worship the New World descendants of the Fon have sustained, Dumas’s ebony avatar—pierced in the side by a lyncher’s broken whiskey bottle—looks ultimately skyward for the coming of a New World Order. What Nillmon and his ilk ultimately face is not a force of earthly civil rights agitators descending from above the Mason-Dixon line, but an apocalyptic instauration, a jihad, an interstellar visitation of spirit-warriors whose mere look contains disintegrative power beyond the merely human to withstand. Dumas veils the transformational sacred mythos in the “ambiguous vision”⁴¹ of the fantastic until the story’s denouement, in the wake of which the whole rich tapestry of his sacralizing signs becomes manifest.

Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, years after publishing “Fon” in *Black Fire*, interpreted Dumas as an exponent of an “Afro-surreal expressionism” of which Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and Toni Morrison were ostensibly the exemplary figures and which had visual parallels in the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, Vincent Smith, and Romare Bearden, alongside musical analogues in Duke Ellington, Thelonius Monk, John Coltrane, and Sun Ra. Two decades after *Black Fire*, Baraka reaffirmed that Dumas’s power lay “in his skill at creating an entirely different world organically connected to this one,” a “black mythological lyricism, strange yet *ethnically* familiar,” a world composed of fabulist morality tales, “magical, resonating dream emotions and images; shifting ambiguous terror, mystery, implied revelation.”⁴² Dumas had become the agent of a new blackness and a true art form—“not twenty ‘Hate Whitey’s’ & a benediction of sweaty artificial flame, but actual black art, real . . . and stunning.”⁴³ Dumas’s Afro-surreal expressionism was, Baraka asserted, a genuine embodiment of the Black aesthetic—form and content—in its actual and contemporary lived life:

MUSIC (drum—polyrhythm, percussive—song as laughter or tears), preacher and congregation, call and response, the frenzy! The *color* is the polyrhythm, refracted light! But this beauty and revelation have always existed in an historically material world. The African masks are shattered and cubed. Things float and fly. Darkness defines more than light. Even in the flow of plot, there are excursions and multi-layered ambiguities. As with Bearden, Dumas’s is a world in which the broken glide by in search of the healing element, or are tragically oblivious to it.⁴⁴

No antithesis with political praxis exists, Baraka believed, because “the fact that [Dumas] was killed by Devils should continue to pull our coat, brains, heart to what is happening to us here in the Devil’s land—and also what needs to happen. We can protect ourselves, our real selves, by protecting our artists (the formal expressive part of the race), only by

41. “Fon,” 2014.

42. Amiri Baraka, “Preface: The Works of Henry Dumas—A New Blackness,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 163 [a slightly amended version of Baraka’s 1970 preface to Dumas’s posthumous collection, *Poetry for My People* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970)].

43. Baraka 163.

44. Amiri Baraka, “Henry Dumas: Afro-Surreal Expressionist,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 165. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2904491>

organizing. By building large organizations based on nationalism.”⁴⁵ Baraka grounds Afro-surreal expressionism in dialectical materialism and attempts to ground Dumas in science as well as art, in the art and *science* of Black liberation and the destruction of imperialism that becomes thereby scientifically predictable and “inherent in *nature*”—the nexus in which the tragedies and transformations of Dumas’s fables so often take place.

Larry Neal retrospectively seconded Baraka’s emphasis on Dumas’s surreal mythological strangeness, and he also glimpsed Dumas’s immersion in the cosmological mysteries of African American folklore. But Neal affirmed more specifically just how deeply Dumas had been influenced by the “occult and space science thing”⁴⁶ in the music and theosophical mysticism of Sun Ra. A decade earlier, in an essay written when the Black arts movement seemed less in need of a postmortem, Neal asserted that Henry Dumas, “more than any writer of the sixties, had effected a brilliant synthesis of Afro-American and African folk-and-myth ideas.”⁴⁷ Dumas’s importance “cannot be emphasized enough,” he wrote, and Neal cited Dumas along with Ishmael Reed as a creator of literary works “which are uncompromising in their quest for pan-African forms, yet refuse to sacrifice anything in the way of artistic integrity.”⁴⁸ The new blackness that Dumas and Reed were exploring presented the possibility of new forms of religious transcendence manifest in the neo-hoodoo catechism that buttressed Reed’s voodoo novels and poetry, as well as in the “analogous synthesis” that Dumas had erected from African American revisionings of biblical, vernacular, alchemical, and futuristic motifs gleaned from his own research and from his discipleship with Sun Ra.

“Like a lot of us,” Neal recollected, Dumas “had been around Sun Ra in the Village”⁴⁹; for Dumas, Neal suggested, the visionary musician, poet, and prophet had been a very important force, “like a spiritual father.”⁵⁰ John Szwed, in his groundbreaking biography of Sun Ra, went so far as to argue that Sun Ra was a “silent partner” in the Black arts more generally, routinely present in Baraka’s own historical allusions, “in the tone and pitch of his reading, in his sense of the importance of language, and in his consciousness of the possibilities of playing the spoken word against the written, unleashing the phonetics buried within the printed word.”⁵¹ Baraka acknowledges that debt in *Raise Race Rays Raze*, a book whose own titled homonymic reiterations evoke the symbolic heliolatry of Sun Ra’s highly theatricalized and proselytical brand of Egyptology, and with it, an ontological and historiographic pan-African reorientation: “What Trane spoke of, speaks of, what [Sun] Ra means, where Pharoah [Saunders] wd [sic] like to go, is clearly another world. In (w) hich we are literally (and further) ‘free’.”⁵² Although Baraka had initially dubbed Sun Ra a “modernist faddist” upon their first encounters during the early 1960s, extended exposure

45. Baraka, “Preface: The Works of Henry Dumas,” 163.

46. Neal, “Henry Dumas: Literary Landmark,” 313.

47. Neal, “The Black Contribution to American Letters,” 789.

48. Neal, “The Black Contribution to American Letters,” 788, 784.

49. Neal, “Henry Dumas: Literary Landmark,” 313.

50. Neal, “Henry Dumas: Literary Landmark,” 314.

51. John Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 209.

52. Amiri Baraka, quoted in Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 210.

to Ra's strange conceptual universe led Baraka to conclude that "Ra was so far out because he had the true self-consciousness of the Afro American intellectual artist revolutionary."⁵³ So, *Black Fire* had included seven poems by Sun Ra—more than any other contributor.

For Ishmael Reed, the densely imagined cosmology that undergirds Arkestra albums like *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra* and *Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy* could be read as an extrapolatable *tone parallel*—to borrow the term Duke Ellington applied to his Harlem Renaissance-inspired programmatic musical compositions—for the Gnostic, syncretistic, mystical historiography of Reed's hoodoo novel masterpiece, *Mumbo Jumbo*, as well as for neo-hoodoo ritual poems like "I Am a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra," which Szwed insists is Reed's "most obvious point of contact with Sun Ra."⁵⁴ The cosmic metaphor of the Egyptian solar ark proved no less invigorating for Henry Dumas, who fuses it with its biblical analogue to singular effect in the Gnostic tale, "Ark of Bones," which serves as the titular lodestone for the posthumous first collection of Dumas's short fiction. Between 1965 and 1966, while employed as a New York City social worker, Dumas communed devotedly with Sun Ra: "of all the young black writers of the time, he was closest to Sun Ra, and was inspired to draw on Egyptian and West African mythological material, as well as Deep South folksay and science fiction."⁵⁵ Dumas shared with Sun Ra the "Afro-Baptist affinity for imagery of birds, eagles, the wind, and other figures of escape, height, and majesty."⁵⁶ He had been on his way home from a rehearsal at Sun Ra's studio the day he was killed, and when news of Dumas's death reached him, the Arkestra leader raged unconsolably for days.⁵⁷

Five years earlier, Dumas had written the liner notes for Sun Ra's Arkestral experiment in "space music," *Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy* (1963). Those notes proclaimed a seriocomic intergalactic instauration by the philosopher king of Afro-psychedelia, informing listeners in eye-winking breathlessness that

THE QUASAR (QUASI-STELLAR OR STAR-LIKE) EMITTED RADIO WAVES REACHED OUR GALAXY AFTER 13 BILLION LIGHT YEARS. AND SUN RA, WHOSE MIND-WAVES ARE SYNCHRONIZED TO NATURE WITH COORDINATED INTUITION, PRISMED THE VOICE OF THE QUASAR ON A COSMIC TONE PIANO AND THIS THUNDER IS LIKE SHOCK WAVES SHAKING AWAY THE STAGNATION OF LIFE IN THE MIND. WHEN YOU CAN MOVE IN A DIMENSION FASTER THAN LIGHT YOU SOLVE THE RIDDLE OF TIME AND YOUR MIND'S COSMOSIS COMPLETES THE EQUATION: LIFE EQUALS DEATH, FOR IN THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE THE INFINITE DESTROYS THE ILLUSION OF LIMITATIONS WHICH TRAP

53. Amiri Baraka, quoted in Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 209.

54. Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 222.

55. Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 223.

56. Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 223.

57. Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 223.

MAN TO THE PLANET EARTH. THE INFINITY OF CONTINUOUS AND ACCELERATING MOTION CHASES THE FLEEING GALAXY ANDROMEDA. . . . THE MUSIC OF THIS FLIGHT ENERGIZES THE QUASAR AND SUN RA RECEIVES TONES FROM THAT QUASAR WHICH HAS BECOME PREGNANT WITH RADIATION AND THIS COMPLETES THE EQUATION: DEATH EQUALS LIFE IN A DYING UNIVERSE WHERE GALAXIES COLLIDE AND WHERE DEATH WEARS A MYSTERIOUS CROWN OF CONSTELLATIONS CALLED CREATION. TO HEAR THIS MUSIC IS TO HEAR THE SOLAR BAND OF REVELATION. THE TONES REVERBERATING HERE PASS THROUGH THE TIME SPECTRUM OF THE ARKESTRA'S MIND AND YOU SEE WITH EAR AND WITH EYE AND YOU BECOME THE METAGENESIS OF COSMIC ATOMS.⁵⁸

In *The Ark and the Ankh*, the recently discovered interview tapes recorded by Dumas and Sun Ra in 1966, the bonds between the two artistic visionaries become even clearer. Myth and music emerge in their meditations as the dual agencies by which “spiritual rehabilitation and wisdom”⁵⁹ can be communicated to a culture in crisis. Responding to Dumas’s interrogations, Sun Ra presents himself as a seeker and as the oracular bridge from a “whole planet in trouble, in need of spiritual awakening,” to another world where “nothing is impossible” and where “cosmic equations” hold the key to regaining the lost harmony originally given to humanity by the Creator. The Astro-Infinity music of his Arkestra, he proposes, is like himself a “force of nature” that speaks to transcendental goals in advance of earthly aspirations for freedom⁶⁰. “Astro-infinity music is beyond freedom. It is precision, discipline. It is not just freedom. It is coordination and sound interdependence. It is the design of another world.”⁶¹ The linking design to Dumas’s quest for analogous literary means is perhaps best expressed in the words of a Nigerian reviewer he quotes to define Sun Ra’s place in the New Music of the era:

This music is so complete in its awareness of and references to the American Negro experience that it corresponds to all the schools of the area of Negro musical heritage called jazz—going beyond the mainstream, past the New Wave and any other contemporary music played in America into a functional music that cultivates the sense of wonder, accustoms the mind to symbolic language, and restores “myth” as an important and permanent part of culture.⁶²

58. Henry Dumas, Liner Notes to Sun Ra, *Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy*, reissued on CD, Evidence Music, ECD 22036, 1992.

59. Sun Ra and Henry Dumas, *The Ark and the Ankh: Sun Ra and Henry Dumas in Conversation 1966* (Chicago, Ill.: Ikef Records, 2002), liner notes, 1.

60. Sun Ra and Henry Dumas, *The Ark and the Ankh*, liner notes, 3.

61. Sun Ra and Henry Dumas, *The Ark and the Ankh*, liner notes, 4.

62. Sun Ra and Henry Dumas, *The Ark and the Ankh*, liner notes, 3.

As such, Dumas's ties to what we might call the New Age Astro-Africanity of Sun Ra distinguish his fictional world from the Euro-American surrealist orbit and from Latin American magical realism as well. Unlike most surrealists, Dumas only occasionally evinces manifest interest in Freudian psychological theories, dream imagery, or the ostensible truths of the unconscious. The surrealist abandonment of a consensual framing reality, the deliberate randomness of its featured automatic writing, and the designedly irrational juxtaposition of realistic and fantastic phenomena that surrealist poets and painters have pursued are not the primary techniques of estrangement that Dumas characteristically employs or that he saw modeled by extrapolation in the highly disciplined and precise "cosmic mathematics" of Sun Ra's Arkestral soundings, nor in the fantastical tales flowing from the imaginations of contemporary African writers. Dumas's affinities with magical realism seem easier to divine. As in the fictions pouring after the 1940s from Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (although English translations of Marquez's work came too late to have been directly influential), in Henry Dumas's fiction, the *terra firma* of the real world may indeed be "irradiated" with hallucinatory imagery, disjunctions of time and space, and superpositions of the spirit world and the mundane. That commonsense reality supplies the frame within or against which his narrations typically proceed. Magical realist techniques of reinterpreting reality have enabled writers from traditions rendered invisible in canonical histories and literature to reclaim lost cultural memories and to reinvigorate a sense of connectedness, security, and identity for themselves and their readers. Magical realist writers also have not been averse to political engagement.⁶³ We still do not know enough, however, about Dumas's specific artistic influences to confirm direct magical realist influences, as we can for other Black arts-era writers like Toni Morrison or August Wilson.

But the clearest disjunction between Dumas's worldview and that of the Latin American originators of magical realism may lie, once more, in his kinship with the Afro-psychedelic New Age astrophysics of the ancient astronaut of modern jazz, Sun Ra. One crucial aspect of Sun Ra's influence on Dumas seems to have been that Dumas was encouraged to adopt a metaphysics that was simultaneously more self-consciously "African"—on a temporal spectrum traceable from the ancient Egyptian to the modern Yoruba worlds—while also more "scientific"—as science has been redefined in the paradigm shift from Newtonian to quantum mechanics and as it has, in turn, redefined the possibilities of literary and mythopoetic creation. Together with his liner notes for Sun Ra's *Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy*, Dumas's cosmological fable, "The Metagenesis of Sun Ra," published for the first time in *Echo Tree*, unveils the playful metaphysics that undergirds Dumas's most distinctive ways of dramatizing character and the self. In this and his other more venturesome work, Dumas's intent seems determinedly at odds with the materialist realities and delineation of the finite, sharply individuated characters that inhabit the 19th-century's Newtonian novelistic universe. Sun Ra's oracular worldview, shaped by the popular currents of atomic

63. "Magic Realism," in *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, Vol. 2, M–Z, ed. Paul Schellinger (Chicago, Ill.: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 797.

age cosmic awareness and post–World War II scientific discovery in astrophysics and genetic engineering, resonates to a quantum universe of boundlessness and metamorphosis for which the self is the most intimate and most mysterious metaphor. Accordingly, the fable of spiritual origins and development that Dumas spins around “the jazzman from outer space” models a narrative performance of what Sun Ra routinely referred to as “cosmo-drama.” Appropriately, the concept of *metagenesis* that Dumas invokes to frame his own cosmo-dramatic homage originates in the polysyllabic discourse of modern evolutionary biology. Metagenesis is distinguished from metamorphosis by “that modification of parthenogenesis or alternate generation exhibited when an organism passes from the egg to the sexual form through a series of successively generated individuals differing from one another in form.”⁶⁴ Dumas grounds his fictional riff in a capsule narration of the “Terrible Child’s” (i.e., Sun Ra’s) hyperbolic mythic adventures among archetypal Bluespeople, Redpeople, Yellowpeople, and Wolfpeople as he journeys across the allegorical Kingdom of Ice. With elliptical aplomb, the fabulistic tongue-in-cheek paean to the free jazz cosmo-dramatist parodies the evolutionary mythopoetics of Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society (one of Sun Ra’s oft-appropriated touchstones) and its Gnostic rhetoric of “root races,” Hyperborean Ages, karmic reincarnation, fifth–, sixth–, seventh–dimension exploration, and Egypto–Hindu–Sufi esotericism.

Afro-psychedelic influences notwithstanding, commentators in today’s Afrofuturist orbit who are trying to place Henry Dumas in African American literary tradition have discovered antecedents for his distinctive voice and style in earlier Harlem Renaissance writers, including Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston, as well as in post–World War II figures, such as James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Ernest Gaines, and Toni Morrison. (As a Random House editor, Morrison shepherded the publication of Dumas’s poetry collection, *Play Ebony Play Ivory*, and the short stories in *Ark of Bones*). But the strongest analogue to Dumas’s unique synthesis of African American folk spirituality, Judeo-Christian mythography, Afro-Eastern Gnosticism, and modern post-Newtonian science may be found in the world of spiritualized landscapes, polyethnic historical tracings, and psychic alchemy created by the prolific Caribbean novelist-critic, Wilson Harris. Beginning in 1960–1963 with his *Guyana Quartet* novels—*Palace of the Peacock*, *The Far Journey of Qudin*, *The Whole Armour*, and *The Secret Ladder*—Harris became perhaps the premier Caribbean novelist of his generation by rejecting realism as blind to “the parallel universes of the Imagination.”⁶⁵ He developed a fictional method rooted in metaphorical transformations rather than documentary-like reportage and fabricated an alchemistic historical perspective that draws the topographies of New World Arawak, Carib, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Asian, and Euro-American mythologies into a luminous tapestry of “black holes,” “quarks,” and “neutrinos” visible only against the backdrop of what he calls “the womb of space.”⁶⁶

64. Wordnik, s.v. “metagenesis.” <https://www.wordnik.com/words/metagenesis> (accessed March 31, 2023).

65. Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 28.

66. Harris, *The Womb of Space*, 48.

Wilson Harris was read enthusiastically in Black arts literary circles, and like Harris, Henry Dumas employed the mind of science to expand the imaginative possibilities of his literary universe. But unlike Harris or his mentor Sun Ra, Dumas's own metagenesis was aborted by fate. The combinational and configurational principles behind the array of experimental fictions he created have been left incomplete or unarticulated. As new pieces in the puzzle of his creative life and death have appeared, we are forced to rethink what we think we know about him and his work. Along with "The Metagenesis of Sun Ra," the prose creations appearing in *Echo Tree* for the first time—"Scout," "Children of the Sun," "The Bewitching Bag, or How the Man Escaped from Hell," "The Man Who Could See Through Fog," "Riot or Revolt?" and "My Brother, My Brother"—conform in certain ways to what previous patterns in Dumas's work might lead us to expect, but in other instances, they surprise. "Scout" is a fragmentary Kafkaesque fable of adolescent anxiety—sexual, filial, monetary—set in the unexpected world of Harlem Boy Scouts at parade time. Its story-within-a-story is related by interlinked first-person narrators so that it presents a quasi-surrealistic maze of parabolic encounters with dream-like figures—first a nubile young seductress and then a reminiscing scoutmaster—who turn the rote maxims of scouting into metaphysical riddles fielded quizzically by an ambivalent young tenderfoot. The briefest of the resurfaced offerings, "Children of the Sun" provides a laconic rural sketch of an interracial group of boys confronting in disparate, uncertain ways the pain and terror of dying, during the awkward moments after having reluctantly killed a mad dog belonging to one of the young friends. "The Bewitching Bag, or How the Man Escaped from Hell (An Afro-American Folk Tale)," appears to be what folklorists call a *Kunstmarchen*, a near-transcriptive literary retelling of an originally oral tale—in this case, an instance of the rich lode of Black Southern devil lore. In Dumas's rendering, it combines conventional folkloric motifs about an escape-bound liaison between a man condemned to hell and the devil's infamous but disaffected daughter. Provocatively, it features a Bunyanesque pilgrim's progress along allegorical roads of grace, hope, illumination, and love and respect, along with a repertoire of folk rhymes, chants, and songs interwoven within the frame narrative. "The Man Who Could See Through Fog" is a dryly comic, thoroughly modern but mundane story of machine-made human folly set on a Texas military post, as related by an ex-stable hand for the nearby rodeo who has become bored and bruised from working with animals, and who takes instead a job driving insect-fogging machinery better suited to asphyxiating humans than killing insects. Finally, "My Brother, My Brother" is a first-person tale of colonial Africa set in a decidedly unspecific geographic and ethnographic terrain. Under threats of death to them and their families by mechanized invaders, two African tribesmen are forced to play a deadly "game" for the invaders' entertainment in which they are impelled by a mysterious, searing force field toward a crocodile-infested river that they must cross before ultimately fighting to the death. Betrayed by his self-seeking companion, the storyteller must finally kill his spiritual brother in self-defense and then raise the titled lament for his lost soulmate.

Among the works included in *Echo Tree* from earlier collections, the redoubtable "Ark of Bones" provides what is perhaps Henry Dumas's most startling fusion of conjure

lore and biblical revelation. This vernacular first-person narrative converts the familiar conventions of the archetypal adolescent fishing adventure into an intensely symbolic confrontation between two antithetical communities of belief over how best to face a legacy of terror and spiritual assault. Like “Ark of Bones,” “Echo Tree,” the title story of the Dumas cornucopia, is a parabolic, allegorical tale of gnosis—of ancient, secret wisdom and the deep need to transmit it from one generation to the next, from knower to novice, from believer to unbeliever. Both tales center around evanescent spiritual experiences shared by two young Black men, one preternaturally a seer, the other less gifted metaphysically, less open to the invisible world of sacramental forces revealed by nature or by transhistorical visitation. These double-souled central experiences both entail the vexing, perennially painful problem of whether and how to create communion between the living and the spirits of the dead. “Ark of Bones” proposes one imaginative answer to that problem—a fantastical and macabre one, but somehow still rich with hope and consolation. “Echo Tree,” drawing much more closely on the incantatory word-magic of children’s fairytale and linked quite probably by its title to the cartoon fancies of Winnie the Pooh, proposes yet another. A modern “wonder tale” drenched in the oral rapture inspired by magical forces in the life-giving Southern landscape, “Echo Tree” nonetheless derives much of its narrative power from the larger-souled young chanter’s repeated warnings to his mate that the latter’s journey northward to the land of the dead has turned his own soul inanimate and unreachable.

Whether we acknowledge such Weusi Mchoro starbursts as Afro-surreal expressionism or as harbingers of the Afrofuturist insurrection awaiting baptism a quarter-century later, Dumas gives his deepest recurring fear and wonder symbolic form. In so doing, he makes it possible for us, in his wake, to share the warning signs and to seek our own healing. The reverberating question he troubled Sun Ra with before undertaking his final fatal journey remains behind for us to remember him by as a seeker and a seer: “If the citizens of a necropolis are dead, how does one resurrect them? I mean . . . how are the souls called forth?”⁶⁷

67. Sun Ra and Henry Dumas, *The Ark and the Ankh*, liner notes, 3.

The “Future” of Afrofuturism: An Essay by Multimedia Artist Daniel Callahan

————— DANIEL CALLAHAN —————

Afrofuturism has been hailed as a “new Black aesthetic,” with cultural production stretching from literature and music to film, fashion, and even religion. The breakout success of Disney’s *Black Panther* and earlier crossover appeal of artists, such as Janelle Monáe, Outkast, and Octavia Butler, have launched Afrofuturism into the popular cultural consciousness. Many believe a movement is afoot. But can this new aesthetic live up to the hype? Should it? And what does the future hold for this future-facing aesthetic? The key to understanding the future of Afrofuturism lies, paradoxically, in its past.

AFRO-WHAT?

Coined by author, lecturer, and cultural critic Mark Dery in 1994, Afrofuturism was originally defined as “speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture.” More generally, Afrofuturism was “African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future.”

The Afrofuturist aesthetic is heavily inspired by African ornamentation and iconography, seen in the audacious, heavily stylized visuals and costuming of musicians and performers from Sun Ra to George Clinton and Janelle Monáe. Thematically, a general hybridity between advanced futuristic technology and ancient African tradition is prevalent. Afrofuturism presents a reality in which spaceships and pyramids share the same proscenium and, as Greg Tate put it “[a]ncient time and things to come coexist.” This atemporal collage mirrors traditional African sensibilities of cyclical rather than chronologic time. Above all else is the centering of blackness and Black people from a decidedly Black postcolonial perspective.

MY PROBLEM WITH AFROFUTURISM

Although Afrofuturism presents as an exciting subgenre of creativity, it is not without issue. It is not solely the fact that this purportedly Black aesthetic was coined by a White man (although that should raise a few eyebrows). What is most important to understand about Afrofuturism is that the term and its concept were retroactively applied to artists and their works, often posthumously, and did not arise from the cultural context or cultural creatives it sought to define.

To his credit, Dery sought to engage firsthand with Black practitioners as he explored his concept. In his essay “Black to the Future,” Dery utilizes a series of interviews with author Samuel Delany, musician Greg Tate, and cultural theorist Tricia Rose to scrub and expand on his aesthetics observations. By providing the space for Black practitioners to analyze their milieu, Dery attempts to avoid the imperialist tendency of imposing outsider (i.e., White academic) analysis and classification on peoples and cultures not one’s own. Yet, despite his best efforts and intention, the dynamic of White mediation over Black culture remains. All too often, Black expression is labeled, categorized, and packaged by White intelligentsia for immediate commercial exploitation. Culture is reduced to product, sold to the highest bidder, and moved out of the community responsible for its creation. The commercial and ultimately exploitative underpinnings that motivate this process of White mediation eventually trickle down into the aesthetic choices of the creatives, regardless of their race, and show up in the work.

Thus, in the case of a film like *Black Panther*, despite all of the progressive inclusion and display of Black creativity, it remains, at the end of the day, the product of a White-owned corporation based on a White-owned intellectual property initially conceived by White men to corner an untapped market. The aesthetic and creative issues I have with the actual film (too numerous to cover in this text) extend primarily from ideological flaws in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby’s initial concept. That a fictional African nation completely removed from the rest of the continent would remain hidden and silent during its colonization, despite having access to the most advanced technology, raw materials, and military might, seems more than odd.

It is tellingly peculiar that the possibility of an African hero-king standing up to the true villain of the continent—European imperialism—was never considered by the two co-creators. Instead, the majority of the fighting, in both the film and comic book, happens between Africans. Lee admits, “I wasn’t thinking of civil rights. I had a lot of friends who were Black and we had artists who were Black. So it occurred to me . . . why aren’t there any Black heroes?” That the idea of offering any of his Black friends and artists the opportunity to co-create and co-own the rights to the first major Black comic book character never entered his mind is more than peculiar, it is an indictment.

Power dynamics aside, from a sociopolitical and artistic standpoint, Afrofuturism takes several leaps in its own conception that affect its validity as an aesthetic. I argue that an aesthetic is a set of observed, sensual, and thematic characteristics that defines a particular artist, artwork, or artistic movement.

The Afrofuturist canon of artists is truly eclectic, spanning not only industries but also time periods, artistic traditions, and stylistic movements. No clear geographic, temporal, or sociopolitical foundation holds those artists and artworks together. Often, though not always, art movements have manifestos created in community by the practitioners. That is not the case with Afrofuturism, which I must remind the reader is a retroactive classification used to describe a heavily curated subset of Black cultural production and *not* the cultural production itself.

Although Afrofuturism has clear and consistent characteristics, the term and its application seem to be without bound. Afrofuturism has, for example, been argued to include the writing of W. E. B. Du Bois, the activism of Harriet Tubman, the cover artwork of Miles Davis, and the early Internet platform Black Planet. Perhaps what Afrofuturism describes is not an isolated aesthetic but an overall feature of Black creativity. (More on this later.)

What is most perplexing about Afrofuturism is its confused influence on actual Black creativity. A growing number of artists, rather derivatively, now strive to create Black art that is based on a retrospective idea about Black art. The notion of Black artists attempting to produce “Afrofuturist” work in response to the buzz the term has received in popular culture is much akin to the South African vendors I witnessed in Cape Town, selling knockoff Malian masks to oblivious American tourists looking for “authentic” souvenirs. Afrofuturism has gone from trying to identify and catch up to Black genius to now dictating it.

As a Black artist, this is where it hits closest to home, especially given the nature of my work. Although I do not consider myself an Afrofuturist, according to its definitions, I likely could be.

Fellas I’m ready to get up and
do my thing.

—James Brown, “Get Up (I Feel Like
Being a) Sex Machine” (1970)

My mediums are in constant flux and range from film, photography, music, painting, poetry, and performance, but I am perhaps best known for my technique of MassQing—a ritual marking of the face with paint to reveal rather than conceal one’s inner essence (Figures 1–6). Derived from indigenous practices of body decoration found all over the world (but especially the continent of Africa), MassQing certainly hearkens, both culturally and temporally, to the roots of my ancestry. And by reinterpreting these traditions through a modern-day application, to modern-day humans and their modern-day struggles, MassQing allows people to see themselves in new ways, thus bridging the old with the new in a process of redefinition.



Figure 1. “Plant MassQ” by Daniel Callahan. Digital photograph of water-based pigment on skin. © Daniel Callahan



Figure 2. "Dad's MassQ" by Daniel Callahan. Digital photograph of water-based pigment on skin. © Daniel Callahan



Figure 3. "Mother's MassQ" by Daniel Callahan. Digital photograph of water-based pigment on skin. © Daniel Callahan



Figure 4. "Yellow & Red MassQ" process detail by Daniel Callahan. Digital photograph of water-based pigment on skin. © Daniel Callahan



Figure 5. "Yellow & Red MassQ" by Daniel Callahan. Digital photograph of water-based pigment on skin. © Daniel Callahan

My MassQing began in the Bay Area of California, where I was pursuing a career in music. I became part of a tight-knit artist community. We lived, worked, and created together, developing our own aesthetics, norms, beliefs, and rituals. One particular ritual, the MassQuerade Ball, would become the most formative for me. Although everyone in our artist community identified as Black, the variety within our ethnic, cultural, sociopolitical, and regional backgrounds mirrored the rich diversity of the African diaspora. Moreover, through our day jobs as youth workers and social activists, we gained access to and formed relationships with the Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities in the Bay Area.

Through the MassQuerade Ball, a semiannual celebration of arts and culture, we were able to bring all these communities together under a shared value of culture, creativity, and community. Unlike a Victorian masquerade, where attendees covered their faces with masks, our MassQuerade Ball invited attendees to paint their faces in a way that would not conceal but reveal their inner selves. We called this painting ritual “MassQing.” Through MassQing, all attendees became living works of art. The MassQuerade Ball was about validating the beauty and worth that we each represented. We celebrated not only what unified us but also what made us different, unique, and diverse. We had our first performance as a band at one of these MassQuerade Balls, and so, we entered the stage with our faces painted. From then on, whenever we performed we would “MassQ,” and the art form became something of a visual calling card for us. Our music was as eclectic and diasporic as we were, melding hip-hop with highlife, reggae with rock and roll, and R&B with EDM (electronic dance music,). We performed in elaborate costuming and sang of solar-paneled Cadillacs, escape to off-the-grid marronage societies, Black sorcery, prophetic visions, and digital adolescent angst.

One of the first MassQuerade Balls our artistic community threw featured a then up-and-coming but still relatively unknown artist from Atlanta. She too performed in costume, albeit a more subdued black and white. She sang of androids in outer space and referred to herself as an alien. Our band would go on to perform as openers for her a few years later when her name, Janelle Monáe, rang many more bells.

My connection to the people and cultural production now labeled Afrofuturist came before my understanding of the term. My aesthetic grew instead from the organic expansion of my own development as a Black artist. What excited me about Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Janelle Monáe’s *Metropolis: The Chase Suite* was not Mark Dery’s Afrofuturist classification, but the actual works and their critical sociopolitical and historical implications.



Figure 6. "MassQ Ball 2022: Origin Report," cover. Photo credit: Lauren Miller. Dressing by House of Nahdra. Visit www.massqball.com for more information on the MassQ Ball.

THE MEANING AND POTENTIAL BEHIND THE TERM

The sensual and thematic characteristics Dery observed in the artists and works he surveyed reveal a well-known tradition of Black signification. The mythic stories and their fantastical presentations hold the same function as reinterpretations of Biblical stories or Anansi tales. These paranormal proverbs serve not just as fantasy for spectacle's sake, but also hold real historic and political meaning and significance.

For instance, it wasn't just eccentricity that caused Sun Ra to profess himself an alien or present his Arkestra performance group and its music as vessels for intergalactic transportation. He was channeling Marcus Garvey, whose Black Star Line of ships became an apt metaphor for artists' imaginations of liberation through modern technologies of travel. It was not only Garvey's vision of a global pan-African future but also his use of dramatic oratory, fanfare, and public spectacle in his marches and demonstrations that would deeply influence the visual presentation of many future artists, from George Clinton to Outkast, both of whom also referred to themselves as aliens.

This alien theme is also no coincidence. A parallel runs between the science-fiction themes of alien abduction and the experience of kidnapped Africans subject to a trans-Atlantic slave trade. A striking similarity exists between speculative fiction's rise of a robotic free-labor class and the diasporic Black experience of colonial slavery, where Black bodies were reduced to crude automatons for industrial production. And a telling comparison can be drawn between interplanetary rebellions or "star wars" against imperialist dark empires and the tradition of Black marronage, revolt, and rebellion against the colonial powers of the "New World." In the words of Greg Tate, "Black people live the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine."

There is a method to the myths, a function to the fantasy found in Black expression. At times, the metaphoric symbolism can be so precise as to enter the realm of prophecy, as is the case with Afrofuturist matriarch Octavia Butler's *Earthseed* series. Written in the 1990s, the books tell of a divided United States in the 2020s, where growing economic inequality, prescription drug epidemics, and a fascist president who promised to "Make America Great Again" prompted chaos and violence against religious and ethnic minorities. Please let that sink in.

Indeed, it seems what Mark Dery coined as Afrofuturism is, in truth, a continued tradition of African/Black response to the Eurocentric White world of the modern 20th century. This tradition extends across all human activity for African/Black people. I would argue that the futuristic themes in Black artistry are more a strategic choice than an artistic one. Because of the great severance of culture and history caused by colonialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and subsequent systems of white oppression, the past for Black people has never been a safe space and certainly not one conducive to self-actualization. Furthermore, the present condition of diasporic people still bears the trauma and enduring tradition of systemic racism, making it also an unsafe and inequitable space. It is therefore to the future, with its limitless possibility, unregulated space, and nonproprietary frontier where many Black thinkers, artists, and leaders turn to envision their full autonomy, freedom, and potential. Their prophetic gifts come not from some exotic clairvoyance, but from the painful understanding of a past that keeps repeating.

See in the third grade this is what you told, you was bought, you was sold.

—Cool Breeze, "Dirty South" (1996)

For Black people across the diaspora, the paradigm we were taught to internalize is that our history began with slavery. Indeed, from the beginning of modern history, White explorers, colonists, abolitionists, missionaries, journalists, pseudo-scientists, and authors have perpetuated a distorted portrait of African people and their diaspora. To this day, the genres of science, fantasy, and speculative fiction have continued to erroneously project futures devoid of blackness, despite the fact that people of color currently account for the vast majority of the human population and the African Continent holds the fastest-growing population in the world.

This colonization of the future could very well be considered the last bastion of white supremacy and one artist of the Afrofuturist canon explicitly look to deconstruct and circumvent through their creation of alternative universes. In this way, Afrofuturism is essentially a pan-African project to project a new diasporic identity.

As a method of critique and historical revision, Afrofuturism presents a Black lens through which to view history and combat a narrative that is oppressively White. Through alternative histories and futures, Afrofuturism aims to tear a black hole (or shall I say “Black wholeness”) into the space–time continuum of white supremacy, creating a space in which Black imagination and potential can exist, decolonized and free.

As an artistic practice, Afrofuturism has the potential to mine past traumas and triumphs and utilize Black artistic creativity to work through real-world issues, all while imagining future worlds in which our experience and identities are centered. Most important, Afrofuturism affords us, as Black people, the opportunity to ask ourselves what future we want, and through the creative act, to begin to bring it into existence.

THE FUTURE OF AFROFUTURISM

The heights and hang-ups of Afrofuturism are many. I leave it to the reader to decide which are more pertinent and definitive. How both will affect the term’s future is unclear. Politics and profit play a greater role in determining such things than we would care to admit.

Given the popularity of the genre in the entertainment industry, I would imagine that Afrofuturism is here to stay. Challenges and alternatives, however, are already being offered that look to deconstruct or reframe the term. Artist Martine Syms’ *Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* challenges the “unexamined and hackneyed tropes” that are often associated with Afrofuturism and claps back at some of the hallmarks of the aesthetic to wrest control from its own self-imposed restrictions. Author Nnedi Okorafor’s *AfricanFuturism* and *Africanjujuism* relate more specifically to “African culture, history, mythology” and are “less concerned with ‘what could have been’ and more concerned with ‘what is and can/will be’.”

Okorafor’s alternatives sit well with her Nigerian American heritage, which has clear and present ties to her country and continent of origin. Yet, for the majority of African Americans, such as myself, such ties are not so clear. For many of us, what were once ties are now the stumps of a severed and stolen legacy. We can still “feel” these phantom limbs but can no longer use them. In the future, will we evolve the ability to regenerate these limbs? Or will we choose to augment our stumps with bionic, human-made artificial prosthetics? Which will serve us best? The questions are hypothetical, but the answers have real-world ramifications.

For African Americans especially, the choice of whether to try to re-link to or reimagine our legacy and humanity has perplexed us for centuries. However, this perceived dichotomy is just that: perceived. As an artist, it is my assertion that the creative act itself—that mercurial space between what is and what is not—is the portal to our ancestors.

Because of the restriction of knowledge about our past, we African Americans have for centuries made magic with the little we’ve had. The remix culture was born out of this

disparity—the assemblage of memories and traditions to create the jambalayas and gumbos of cultural innovation. An achronological collage of Egyptian and Dogon mysteries, Kente cloth, and rites-of-passage rituals expressed through hacked and hand-me-down technologies like turntables, speakers systems, the Internet, code-switching, Christianity, and the English language, culminated in the creation of new kinds of syncretic beliefs and pigeon languages. The rich diaspora of Black survival is a case study for Afrofuturism. And Afrofuturism, in turn, provides a compelling case study for diasporic survival and revival through the arts.

As to Afrofuturism's staying power in the wider art world, I am not sure. As a Black creative, however, I will say that for Afrofuturism to stay relevant to *me*, it must grow beyond its original ideas. It must expand past its mission to merely Africanize the future and devise a melanated science fiction. It must imagine and create futures whether aspirational, dystopian, or otherwise for people of the African diaspora that inform both our present and potential. It must continue to create new paradigms of art, thought, and experience. It must resist capitalistic exploitation and commercial manipulation. And most important, it must be championed and controlled by the practitioners and not by the critics, the media, or even well-meaning cultural theorists.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Editor's Notes." *Black Camera*, 5, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 1–2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/Blackcamera.5.1.1>
- Bakare, Lanre. "Afrofuturism Takes Flight: From Sun Ra to Janelle Monáe." Interview. *The Guardian* (July 24, 2014). <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jul/24/space-is-the-place-flying-lotus-janelle-monae-afrofuturism>
- Cool Breeze, vocalist. Goodie Mob. "Dirty South." *Soul Food*. Track 4. LaFace Records, 1995.
- Brodsky, Bob. 1998. "Stan the Man Lee: Maestro of the Marvel Mythos." *Comic Book Marketplace*, 61 (July 1998): 28–36, 45–54.
- Brown, James. "Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine." *Sex Machine*. Track 1. King, 1970.
- Clark, Ashley. "Afrofuturism on Film: Five of the Best." *The Guardian* (April 2, 2015). <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2015/apr/02/afrofuturism-on-film-five-best-brooklyn-bamcinematek>
- Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Ellis, Trey. "The New Black Aesthetic." *Callaloo*, 38 (Winter 1989): 233–243. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2931157>

- Gramlich, John. *For World Population Day, a Look at the Countries with the Biggest Projected Gains—and Losses—by 2100*. Pew Research Center (July 10, 2019).
- Jones, Lucy. "What Will Humans Look Like in a Million Years?" *BBC Earth* (blog). <https://www.bbcearth.com/news/what-will-humans-look-like-in-a-million-years>
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Drama Review*, 12, no. 4 (Black Theatre/Summer 1968): 29–39.
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movements." In *A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African American Studies*, 3rd edition, ed. Floyd W. Hayes III, 236–246. San Diego, Calif.: Collegiate Press, 2000.
- Okorafor, Nnedi. "Africanfuturism Defined." *Nnedi's Wahala Zone* (blog). October 19, 2019. <https://ewosavillage.com/2021/01/29/nnedis-wahala-zone-blog-africanfuturism-defined/>
- Syms, Martine. "The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto." *Rhizome* (December 17, 2013). <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/dec/17/mundane-afrofuturist-manifesto/>
- Tate, Greg. Interview by Mark Derry. In Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994, 208.
- Womack, Ytasha. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press, 2013.

Toward a Radical Popular Culture: Political and Musical Reflections

— VICTOR WALLIS —

I

The economic engine of capital is driving us relentlessly to our collective doom. In the process, it has made U.S. society at least as polarized now as it was in the late 19th century. The ruling class is incapable of responding to the full measure of popular need. It resists addressing real problems, from catastrophic climate change to mass hunger, touting instead a mission of U.S. global “leadership,” which its politicians seek to sell to the wider public through an ideology grounded—if not openly then tacitly—in white supremacism.

In response to the resulting assaults on humanity and nature, a vibrant popular culture has been developing for some time. It takes different forms in different communities, but these have yet to come fully together. There have been some notable glimmerings of unity—especially in massive protests against police killings—but for the process to go further, all of the “aware” sectors will need to both strengthen their voices and amplify the scope of their interactions.

All forms of artistic expression are pertinent to this project. Music performance, however, has a sociality and an immediacy that can give it a distinctive role. The diversity of musical forms reflects the diversity of social formations. A unified communal expression that can evolve into a political force therefore requires the cross-fertilization of a wide array of traditions, not only those of different parts of the world but also those of distinct cultures existing side by side within any given locality.

My goal in this essay, after providing an overview of the current U.S. scene, its historical grounding, and my place within it, is to suggest the potential of present-day musical culture to contribute to the necessary—and necessarily revolutionary—popular response. My selection of pertinent examples of this culture will unavoidably be personal and subjective. I cannot apologize for this but can only encourage others who share my concerns to put forward their own selections, with a view to eventually combining all of them. As for the term *revolutionary*, it refers here to the scope of the needed transformation; it does not prescribe the process by which that transformation will be carried out.

II

The United States of America originated in a contradiction. Its founding document proclaimed universal human equality, yet the author of that document “owned” (at any one time) approximately 130 other human beings. The only way to resolve this contradiction

was to assume that those who were thus enslaved did not count as persons—or could be classified as, in the polite language of the Constitution, “other persons.”

After nearly a quarter-millennium, this contradiction is still with us. And the inequality, while affecting most palpably the descendants of enslaved Africans, has spread its toxic impact with ever-increasing aggressiveness to the entire population in the form of a pervasive culture of competition and subjugation. The constitutional structures that were initially devised in a spirit of conscious fear of the majority—as unashamedly proclaimed by James Madison in *Federalist Paper No. 10*—have now enabled a situation in which even the most blatant violations of democratic norms are routine.

The idea of applying the label “democracy” to a country in which the candidate who gets the most votes may nonetheless lose—as in the U.S. presidential contests of 2000 and 2016—is worthy of the arbitrary dictates of the queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. And yet, woe to any notion that such customs might be superseded by the dictates of logic!

Dispensing with the Electoral College, however, would not, by itself, make authority democratic. If any particular stratagem for legitimating privilege proves inadequate, the ruling class has many others operating or in reserve (ranging from public relations campaigns to voter suppression), and these have lately been proliferating, as the U.S. ruling class has now reached a point of desperation. Its incapacity to serve the interests of the majority has become blatant. As a result, a disaffected public, misinformed yet seeing no meaningful alternative, appears to be fair game for demagogic appeals.

The disaffected, however, are not a solid bloc. Those whose beliefs most easily resonate with demagoguery are among those who still feel a degree of satisfaction with the status quo. By contrast, those whose interests are ignored cannot take political posturing seriously. They look for concrete measures rather than rhetoric. To the extent that they are aroused, their participation threatens the ruling class’s priorities and, ultimately, its very existence. It is for this reason that they are targeted for voter suppression.

People’s votes can be suppressed in many ways, including the following: (1) undercounting certain districts in the census (2) drawing district boundaries so that, as with the national subdivision into states, a scattered minority gets more representation than a concentrated majority, (3) closing selected polling stations, (4) reducing the hours available for voting, (5) imposing arbitrary and burdensome requirements for identification, and (6) periodically scrubbing the voter rolls on highly questionable pretexts. All these methods have been applied in recent years, particularly targeting low-income people of color.¹

Perhaps the most effective way to disenfranchise people is to criminalize them. Hence, we find one of the biggest contradictions of our time: the country whose rulers call it the leader of the Free World has, by far, the world’s highest per capita rate of incarceration.² This practice directly affects not only those behind bars at any one moment but also former

1. In a class by itself is the March 2021 Georgia law that criminalizes bringing food or drink to people lined up at polling places. For continuing coverage of voter suppression, see <https://www.gregpalast.com/>

2. The U.S. rate is many times higher than that of any other industrial country and is only approached in some smaller countries of the Global South.

prisoners and their families, totaling tens of millions of people, disproportionately Black and Brown.³

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the impact of the prison system and that of a media system, which, lacking a state-owned national news outlet, leaves its audience more rather than less at the mercy of a corporate or ruling-class perspective—and thus more fully conditioned in its views by direct censorship by the ruling class (through advertising and network ownership). The larger dynamic framing the role of both these institutions—prisons and media—is one that we might describe as *calculated disorder*.

The disorder is in part the natural state of an economy of competing profit maximizers—as illustrated by the chaotic market for private health insurance and healthcare services, which generates mountains of paperwork and billions of advertising dollars while leaving vast sectors of the population without the care they need. This disorder is compounded by its “calculated” aspect, which includes the complexities of U.S. federalism as well as the deliberate violence associated with conquest, colonization, and enslavement. All these factors combine to produce unjust, skewed, or repressive outcomes while seemingly not implicating any single institution or social class and thereby tending to disorient and scatter any possible collective response.⁴

The process by which Europeans originally settled the land gave rise to an enduring culture of vigilantism, whereby private individuals could kill officially designated “nonpersons”—originally, Native Americans and those who escaped being enslaved—while claiming to act in the name of the law. The “right to bear arms,” like the “right” to own other human beings, could be defended by invoking States’ rights against the power of the federal government. Similarly, each state now sets its own rules for how any national election is to be conducted. And the process within any state may be administered by one of the contending parties. Equally shocking, although insufficiently remarked upon, is the fact that today even when the Republican Party holds a majority of seats within the U.S. Senate, it is on the basis of many millions *fewer* votes (nationally) than those tallied for the Democratic Party.

The upshot of all these arrangements is that, while the government, through the Executive Office, can act decisively to implement ruling-class priorities, it most often finds its hands tied—through a blend of structural and contingent factors—when the task is to respond to popular needs. As the urgency of such needs grows and as the deadlock tightens, popular anger and frustration intensify but have difficulty finding an outlet within established governmental institutions.

III

The quagmire I have just summarized, which paralyzes any effective response to the looming ecological disaster, is widely recognized, even if not exactly in the terms I apply to it.

3. See Reuben Miller, *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration* (New York: Little, Brown, 2021).

4. For fuller discussion, see my book: Victor Wallis, *Democracy Denied: Five Lectures on U.S. Politics* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2019).

This recognition takes many forms and comes from many directions but is not enough on its own to constitute a political force. Yet it does provide the necessary matrix out of which the requisite force will have to emerge.

This political force (movement or party) will manifest itself in strategic and organizational terms; the larger matrix it comes out of will take the form of cultural expressions. The cultural expressions that will be most helpful in generating the necessary political movement will be those that can at once (1) reflect life under capitalism and (2) project a sentiment or vision that is free of capitalist constraints. In other words, these expressions will have to use familiar associations to evoke an (unfamiliar) alternative reality.

Given the enormous diversity of cultures in the United States (let alone worldwide), the variety of forms through which this dual mission can express itself is virtually unlimited. The cultural works that have impressed me, in this connection, reflect the range—however broad or narrow—of what has surrounded or formed me and of what I have deliberately sought out. Eventually, of course, these two strands fuse into one.

At the time I entered college (1955), although an important challenge to the status quo was brewing in the U.S. South, my own sense of the political surroundings—coming as I did from a comfortable background in New York and being sent to “the best schools”—was dominated by the pervasive atmosphere of ideological repression combined with fear that the nuclear arms race would escalate into World War III. These conditions made it difficult for me to articulate in political terms the awareness of social injustice that I had felt since childhood. Although I reacted against class privilege—and the scourge of poverty that is its corollary—I faced surroundings in which the discussion of any systemic alternative was held to be out of bounds.

Music appeared to me at first as an escape from the resulting malaise. But it impinged on my life in an odd and even contradictory mix of ways. My earliest musical thrill came from the brass bands of World War II military parades along New York’s Fifth Avenue. A second strand came through AM radio, which in predawn hours during my childhood transmitted to my bedside the distant strains of Appalachia (“Here Rattler,” “The Cat Came Back”). A third inspiration, which in retrospect I’m surprised to have encountered in our household (which was not given either to music in general or to radical politics), was recordings of the deep, warm, unforgettable voice of Paul Robeson performing songs of international brotherhood from—as I only later realized—the Spanish Civil War.

These varying threads continued working in me when I went away to prep school. My initial predilection for military marches evolved into a passion for symphonies, which I fed with LP recordings, from Beethoven’s “Symphony No. 5” to Haydn’s “Haydn No. 98,” and on from there in many directions. From orchestras, I moved on in my explorations (though without formal musical training) to smaller ensembles, developing a particular taste for the cello, which I would later begin to study (after my first year of college). My exposure to other genres continued, however. A notable moment in those years was a live performance in our school auditorium by Josh White, whose rendition of “Strange Fruit” (this was in the early 1950s) stayed with me, even though I did not initially grasp what it referred to. Finally,

I had my first exposure to live jazz in a form that resonated with my early love of brass—the Almost 8 Dixieland band, which was directed by my classmate, the trombonist Phil Wilson.

During my college years, I was part of what was called the silent generation, a label given to those born before World War II. During this time, I studied philosophy and history and practiced the cello daily. My most direct reminder of the convergence of music with politics was a concert by Pete Seeger, although what stuck most in my memory of that event was the visual image of him bringing a tree stump onto the stage and swinging an axe into it.

My experience of the 1960s began (albeit from a distance) with the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This moment of liberation and innovation—epitomized by the mass-volunteer literacy campaign and the evolving ethic of “service”—drew me into engagement, political as well as academic, with Latin America, culminating in a year in Chile (1966–1967), where I first got to experience, among large crowds at rallies, the feeling that my instincts were in tune with those of the greater part of humanity. Meanwhile, the burgeoning U.S. military occupation of Vietnam, which lasted until 1975, becoming ever more sweepingly destructive, would generate a broad movement of solidarity and anti-imperialism in which I could directly participate. Also significant as a target of international protest was the U.S.-supported military dictatorship that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974.

All these arenas of struggle inspired vibrant musical expression. Within the United States, the initial emblematic voice was that of Bob Dylan. His devastating “Masters of War” (1963), followed by Seeger’s “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” (1967), struck hammer blows against the criminality, mendacity, and absurdity of empire. The singer who engaged me the most, however, both because of his wit and lyricism and because of his dependable presence at every big demonstration, was Phil Ochs, with his defiant songs “I Ain’t Marching Any More,” “Draft Dodger Rag,” “Love Me, I’m a Liberal,” and others. On a different plane of expression, I was mesmerized by Jimi Hendrix’s electric guitar—recorded at the vast Woodstock Festival of 1969—drenching the “rockets’ red glare” of “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the simulated sounds of wailing sirens and exploding bombs. The spirit of defiance arose also directly among the U.S. troops in Vietnam, as later chronicled in the gripping documentary film *Sir! No Sir!*

In Chile, I encountered the extraordinary flowering of political song that presaged the period of Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity government (1970–1973)—the world’s first attempt at a “peaceful road to socialism,” though destined to be crushed by a U.S.-supported military coup. The musical movement was called *Nueva Canción* [New Song]. Its worldwide ambassadors, both before and after the coup, were the ensembles *Quilapayún* and *Inti Illimani*, with their Andean instruments. The movement attained its expressive peak in the songs of Víctor Jara, who was martyred by Chilean army officers during the days of the coup. The work of his that affected me most deeply was “Plegaria a un Labrador” [Prayer to a laborer], with its inspiring progression from a hymn-like opening to an impassioned call to arms.

The Greek nightmare of that epoch was culturally noteworthy because of the worldwide platform it gave to the communist composer Mikis Theodorakis, whose songs were banned from public performance in his country, yet deeply ingrained in the memory of its people. I drove 100 miles with my colleague and friend Nick Petropoulos to attend a Theodorakis concert in Cincinnati in the early 1970s. Because the event drew a “niche” audience,

the concert hall was no more than half full, but the enthusiastic response of the crowd was overwhelming. Soloists and chorus projected a resonant mood of affirmation and commitment. Fittingly, Theodorakis would later set to music the *Canto General* [General Song] of the Chilean communist poet Pablo Neruda.

IV

The mid-1970s constituted a historical turning point along a number of axes. Globally, those years saw the end of U.S. economic supremacy, which had undergirded the “golden age” of U.S. capitalism, dating from 1945. Of course, the country’s politicians and media would seek to sustain the aura of that period—invoked most recently in the slogan “Make America Great Again”—even when its material conditions had vanished. U.S. capital sought to recover its lost global advantage by imposing deregulation and social service cutbacks—in short, a neoliberal agenda—all of which wrought havoc on the living standards of the majority. Neoliberal policies have been advanced by Democratic as well as Republican administrations, a complicity that is too often obfuscated by campaign rhetoric but is widely recognized by the oppressed. As Kendrick Lamar puts it in “Hood Politics” (from *To Pimp a Butterfly*, 2015), “Ain’t nothing new but a flow of new Demo-Crips and Re-Blood-licans.”⁵

This convergence of the nation’s two dominant parties had long framed the official approach to foreign policy. In the domestic sphere, however, the Democrats had distinguished themselves beginning in the 1930s by a commitment to social services and to modest redistributive measures. This had come under attack during the post–World War II anticommunist crusade, but the impact of the latter was at first partly blunted in the 1960s by the Civil Rights Movement, the New Left, and the Black Liberation movement. These developments signaled a heightened popular consciousness, but by the same token set off alarm bells in the halls of power. Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover called the Black Panther Party the greatest threat to “national security,” and Harvard professor (and government consultant) Samuel P. Huntington published a revelatory article opining that the country was suffering from an “excess of democracy.”⁶

The ensuing counterattack would set the tone of public policy for subsequent decades. The Democrats, in forming the Democratic Leadership Council (1984), would—in the name of “small government”—explicitly repudiate the legacy of the New Deal. The thrust of official policy would be “lean and mean”—stingy with social support but profligate when it came to the military budget and the penal system. This was the era of deindustrialization, privatization, financialization, union-busting, and the War on Drugs.

It should not be surprising, at least in retrospect, that the same decade of the 1970s that spawned these trends should also have given birth, in the bowels of New York City’s poorest

5. Or, as Glen Ford reminds us, “More than half a century ago, Malcolm understood the duopoly electoral system as ‘foxes’ (Democrats) and ‘wolves’ (Republicans), and that ‘both will eat you.’” *Black Agenda Report*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.blackagendareport.com/nightmare-years-will-repeat-themselves-until-people-kick-out-cabal>.

6. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Democratic Distemper,” *Public Interest*, 41 (Fall 1975): 36.

borough (the Bronx), to the art form that would become known as hip-hop. While hip-hop would eventually incorporate fragments of melody, its initial incarnation as (principally) spoken rhymes over a heavy background beat reflected in part the simple material fact that its early practitioners could not afford musical instruments. In its later evolution, hip-hop came to encompass two antagonistic ideological tracks, sometimes coexisting within a single individual. One of these embodied people's deep-seated outrage at poverty and social injustice—the other, beguiled by visions of success in the capitalist marketplace, accommodated the oppressive culture of glitz and misogyny.⁷

We should note two other benchmarks of this same historical moment. One was the U.S. weaponization of radical Islam in 1978 to undermine the socialist regime that had been established in Afghanistan in 1974. Apart from provoking a Soviet occupation of that country that would bleed the Soviet regime to the point of its eventual collapse, this also marked the beginning of a long-term U.S. strategic interest in Afghanistan, which would outlast any trace of Soviet influence there, being subsequently directed against the Islamists who replaced the Soviets. The United States sought control over Afghanistan's mineral wealth and access to its location as a site for oil pipelines.⁸ These objectives both predated and outlasted the period of the September 11 terrorists attacks that the United States invoked to justify its 2001 assault on that country.⁹ And they underlay the ensuing U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan, which persisted for 20 years, despite the obvious impossibility of establishing a regime that would be at once compliant and popularly accepted. A similar agenda drives U.S. policy globally, but with its heaviest bombardments also encompassing other parts of the Islamic world.

The other benchmark, less spectacular but of enduring cultural significance, was the publication of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* in 1980. If the Afghanistan occupation signaled a permanently heightened U.S. imperial role, Zinn's book constituted an important salvo in the opposite direction. Zinn's historical scholarship was rooted in his activism, which had blossomed throughout his seven-year teaching stint at Atlanta's Spelman College during the height of the civil rights movement. Mining the records of centuries of struggles against oppression, Zinn was able to remind his readers (who would swell into millions) that the United States has a proud tradition of working-class and popular militancy. His book was notable for, among other things, popularizing the critique of Columbus that would culminate, years later, in official commemorations of the indigenous peoples whose collective agony Columbus had set in motion.

7. This duality is a persistent theme in the 2004 collection *Hip Hop, Race, and Cultural Politics*, which I coedited with Yusuf Nuruddin as a special issue of *Socialism and Democracy* 18, no. 2.

8. See (despite YouTube's "warning") Abby Martin's 2020 documentary film on the United States in Afghanistan (32 min.), "Afghanistan War Exposed: An Imperial Conspiracy," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3LFbOSPfrE> (accessed June 2, 2023).

9. The invasion was not necessary for the apprehension of Osama bin Laden, for whom a negotiated handover was proposed by the Afghan government. Whatever bin Laden's part in inspiring the September 11 terrorist attacks, his logistical role in their execution could not possibly have been significant. The irrelevance of his neutralization to actual U.S. objectives may be gathered from the fact when he was finally assassinated by U.S. forces (in Pakistan in 2011), no U.S. authority then suggested that their mission in Afghanistan was over.

V

The period beginning in the mid-1970s is when neoliberalism—better known at the time as “trickle-down economics”—became a fixture of U.S. policy. The assumption, put forth by President Ronald Reagan, was that if more money was left in the hands of the rich, the bloated beneficiaries would “create jobs” that would improve the lives of everyone else. But this of course is not what happened, because speculative transactions were more attractive than investment that could generate working-class employment. A heavy level of indoctrination was needed to make trickle-down economics appear to be part of the natural order of things. The dominant culture of Indianapolis, where I lived from 1970 to 1994, pushed heavily in this direction.

To contextualize our inquiry into present-day possibilities, I must again narrate some of my own activity as it relates to changes on the world and national stages. A constant theme for me was opposition to U.S. imperialism. From Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, Greece, and Afghanistan, my focus extended and shifted in the 1980s to encompass Central America, in the 1990s to Iraq, in the 2000s to Venezuela, and in the 2010s to several other countries. The collapse of the Soviet bloc (1989–1991) was especially consequential, not only in relation to the perennial debate about a socialist alternative but also, more immediately, for undercutting the pretext that, for decades, had been used by U.S. policymakers to justify their interventionist policies around the world. Although, with the Soviets now gone, new “outside agitators” (excluding, of course, the United States) could be identified or imagined, the underlying corporate interest that had driven U.S. interventions without letup since long before 1917 became ever more glaringly obvious.

In the intricate web of historical developments, the period of the Soviet collapse proved to be roughly contemporaneous with other turning points. Two of these came to draw my particular attention. One was the eruption onto the international stage of the climate crisis and the wider process of environmental breakdown. In 1988, NASA scientist James Hansen released a dramatic report on the dangers of global warming, which was followed the next year by journalist Bill McKibben’s best-selling book *The End of Nature*, and in 1992 (in Rio de Janeiro), an unbroken string of global environmental summit conferences gave a formal, though ineffectual, nod to the escalating danger of species extinction. In my writing, an inquiry into the post-1989 horizon for socialism led directly to an exploration of the links between ecological collapse and capitalist hyperdevelopment—focusing on the types of energy-consuming activities that could potentially be curtailed while respecting the real needs of humanity.¹⁰

The other major turning point was the relatively sudden emergence of the United States as the world’s leading carceral state. Having noted the use of criminalization as a tool for voter suppression, the impetus for such use also needs to be recognized, as does the scope of its impact. Criminalization, rationalized in terms of the War on Drugs, was part of

10. Victor Wallis, *Red-Green Revolution: The Politics and Technology of Ecosocialism*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Canada: Political Animal Press).

a conscious strategy of social control devised in response to the revolutionary movements centered in the Black community (most notably, the Black Panther Party) that had arisen in the 1960s.¹¹ My own engagement with the consequences of this strategy began in the mid-1970s in Indianapolis, whose small progressive milieu facilitated contacts between the various solidarity movements. It was thus at a meeting, in solidarity with Chile (following its 1973 coup), that I met an organizer who, by putting me in touch with recently released prisoners,¹² introduced me to a dimension of U.S. society whose impact would surge dramatically over the ensuing years.

As a result of these initial contacts—and later of my role as editor of *Socialism and Democracy*—I developed working relationships and sometimes friendships with people far outside academic circles, possessing a distinctive grasp of society and with it a thirst for knowledge, incubated in the social wounds inflicted on them both before and during their time in prison. George Jackson said of prison that it either “brings out the very best in brothers or destroys them entirely.”¹³ Those who survive the prison ordeal inspire confidence in the human potential for transformation.

Mass incarceration was the underside of the neoliberal agenda, which, in addition to outsourcing jobs, reduced both the public assistance and the legal protections that working-class people had previously, to some extent, enjoyed. The War on Drugs then entrapped many who sought relief through the underground economy. The resulting social polarization—extremes of inequality not seen in almost a century—fed into a growing popular movement that began to embrace a systemic critique. Elite gatherings, from party conventions to global conferences, became targets of protest. The forward movement was slowed in the repressive aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks but revived in the fallout from the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. At this point, a new openness to socialist ideas emerged, given public expression first in the Occupy movement of 2011—with its slogan of the 1% versus the 99%—and then in 2015–2016, in the wide support tapped by Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign.

The culture underlying mass incarceration, of course, pervades policing practices. As in the days of the post-Reconstruction Black Codes, even the smallest infractions—and at times, no infraction at all—can suck people into the court system, if not into summary neutralization at the hands of police officers. While none of this is new,¹⁴ it has gained heightened visibility in part through the increasing ubiquity of video recordings but especially as a result of the massive outpourings of protest—cutting across all ethnicities—to killings by police or vigilantes of unarmed people of color. The protests against police violence have drawn vast numbers of people—estimates suggesting as much as 10% of the U.S. population—into publicly denouncing a central bulwark of the established order. It’s

11. See Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernández, eds., “The Roots of Mass Incarceration: Locking up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor,” special issue of *Socialism and Democracy*, 28, no. 3 (November 2014): 1–14.

12. See my tribute to one such prisoner: <https://sfbayview.com/2020/12/lifelong-fighter-for-prisoners-rights-hugh-ray-lyons-jr-presente/>

13. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 32.

14. See Steve Martinot, “Probing the Epidemic of Police Murders,” *Socialism and Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2013).

significant that while the right-wing effort to delegitimize the 2020 election was based on disqualifying the votes of people of color, the corresponding political objective—defeating the Democrats and curbing the popular protests—was described by its proponents as being necessary to block “socialism.”

The Democratic leadership, for its part, far from desiring socialism, seeks to gain popular support while faithfully serving ruling-class interests. Aided by most of the corporate media, it has weaponized identity politics to this end, touting the ethnic and gender diversity of its appointees over their occupational and policy trajectories (not to mention their class loyalty). It thereby pays backhanded tribute to the various popular movements that have arisen against racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, but it does so without embracing the policies needed by majorities of the targeted groups.¹⁵ The movements, however, along with movements against ageism, ableism, and speciesism, and the various environmentalist movements, have together put a clear stamp on the culture of our time.

VI

The big question is how all the oppressed groups can be brought together into a political force that will embody their common interest. It is not hard to ascertain that the underlying common interest is one of class. This has been easily recognized by hundreds of millions of people all over the world, but such understanding has been and continues to be obstructed to a unique degree in the United States—first, as we have seen, by the lasting impact of slavery in dividing the working class, and subsequently, by the direct U.S. experience of the post–World War II decades. A decisive factor was the manufactured anticommunist panic that dominated political discourse from the mid-1940s until around 1960.¹⁶ The associated repression made people apprehensive about supporting any movement that spoke for the working class as a whole. At the same time, the noted identity groupings raised demands that were easier to embrace and less threatening to the system than a full working-class political program. The resulting pattern of fragmented activism was, in turn, rationalized philosophically by postmodernist thought (an academically popular trend in the 1980s), which applies the derogatory phrase “grand narrative” to the search for any unifying principle beneath the various particularistic demands. All these barriers to a cohesive popular movement were backed up by the draconian, though unacknowledged, emergency power of targeting key leaders for assassination: Malcolm X (1965), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), and Fred Hampton (1969).¹⁷

The phenomenon of mass incarceration—which stabilized at its current high level shortly after 2000—confirmed the systemic underpinnings of this succession of murders and executions, all of which decapitated incipient drives toward working-class unification.

15. See my discussion in “Intersectionality’s Binding Agent: The Political Primacy of Class,” *New Political Science*, 37, no. 4 (2015): 604–619 (also in *Red-Green Revolution*, chap. 8).

16. See Cedric Belfrage, *The America Inquisition, 1945–1960* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973).

17. Discussion and references in Wallis, *Democracy Denied*, 58–60.

The repressive measures taken in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks (epitomized by the USA Patriot Act) escalated the criminalization of dissent, thereby further stifling mass initiative. These conditions make the post-2008 progressive breakthroughs—from the Occupy movement to the big followings aroused by the Sanders campaign to the mass protests against police killings—all the more remarkable. What will be important in carrying this process further, however, are the many other advances in consciousness that have been unfolding mostly in separate grooves and that are not typically seen, either by their own protagonists or by the general public, as part of a broader movement.

Our challenge, then, is in part to create a setting that will encourage artists to extend the impact of what many of them are already doing. I'm thinking of a kind of common platform, which would not only encourage in each artist a heightened awareness of what other artists are producing but would also—and especially—transform the relationship among all the artists from one stressing individual distinction to one of collaboration. Such a process would offer a model that could be extended to other spheres of community-building activity, such as expanding the scope of public space for gardens, for sports, and for social interaction (including political debate and demonstrations). Although anyone can work toward such goals, artists who have attained a certain level of recognition—and who, in some cases, have acquired sizeable fortunes—are particularly well placed to achieve them.

What allows us to imagine such scenarios is the phenomenon—rare except in the performing arts—of individuals who have built up vast audiences in commercial venues, while nonetheless putting forward a deep, if sometimes subtle, critique of the surrounding society. My awareness of such individuals and their works has evolved slowly and remains only partial. It was advanced, however, as I became acquainted with students and faculty at the Berklee College of Music, whose General Education (later Liberal Arts and Sciences) Department I joined in 1996. As a result, I got to know more of the various popular music idioms in a context in which all forms of musical expression are valued. I benefited especially from exchanges of class visits with Matt Jenson (for his course on Bob Marley) and with Bill Banfield (his courses on the 1960s and on sociology of music). This was also the period in which, thanks to my *Socialism and Democracy* colleague Yusuf Nuruddin, I began to comprehend the scope and relevance of hip-hop. Having the good fortune, then, to be introduced (by an incarcerated friend) to the coeditor of a book called *Sounds of Resistance*, I took up the challenge of writing a historical chapter on music and radical politics in the United States.¹⁸

That project gave me the opportunity to pay tribute to artists I had long admired and also to begin acquainting myself with the more commercially popular bands and songwriters whose work I had previously had little, if any, exposure. As I continue this process now, I am pleasantly surprised to discover the range and radicalism of expressions that have, since the 1960s, attracted tens of millions of followers. Among the examples that

18. Victor Wallis, "Song and Vision in the U.S. Labor Movement," in *Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism*, ed. Lindsay Michie and Eunice Rojas (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO/Praeger, 2013), 47–64; updated version in Wallis, *Socialist Practice: Histories and Theories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 205–223.

have impressed me especially are some that have long had the status of classics, although I missed them when they first came out: Marvin Gaye, “What’s Goin’ On”; Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”; Bruce Springsteen, “Born in the USA”; and Tracy Chapman, “Talkin’ About a Revolution,” among others. More recent works that strike me both for their musical quality and for their upfront social critique include “American Idiot” by Green Day, “Land of the Free” by The Killers, and “New National Anthem” by T.I. Nor should we forget the continuing inspirational commentary offered, albeit to a smaller public, in the songs of David Rovics. Finally, a recent addition to the canon, notable for its reflective yet urgent call to action, is Samora Pinderhughes’ concert-piece “The Transformations Suite.”

VII

We must round out this discussion by addressing the problem we began with: What will it take to draw the vast pool of enthusiasm tapped by these works into a political movement strong enough to challenge and finally supplant the capitalist ruling class? A powerful anticapitalist message is already present in the compositions I have mentioned, and, at least implicitly, in many others as well.¹⁹ The immediate question is how people *receive* these works. Can they go beyond just resonating with the words and music? How can they extend and deepen what they are experiencing?

I am reminded of how, at demonstrations, the more inspiring speakers insist that the real work begins when we all go back to where we came from. Out in the public spaces, unless we have come under physical attack, we have mostly just gathered together with our comrades. This can be encouraging and reassuring, especially if we are numerous (and if we attract media coverage), but it’s not enough. The hard part is winning over the uncommitted, and this entails interactions of all kinds, ranging from direct arguments to incidental conversations in the context of work or recreation, or linked to the provision of services (like the free clinics and the breakfasts for children organized 50-plus years ago by the Black Panther Party, or the “garbage offensive” and detoxification programs organized in that same period by the Young Lords²⁰).

From our present discussion, we see that the uncommitted include not just those who oppose us but also those whose needs and demands are entirely compatible with ours, yet who don’t know it. The big task, then, is for activists to get out of their separate grooves and to understand the imperative of unity. Understanding alone is not enough, of course, but it is nonetheless indispensable, both for practical guidance—knowing who we may or may not be able to work with—and for nourishing a core vision that becomes stronger as it assimilates a wider range of experience.

19. See Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs from Billie Holiday to Green Day* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

20. Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 91–114, 302f.

A proper understanding is valuable as well for breaking down artificial boundaries. These include not only those that are erected on the pretext of demographic or cultural differences among people but also those involving categories of analysis. An especially consequential example of the latter is the alleged separation of foreign and domestic policy issues. The most obvious link between the two spheres is found in the straightforward matter of resource allocation: the colossal amounts spent for war dwarf whatever else might be available, either for domestic material needs or for mutually beneficial collaboration with other countries. But the relevance of foreign to domestic policy goes deeper. In particular, how can a government expect to instill mutual respect across “racial” lines if it is constantly stereotyping and demonizing people of other parts of the world in pursuit of its imperial agenda? And how can it expect people to settle their differences peacefully if it is perpetually waging war?

The impact of militarism on the domestic agenda is not merely theoretical. It involves a palpable political culture, built up on the basis of military training, actual military experience (and ensuing mental illness and substance abuse), the “gun rights” fetish, violent blockbuster films, traditional macho values, the ideology of competition, the vigilante heritage embodied in police practices, and (capping everything) politicians’ constant invocation of U.S. “world leadership,” with its implicit disdain for the rights—not to mention the human qualities or the creative abilities—of others. It is of a piece with all the antidemocratic practices we have noted.

If the indispensable mass of people is to join in the struggle for liberation, we will all need to see these multiple connections and feel their aggregate weight. By the same token, we will have to develop an indestructible sense of our commonality—a commonality that excludes only those whose exploitative agenda drives them to perpetuate artificial antagonisms within the majority.

The sense of commonality must be felt at the deepest levels. This is where music can help.

Interdisciplinary Modes of Presentation as Vehicles for Cultural Change in Classical Music

— CARMEN-HELENA TÉLLEZ —

In the opening essay for this book, Dr. William Banfield asks the questions “How do we as creative people alive today sustain cultural relevance? How does our society best represent what is important for living whole today?” (Banfield, “Introduction: On Meaning,” this vol.).

The following attempt to answer these questions comes from the perspective of a creative artist in the field of classical music, one who hails from South America and has therefore inherited both the traditions of classical music and the specific contribution to the art by Latin American culture.¹ The term *classical music* has been the subject of definitions and redefinitions that reflect the changing role that this art form has played in Western culture. I use it in its widest understanding, as art music that emerges from the inherited liturgical and secular traditions of Europe but is now practiced throughout all the Western countries and, effectively, all over the world. Classical music is characterized by signifiers like complex notation (guaranteeing the dissemination of the musical pieces away from aural transmission); ambitious formal structures and ensembles; and rituals of presentation and consumption as a serious and intellectually refined experience. Classical music is arguably the most complex musical phenomenon in human history. It encompasses discrete practices of creation, performance, promotion, and listening. It features an extraordinary array of genres, from motets and minuets to symphonies and opera. Its repertoire has been collected from the initiation of notation in the 8th century to the works composed today under the label of “contemporary classical music.” Most important, like a majestic river, classical music carries within its forms and practices a synthesis and a representation of the intellectual, religious, economic, and social movements that have risen and declined throughout history. Furthermore, as European colonization and evangelization spread throughout the world, classical music imposed its practices on other cultures but unavoidably absorbed their musical features as well, with an increasing progression from abstraction and mediation to direct emulation and quotation. Classical music is a true barometer and mirror of human society. Its artistic manifestations and social ritual in present-day culture offer tremendous opportunities to evaluate and test our quest for social transformation.

If we believe that the arts reveal the innermost workings of the human spirit and can be a tool for social healing and understanding, then the recent upheavals in American society have made William Banfield’s questions extremely relevant for any creative artist,

1. This essay is published posthumously. It constitutes a further development of ideas first presented by the author for the Robert Trotter Lecture of the College Music Society on October 26, 2019, at the national conference in Louisville, Kentucky. Carmen-Helena Téllez was a conductor, composer, scholar, and creative producer. Born in Venezuela, she obtained her doctor of music degree at Indiana University–Bloomington and performed and taught in the United States, Europe, Israel, and Latin America.

including classical musicians. Indeed, it appears that, at the time of this writing, we may be at a watershed moment in the arts. The recent crimes committed against women and the Black community and the devastating disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have only intensified the need for self-examination by the power structures of the classical music establishment, alongside the rest of society. The fields of classical music and opera tend to be among the last to espouse progressive social trends, even though individual classical musicians often embrace progressive ideas in their personal lives, and the lives of classical composers are peppered with stories of their fight for human rights. There are many reasons for this. The inequities in the field originate in the history, dissemination, educational practices, socioeconomic contexts, and professional stresses of the classical music world. Therefore, how can we enact a responsive paradigm shift in the creation, presentation, and consumption of classical music?

In our quest to preserve a place for classical music and opera in society, interdisciplinary modes of music creativity and presentation may provide the richest and perhaps the best tool to navigate and even promote current social and cultural changes. This assertion is tempered by the awareness that classical music is a polyvalent area of human endeavor, and therefore no unidirectional analysis of the field will provide a full and satisfactory understanding of how it is part of the status quo or how it can be part of social and cultural renewal. In a recent roundtable at the University of Cambridge titled “Decolonising Music Studies,”² a group of distinguished interdisciplinary artists and scholars addressed how arguments of classical music as a colonizing tool cannot be separated from its impact on the personal practice of each individual musical artist. In summary, individual composers and performers will ultimately reach a unique language that will respond to her or his objectives, and that may include classical music tools alongside any other musical or artistic strain that responds to a personal quest. While admitting the role classical music appears to have in entrenching the values of a White-dominated patriarchy, the presenters decried the role of academia in supporting this role. At the same time, they protested the habit of progressive disciplines in cultural studies of policing and colonizing the thought processes and expressive rights of artists that would wish full freedom to mix classical music with the musical heritage of any other culture. Many panelists concluded that the personal synthesis of each artist using classical music materials and procedures must be separated from academic analytical trends that can suffocate them. This conclusion acknowledges the reality that classical music methods inherited from Europe now pervade overarching swaths of international musical practice, including many of the traditional and urban poplar genres of non-European countries.

The polarity between the cultural and the personal is only one among those affecting the polyvalent practice of classical music. Another polarity manifests in the international

2. The roundtable was organized as part of the series “Auraliies” organized by the Center for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge on June 2, 2021. The speakers included Alexander Douglas (Cambridge), guest convenor; Diljeet Kaur Bhachu (Royal Northern College of Music); Shzr Ee Tan (Royal Holloway, University of London); and Ken Ueno (University of California, Berkeley). “Roundtable: Decolonising Music Studies,” CRASSH, <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/28992> (accessed June 2, 2021).

reach of the field, even viewed from a purely professional perspective. The power structures and professional power structures of the classical music and opera business models have an international dimension that complicates the establishment of new directions. Artist agencies, orchestra conductors, operatic stars, and magazines can all have a foothold in many countries at once. The Internet has increased the international influence of tastemakers. Because of the perception in some quarters that classical music and opera both represent long-standing colonialist paradigms, artistic success in these fields can be sanctioned as real only in the metropolis and rarely in the provinces. Classical music has a global marketing face that often affects local decisions of programming and casting. The reverse is also true. Classical music can feel international in Venezuela and provincial in London. Therefore, discussions in certain circles about inequities of representation can refer not only to the underrepresentation of people of color but also to the underappreciation of international repertoires, especially music from Latin America or Asia within the United States. As a result of these realities in the classical music profession, an artist of color reaching a zenith in her or his musical career may have to negotiate the conflict of career internationalization versus a duty to represent her or his ethnic values at home.

Within this complex landscape, the discourse of renewal of classical music and opera structures in the United States tends to focus on objectives of diversity and inclusion of women and artists of color. Throughout the past 100 years, waves of empowerment have emerged for diverse disenfranchised constituencies in classical music, only to fall again into the normalcy of indifference, perhaps because the patronage paradigms have not changed much. In the United States, classical music and opera have ultimately depended on a system supported by private money, as opposed to the state-managed patronage system in Europe and Latin America. If one can assume that the state patronage will favor by inertia the nationals of the individual country (albeit mostly from an intellectual class), the sponsorship of private donors and foundations will also favor by inertia their network of sanctioned individuals and organizations, subjecting the classical music phenomenon to sociological and marketing analyses while trying to ensure that the sponsored artists and organizations have the relevance and attitude needed to validate a donor's efforts. Still, because progressive trends do make their mark, one can find sponsorship programs of all kinds seeking to recruit widely among women and persons of color for integration into orchestras, opera companies, university programs, and presenting seasons. All these dynamics proceed through a sieve of marketing and publicity strategies. Occasionally, classical music organizations engage in efforts to entice audiences from minority groups to attend classical music concerts, which is now a fashionable goal. How successful can those efforts be if the central messages remain the same?

The marketing strategies often forget to address the elusive aspects of lived experience that pertain to music of all kinds and that are particularly revelatory of the polyvalent nature of classical music. For example, the appreciation of classical music can be tied to social class more than to race or ethnicity. The intimate enjoyment of music is ultimately personal, and individual choices can potentially transcend the person's social and cultural context. For this reason, classical music can be encountered among people of all racial

profiles and nationalities all over the world. We must investigate the potential of classical music and opera to enter in a dialogue with any and all social groups. Certainly, the enjoyment of classical music in the United States has been tied to a belief in the ideas of the Enlightenment, advancing through the social ranks using the tools of education and hard work. In the Americas in general, for most of the 20th century, attendance to classical music concerts and opera was a sign that a person had the right to consort with the upper and intellectual classes. This is not the same as saying that the classical music repertoire is elitist, but rather that the appreciation of this repertoire and the cultural practices for its enjoyment have become a signifier for intellectual and social attainment. Conversely and perhaps paradoxically, in the 21st century, we see that the most sophisticated listeners of classical music and opera now also share an openness to the best that American urban popular music genres can offer, without apologies or equivocation, establishing occasional parities between the two repertoires.

This leads us to reflect on the associations that classical music has with European colonialism. Notwithstanding the validity of such inquiry, we must realize that the repertory we label as classical music has its origins in Europe but now belongs to the world through layers of exchange, evolution, and transformation. The reasons it has prospered under diverse international, racial, gender, and cultural circumstances lie in its condition as an art form, in spite of its associations with colonialism or forced evangelization. Perhaps the label needs to be switched finally and exclusively to “art music.” Art seeks to communicate visions, values, and emotions we are all capable of experiencing. The artist dares to experiment and polishes her or his technique to be pliable and expressive of personal content. From a strictly artistic perspective, a musical artist can invite any culture and their techniques to the postmodern music table. Composers have absorbed multiple styles for ages, even though sometimes we do not notice it as the years pass. Certainly, Western European classical music has had a pride of place in receiving recognition for its examples of true art music. However, it is also known for incorporating many strains not originally Western European. Time and again, what begins in the fringes of the culture later become mainstream. At the same time, music from other cultures have also done the same and have incorporated techniques of Western classical music in their genres. Art is a sacred crucible of exploration from human to human, mind to mind, heart to heart.

The sociocultural issues described thus far have been extensively and responsibly analyzed by many scholars and music administrators. In my discussion, however, in favor of interdisciplinary modes of musical creativity and presentation, I would like to argue in favor of the experiential dimension of classical music. As William Banfield states: “Today, we need a ‘transformative investment praxis’ for moving ahead, to become our best, to address these problems, and to create better designs forward” (Banfield, “Introduction: On Meaning,” this vol.). Against the aforementioned background, the social upheavals of 2020–2021 have accelerated the pressure on classical music and opera organizations to fulfill objectives of diversity and inclusion in the planning of concert programs; however, it is worth discussing how those programs composed and performed by women and people of color are perceived and experienced by not only the performers but also, and most

important, by the audience. Even when populated by diverse composers, does the context and mode of presentation still reflect the power structures and paradigms of the past?

I assert that new interdisciplinary modes of the presentation of classical music can offer rich opportunities for the examination of diverse cultural and social ways of being, through the exchange of methodologies with other arts and the humanities, the artistic use of technology, and the generation of opportunities for co-creativity or interactivity between performers and the audience. New modes of presentation help us achieve goals of diversity and inclusion while opening classical contemporary music to 21st-century expressivity and signification. Conventional concert programming and presentation rituals—phenomena apart from the music itself—were inherited from the Western European culture of the 18th and 19th centuries, with its charged legacy of colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Even when classical music slowly opens up to new repertoire, and as it extolls some of the highest values known to human, each of the components of the traditional concert format speaks about old hierarchical relationships between social groups and the assumed dominance of one cultural perspective over all others. I will not aim to reject the classical music repertoire as we know it, but I will examine how we can source alternative artistic techniques, meanings, and experiences from the social, ritual, and artistic trove of the world cultures and from realigning our own perceptions in regard to our own classical music culture. In so doing, we may open spaces for the participation of artists, students, and audiences from all walks of life in our classical music and operatic events, breaking negative assumptions in the process.

THE DISRUPTIVE POTENTIAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY MUSIC PRESENTATIONS

New trends in classical music presentation had gained ground gradually before the COVID-19 pandemic, but some enjoyed accelerated usage during the long year of pandemic seclusion and quarantine. For example, the presentation of virtual events through video and digital technologies provided a necessary outlet to reach audiences when all public events were shut down. A blurring occurred of the division between so-called high and low musical styles, the re-emergence of transcriptions, and the exploration of unusual locations for a classical music performance. However, given their potential for reconfiguring the paradigms and power structures in classical music, I focus on interdisciplinary presentations, namely production concepts in which music is combined with other arts, but also possibly with scholarship and new digital technologies. In fact, as we shall see, the blurring of the division between high and low musical styles, the use of transcriptions, or the exploration of unusual locations appear frequently as components of interdisciplinary presentations. I prefer to use the term “interdisciplinary” rather than other common terms like “multisensory,” “multimedia,” “Inter-artistic,” or “intermedia” for several reasons: It suggests that the disciplines can be other than just artistic, that one discipline can borrow the methodology and goals of another discipline, both being transformed in the process, and that because of the research involved, interdisciplinary events tend to break boundaries and open new perspectives on old problems. Furthermore, interdisciplinary

modes of presentation often promote a co-creative interaction between the producing artists to generate the content as well as immersive and interactive approaches to audience participation, rejecting traditional hierarchical postures.

Theater, dance, and the visual arts have already promoted interdisciplinary attitudes in their practices many years ahead of classical music. Among ubiquitous cases, we can find immersive theater and interdisciplinary postmodern dance. Recently, New York witnessed the success of *Sleep No More*, a recreation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in which the audience traveled many rooms in a building alongside the performers, becoming part of the cast and the scene. For a case of postmodern dance, we can refer to the work of the late Pina Bausch (1940–2009). In her choreography for Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, she refers to an anthropological understanding of patriarchal society, with a clear separation between men and women, while also using actual soil as a both a prop and symbol. Furthermore, she would use a co-creative approach with her dancers, asking questions and incorporating their responses into the design of the choreography. In these artworks, the demarcation between one of the arts and the related art form or scholarship blurs subtly.

One may observe that the resulting meaning in these theatrical and dance presentations would not be the same if the other art form or scholarly perspective were absent or changed. It is not a matter of design but of shared methodology that exerts a transformative influence. This inextricable factor of the interdisciplinary approach can contribute potentially to the integration of diverse and noncanonical narratives and artistic languages into a musical presentation. The point of integration of outsider elements may provide the locus for the provocation of agencies of diversity and inclusion, and generally, of subversion of prescribed outlooks and outmoded paradigms. Beyond the planned designs of the artwork's creator, the ultimate objective is to excite the attentive participation of the spectator, because the confluence of unexpected elements will generate questions and reconsiderations of what we took for granted. The interdisciplinary artwork potentially encourages a new understanding of the issues.

Let's focus for a moment on one example in which music was one of the central components of the work and apparently a trigger for its specific profile. In the experimental art film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), the film director Godfrey Reggio reached out to composer Philip Glass to compose the music for what was initially going to be a sequence of images about humankind's role in the destruction of our planet. The composer at first resisted, eventually accepted, and then split the sequence of images into chapters for which he started writing music. Over time, the dialogue between the artists shifted, and the director reconfigured the film structure to match what Glass had proposed; they reportedly ended up composing co-creatively to each other's narrative rather than Reggio controlling what Glass should compose, as is more common in film scoring.³ The result is one of the most influential artworks denouncing man's disrespect for nature and the disaster that will inevitably follow. The language of images and music has become a point of reference for both video artists and composers whenever addressing environmental issues.

3. Godfrey Reggio, dir., *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), imdb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0085809/> (accessed May 30, 2021).

The example of the masterful *Koyaanisqatsi* invites us to observe our own role as viewers and listeners. The film has no words and no linear narrative. The meaning of these images is determined by the associations that the viewer's mind will impose on the relationship between image and music, seeking to make sense of it, in what we could call a form of "conceptual blending."⁴ Therefore, this technique of a wordless combination of music and video can also open spaces for the reinterpretation of canonical repertoires or for the understanding of new music that the viewer has never heard before, which is usually rejected at first by mainstream audiences.

These examples illustrate the potential of interdisciplinary modes of presentation to circumvent expectations in the audience, breaking down staid perceptions and opening the path to a reconsideration of paradigms and structures we take for granted. They achieve this through the actual experience of viewing and participating in the artistic event. The potential for emotional involvement in an interdisciplinary work cannot be underestimated. It follows that emotional involvement and a sense of belonging should be tested as part of any strategy to bring new audiences, and especially audiences of color, people from different ethnic backgrounds, and young people of all kinds to concerts of classical music and opera. Furthermore, without young people of every social group, we cannot achieve the eventual critical mass necessary to enact cultural change.

Considering the potential benefits of the experiential attitude encouraged in the spectator by the interdisciplinary artwork, a creator can take many paths to elicit such experiences. When the creator of the interdisciplinary artwork aspires to address matters of social change in general and diversity and inclusion in particular, he or she can consider the following factors:

- The notion that classical music is strictly European must be substituted by the idea that classical music has evolved paradigmatically into art music; and art music, like other art forms, can now embrace methods and languages from other cultures and streams, both high and low, as long as the realization is virtuosic (by whatever definition), and the message carries an intellectual or humanitarian value beyond commercial goals. Within such a broad definition, the cultural associations tied to the European colonial era can be overcome.
- Through the choice of artistic topics and production processes, the creator must aim to revise or revert the agency of hegemonic groups and embrace the concurrent agency of underrepresented social groups.
- Process-based approaches to artistic creation, involving co-creators from underrepresented groups, would be conducive to situations in which the act of creation matters more than the result, leading to opportunities of learning, empowerment, and innovation.
- Co-creation between all participants in the art work opposes the old top-down, hierarchical authorship model that mimics the patriarchal and colonial paradigms to be superseded.

4. Richard Nordquist, "Definition and Examples of Conceptual Blending," Thought Co., January 29, 2020, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-conceptual-blending-cb-1689780> (accessed June 6, 2021).

- Artists may lead interdisciplinary collectives that can also have an activist role and produce socially engaged art.
- The creator can consider the following parameters in different ways to dissolve old paradigms embedded in the work by its origination or social practice. For example, consider the factors of spatiality and temporality in music: Can music be sculpture? Can art be music? Can we travel through a space with our audience? Can we examine performativity and performance ecologies? Can we create a new work through the observation of performance in all aspects of our lives? Can we consider the materials and the media used in the interdisciplinary music work? Can they impart meaning by themselves?
- Interactivity and immersivity may constitute the most important parameters to consider in the design of an interdisciplinary presentation. They can affect the perception of the message as they enhance emotional involvement and individualized imagination in the spectator through the experience of participation in the creation of the work.
- We are witnessing the beginnings of machine agency and automated practices, enabled by new digital technologies. They offer new languages that will expand the artist's relationship with audiences and society in general.

The devoted traditional classical music listener will counterargue that music does not need the accoutrements of interdisciplinary presentation, as they amount to a distraction. Admittedly, listening to music through an interdisciplinary presentation will constitute a different kind of experience than listening in the dark of a concert hall. The same can be said of listening at home with headphones or in the car during a long trip. That is precisely the point. The psychological space that the spectator affords an interdisciplinary event has a more frequent potential of developing into a physically overt interactive and participatory action. However, such psychological participation already takes place with the expert classical music listener, whereby memory and other psychological contents are attached to musical discourse without the stimulus of visual or staged components. Most likely, this educated listener has had the fortune of developing this capacity of psychological connection over time, usually after being exposed to art music in her or his youth. Furthermore, the history of classical music is replete with discussions of rhetorical and text-painting devices that excite the listener's imagination. Still, this self-sufficiency in the act of listening does not preclude all other potential listening experiences. On the contrary, interdisciplinary presentations have a likely pedagogical role in teaching certain spectators not familiar with classical music to engage in active listening, projecting associations and emotional reactions unto the music. At the same time, for the expert listener, interdisciplinary presentations may offer surprising insights into the musical discourse, including the breakup of unquestioned assumptions that dominate the culture. Either way, active listening is the ideal approach to art music, with or without interdisciplinary input.

When designing an interdisciplinary musical presentation, the following components should be present to fully engage the delineated potentials; First, we must secure an exchange

of languages, methodology, and goals between music and the visual arts, staging, scholarship, sociocultural concerns, and technology, and not just a simple juxtaposition of other arts around music. Embracing new technologies would give us tools for immersion and interaction with the audience, besides being ubiquitous in our current society. They are part of our present context. This *modus operandi* will open the doors for languages and materials that are not conventional in classical music presentation, and most especially, it might prompt us to investigate and incorporate the artistic forms, genres, and devices of cultures and social groups not usually related to the Eurocentric view of classical music. The exchange of methodologies between the collaborating artists, being responsive and co-creative to each other, would eschew the hierarchical decisions by a single artistic director.

Changing the contexts where performances take place may imply seeking unconventional environments for performance or addressing the musical work as part of a sociocultural issue that provides a new context and even suggests an embodiment of new philosophical ideas in the social dialogue. In short, context affects perception. Beyond the implicit artistic merits of recontextualization, this approach will bring classical music works into locales where audiences do not experience classical music as a matter of course. It has the potential to break the occasionally stifling classical concert protocol that some define as elitist.

The two factors that will provoke most successfully a new state of mind in the listener are the experiences of immersion, in which the audience is surrounded by the work (as opposed to seating separate from the work in the conventional concert format), and interactivity, in which case the listener engages in the co-creation of the artwork (as opposed to the supreme authority of the composer).

The participant spectator is a key objective in the interdisciplinary work of art. The spectator would feel a sense of ownership of the work, breaking paradigms and allowing for communication between cultures, social classes, and historical values. At the same time, immersion and interactivity provoke the emergence of emotions and insights that will allow the artistic message to connect more fluidly and directly. The creators of the interdisciplinary work acknowledge that the ultimate meaning takes place in the mind and heart of the spectator.

A music professional can engage in these interdisciplinary modes in concert situations as well as in workshops and classes. The visual components in an interdisciplinary concert potentially reveal embedded or subliminal concepts, designs, narratives, and symbols inside the music. Sometimes this content has been forgotten in a society that no longer studies classical culture, or it is foreign to constituencies that do not come from the Western European culture. The other side of the equation counts, too. Music from a non-Western European culture can be represented visually, so it engages an inclusive audience. Therefore, visual representations of the embedded concepts in music can allow us to understand what we could not perceive just aurally. Conversely, a subversive or contrarian visual representation of the embedded concepts, with the usage of visual languages from nonhegemonic constituencies, will excite new opportunities for inquiry, representation, dialogue, and emotional engagement.

An interdisciplinary project can evolve in the manner of a workshop in which different constituencies can debate human and social issues without risk, through the act of artistic expression. The latter can produce a fruitful dialogue, especially with young people. The specific

issues of these constituents can be transmuted into musical and theatrical actions, which then can be part of a coherent whole—one that can be expressive, transformational, and beautiful, and therefore, it can be conducive to personal insight and even social healing. In terms of possible social engagement, the modality of co-creativity—when the production concept relies on the creative decisions of all participants and not only on a music or stage director, aspires to operate in a nonhierarchical manner. The decisions can come from anywhere. The diverse and co-creative constituencies can even include the audience. When we all co-create the presentation, the potential arises to challenge the preconceived meanings of a piece of music.

CASE STUDIES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

An artist or college professor may be triggered by an infinite variety of factors to enter into the experimentation with an interdisciplinary concept. Although I address some typical models here, we should never consider an interdisciplinary mode of presentation to be a formula or even a template. The action of devising an interdisciplinary form of presentation is an individualized creative act, and therefore it should respond to your context and to the people who are going to collaborate with you. In this case, your deliberate creative intent is to create opportunities of creative action by all your collaborators. This becomes particularly pregnant with possibilities when your co-creators do not come from the assumed world of classical music, Western European high culture, or comfortable upper-middle classes. I provided examples of a few models for Western classical music works that may enter into an engagement with the art of other cultures, with aspects of popular culture, or with topics of concern from underrepresented, underserved, or discriminated constituencies. The list is not exhaustive by any means, as the potential for creators to device fruitful combinations can be infinite. However, any of these models by itself can lead a classical music artist to the desired objectives, and often, the used techniques can appear in pairs or in constellations. I have provided an example for each model. Please note that some of these examples have not been labeled specifically as interdisciplinary works seeking diversity and inclusion, but ultimately, they effectively give us a general guide we can use to pursue goals of diversity and inclusion in our presentations. In all cases, they promote a reconsideration of expected paradigms by the spectator. Also, the size of these models should not represent the critical factor about their suitability. The combination of arts and disciplines can be achieved also with small resources, such as, for example, those required by a song cycle. One must concentrate instead on how elements are mixed and how one can adapt the methodologies to your environment, because, in this paradigm, all artistic elements, no matter their origin, and no matter the message, can be incorporated.

LINEAR MODEL

The first model consists of the creation of an original work that mixes styles derived from diverse traditions in a linear sequence. This model elicits a dialogue among the performers about the values that are expressed in the different traditions and promotes a sense of belonging to a common artistic objective. More often than not, this model will

force classical musicians to share the performance stage or even engage in the practice of traditional or urban popular styles, leading to an understanding of the technical and aesthetic achievements of each.

One such case is *La Pasión según San Marcos* [St. Mark Passion], composed by Osvaldo Golijov. The work recontextualizes a canonical story, as the Passion of Jesus Christ is equated to the suffering of exploited peoples in Latin America. The Argentinian composer addresses diversity and inclusion through the use of diverse Latin American, Spanish, and Sephardic popular music languages without much transcription or mediation and in a linear sequence. Composed with a classical oratorio structure, it mixes contemporary classical techniques, including digital manipulation, but the composer also commissioned collaborative segments written in nonmediated popular styles, which in turn attach their own symbolism to the work. The musical objective appears to address issues of historic exploitation while lifting representative popular genres of the affected communities into the expressive realm of high art. The work requires acting, dancing, and possible memorization by the choir, as the music can be learned aurally. In this situation, choral singers can apply vocal techniques and expressions fully belonging to popular and ethnic traditions. It requires popular performers who are willing to enter into the rehearsal process of a classical oratorio but also classical conductors and performers who are willing to learn the aural traditions in the popular repertoire. In short, both groups have to go beyond their regular concert expectations. Conductors, usually at the top of the classical music totem pole, must confront the learning processes of absorbing popular genres with inflexions that cannot be classically notated. Although a conductor from a Latin American country⁵ may have a small advantage, their classical training will be not much different than that of a conductor from the United States⁶ or Europe. All classically trained conductors will be changed by the learning process imposed by this work.

CONVERSE MODEL

A second model to be examined has enjoyed a long-standing presence in Western classical music—in reverse. Classical composers have frequently transcribed and reinterpreted the musical strands of other cultures, especially if they are based in multicultural societies. In the converse model, one can transcribe a Western European classical work into the instruments and musical idioms of a non-Western European tradition. This elicits a trans-traditional dialogue and transmits the approach to new audiences. One such experiment took place at the Teatro Nacional Sucre of Quito, in Ecuador, with *La Flauta Mágica de los Andes* [The Magic Flute of the Andes], produced in 2018. This transtraditional transcription and recontextualization of a canonical work was developed in a workshop environment, through the collaboration with virtuoso practitioners of Andean popular music. The art of

5. For a version conducted by Venezuelan conductor Maria Guinand, see “Festival Música Cartagena 2012—La Pasión según San Marco Osvaldo Golijov,” YouTube, January 13, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5S-MedsX7DY>

6. For a version conducted by American conductor Robert Spano, see “¿POR QUÉ? de La Pasión según San Marcos de GOLIJOV,” YouTube, March 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zZYRBYaCfI>

transcription is one of the most ubiquitous tools used in interdisciplinary presentation, and it offers many opportunities to connect cultures and social groups. Practiced for centuries, transcription is earning new respect among composers and scholars. The Teatro Sucre aimed at bringing audiences to opera that had never visited before.

Of course, the specter of cultural appropriation emerges whenever a process of transcription is taking place. The complete opera by Mozart was transcribed for the National Orchestra of Andean Instruments. The libretto was translated into Spanish and Kichwa, with the godlike figures in Mozart's opera syncretized into Andean divinities, while the presentation aesthetic followed Ecuadorean popular traditions, such as costumes, animals, and puppets, which were made by indigenous artists. The producers assessed the areas that would remain canonic and the areas that would be transcribed and recontextualized. The solo singers were still trained in operatic *bel canto*, while the transcription into the Andean instruments generated many opportunities for interaction with the Andean music players, who proposed technical solutions for their instruments and alternative Ecuadorean dances for Mozart's most popular characters.

Was the Teatro Sucre engaging a new variation of neocolonization? Artistic director Chía Patiño had engaged in a thorough comparative study of the religious cosmologies between Mozart's libretto and Ecuadorean mythology and found fascinating parallelisms that informed her conceptualization. In the end, Teatro Sucre appealed to a new audience who came to an opera for the first time, and in a parallel fashion, the upper classes of Ecuador, still steeped in traditions from Spain, learned unexpected details about myths and crafts of the indigenous cultures of Ecuador.⁷

CO-CREATIVE MODEL

A third model provides some of the most startling opportunities for breaking down paradigms and looking at the art of disenfranchised communities with respectful eyes. In September 2019, the Opera Nationale de France presented a production of Jean Philippe Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* [The Amorous Indies]. With musical direction by Leonardo García Alarcón, stage direction by Clément Cogitore, and the choreography of Bintou Dembélé, an artist of Senegalese descent, the opera applied several genres of hip-hop street dance to this epitome of French Baroque opera-ballet.⁸ The dance style was not mediated to match the overarching style of the opera but rather was set in startling contrast to it, allowing for antipodal and simultaneous coexistence of two or more artistic languages coming from diverse constituencies, without adaptations, asking the spectator to draw their own meaning out of an ostensible incongruence. This modality does not intend to translate one cultural expression from the other, but instead they are allowed to coexist so that the

7. "Flauta Mágica de los Andes Intro Obertura," YouTube, October 18, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4XTl1MX1Vc&t=2s> (accessed May 31, 2021).

8. "Les différents styles de danse—Les Indes Galantes," YouTube, July 29, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNriTAq9Fbs> (accessed May 31, 2021).

participants express themselves freely with their own context, but the audience can establish its own parallelisms and new levels of understanding. The excitement seen in recordings of the rehearsals reveals the benefits of this modality. As one of the dancer's states, each street style represents a way of interpreting the world, a *microsystème* [microsystem],⁹ but, as Dembélé explains, all the dualities become one artwork. Of course, critical reviews immediately pointed out the dilemma of cooperating with an opera-ballet extolling the triumph of the French Enlightenment over the "Other," which many scholars insist reeks of colonialism and white supremacy.¹⁰ And still, the unavoidable reality of the moment was the spectacular virtuosity of the hip-hop dancers, their capacity to renew an almost forgotten opera, and the wild enthusiasm of the audience. Certain aspects of the hip-hop dance style offered also unexpected revelations. One expects drama and rhythmic vibrancy from this dance style, not nuance and lyricism, and yet this was evident in the choreography for the air "Viens Hymen" [Come, Hymen], when solo dancer Cal Hunt dances *en pointe*, with exquisite lyrical sensitivity, with his sneakers. In short, both traditions made discoveries of each other.

The essential tool required is free co-creativity. The subversive confrontation of two cultures and ways of being can produce some of the most fascinating artistic results and opportunities for dialogue between dominant and underserved social groups. Each participant should be allowed to offer what emerges authentically from their social and cultural experience. This model also works well in a workshop environment of trust and nonjudgmental participation, where topics of representation and techniques of expression can be tested and accepted. In some respects, it can be brought fruitfully to educational situations in which it would avoid the stages of preparation of typical classical music productions that some could consider a form of indoctrination.

TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL

The last model I consider (although there are potentially many more) is the creation of an original interdisciplinary musical work through the embodiment, ritualization, or allegory of the experiences lived by nonhegemonic communities. This allows for transformative and healing opportunities, especially if developed in a communal workshop situation. Depending on the musical materials employed, it could lead to the reconsideration of a heretofore popular genre as high art. With this in mind, let's consider "This Is America," the video created by Donald Glover (aka Childish Gambino) as a model for ritualizing and allegorizing experience.¹¹ We see some aspects of interest: The video ritualizes and allegorizes the experience of Black urban youth and its encounters with gun violence. By its complex philosophical reflection, it exalts the genres of Black urban American rap

9. "Les Indes Galantes, Behind the Scene—Coulisse," YouTube, May 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbOi7eQ5IV0> (accessed May 31, 2021).

10. "Les Indes Galantes, Behind the Scene—Coulisse," YouTube, May 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbOi7eQ5IV0> (accessed June 1, 2021).

11. Donald Glover, "Childish Gambino—This Is America (Official Video)," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VY0jWnS4cMY> (accessed June 3, 2021).

and hip-hop into high art. A measure of its potential evaluation as high art emerges in several examples of exegesis and reaction videos on the meaning of the piece.¹² These interpretations can disagree on the core message of “This Is America,” further testifying to its intrinsic complexity and layering—another signature of high art.

Another aspect of “This Is America” can give rise to interesting discussions. It has generated countless emulations, paraphrases, and parodies, each attached to a particular sociopolitical situation. The template of “This Is America” has been coopted for critiques of violence, corruption, and injustice in many countries. Although the emulations emerged first in African countries (“This Is Nigeria,”¹³ “This Is Kenya,”¹⁴ and others), soon thereafter we found paraphrases in the Middle East, East Asia, Europe and the Americas, as it is documented in yet another summarizing video.¹⁵ All of these videos rework the artistic elements of the original, such as the music, the location, the dance moves, and the outfits, while providing variations on the theme of violence and political corruption as it applies to the particular country. So, a question arises as to the “neocolonizing” effect of American popular music on the genres of other countries: Why is “This Is America” so influential?

In many of the reaction videos and the comments by viewers, a common theme emerges, namely, that it is perturbing to digest the scenes of violence while admiring the infectious beat and the imaginative dance moves. Many of the interpretations allude to the dichotomy between the pervasive violence affecting Black America, and the distractions offered by music and dancing, which supposedly prevent meaningful corrective action by the community. However, an argument also can be made that the music and the moves are intrinsically outstanding. It is their virtuosity that seduces the American and international viewer into watching “This Is America” again and again, while producing parodies and discussions. “This Is America” has artistic merit tied to its political message. Perhaps the artistic merit permits the fullest projection of the political message. If “This Is America” were to be canonized as a piece of high art, what would it say about the reception of canonized works of Western European classical music in the former colonies? As scholar and Gospel artist Alexander Douglas declared in the aforementioned discussion at Cambridge, “I love Gospel, and I love Bach and Telemann. Am I colonized?”

The point is not to answer this question but to acknowledge the question as the desirable result of this model of musical creation. It demonstrates that allegorizing and

12. Make Stuff, “This Is America: Childish Gambino’s Genius Absurdity,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HfsU07jHis> (accessed June 3, 2021); Insider, “Hidden Meanings Behind Childish Gambino’s ‘This Is America’ Video Explained,” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_LIP7qguYw (accessed June 3, 2021); Ladan Osman, “New Black Notions: Childish Gambino’s ‘This Is America,’” *World Literature Today*, 92, no. 4 (July/August 2018): 40–41; Muted Alpha Behavior, “Reacting at Work to: This is America (Official Video) by Childish Gambino,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml4VJJjytmA> (accessed June 3, 2021).

13. “Falz—This Is Nigeria,” YouTube, May 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UW_xEqCWrm0 (accessed June 3, 2021).

14. “Childish Gambino This Is America Cover This is Kenya IGIZA,” YouTube, June 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7uzheM1nGk> (accessed June 4, 2021).

15. “This Is America (Around The World),” YouTube, June 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6XJ7CeEgM8> (accessed June 3, 2021).

ritualizing the lived experience of the disenfranchised into an interdisciplinary work of art can disrupt the expected paradigms, to the point that genres considered apologies of dystopia and signifiers of social rejection can become high art and soon enter the canon, revealing new truths to all who partake of them.

Many more models can be explored. As mentioned earlier, something as simple as changing the context of performance, possibly out of the concert hall, can alter our perception of both the musical elements involved and the value of the experience. It would permit members of different social groups to engage in a joint experience without the prejudices tied to the classical music concert hall. We must recognize that the rituals in classical music presentation evoke the European cast systems with its constant bowing and predilection for Western European repertoire by male composers. Changing the context can redirect the attention of the audience to the composers' different messages, because many among them often espoused republican and liberal ideals or toiled under difficult circumstances.

CONCLUDING NOTES

All these examples can serve as points of departure for us creators, performers, administrators, and teachers to develop interdisciplinary artistic experiences, where our colleagues, students, and audiences, no matter their profile, can act collaboratively to co-create a unique work of art, expressing content that can subvert the old structures that need to be superseded for our society to progress. Interdisciplinary modes of presentation often can open new rituals beyond or outside those of the conventional concert hall, conveying alternative meta-messages and potential new paradigms. In this regard, the use of modern technologies, digital or otherwise, leads us to explore immersion, interactivity, and new environments for the enjoyment of art that are not available in the conventional theater.

The American composer and philosopher John Cage (1912–1992) and the international art movement Fluxus suggested that one should embark on an artwork without a conception of its end. They understood the work as a site of interaction between artists and audience. The experiential process of creating must be privileged over the finished product.¹⁶ Consider also the tenet by George Maciunas and Kristine Stiles, cofounders of Fluxus, that “global humanism [could be] achieved through the breakdown of boundaries in artistic media, cultural norms, and political conventions,” and that “the extraordinary is latent in the ordinary.”¹⁷ Both ideas persuade us that we can create an artwork with any one of our fellow men and women if we allow the process to take us in any direction.

As a closing thought, one must consider challenges and questions that are likely to appear as we experiment with interdisciplinary presentation for classical music within the crucible of the current dialogue in cultural studies. For example, we may encounter concerns about cultural appropriation, and we may not have an easy response to this. In theory, our

16. Elizabeth Armstrong, ed. “The Occasion of the Exhibition,” in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis, Minn.: Walker Art Center), 24.

17. “Support Us,” George Maciunas Foundation Inc., 2023, <http://georgemaciunas.com/donate/>.

adoption of the artistic products from another culture or social group risks becoming an act of exploitation. One must be conscious in the preparation of the artistic work to address one's moral goal in the embrace of another culture's art form as well as the acquiescence of the coparticipants from that culture. It behooves the producers to understand the technical merits and spiritual values of the adopted artistic genre. Even then, miscommunications and misunderstandings may arise as a result of the polyvalent function of art music. As described earlier, this will remain the prerogative and the risk of the individual artist, which can be analyzed ultimately in the light of the merit and authenticity of the artwork itself. Another likely challenge will emerge from our institutions. The implementation of innovative interdisciplinary models may demand a dialogue between artistic organizations or academic units that are not used to working with each other. This may involve decision making about financial resources, the use of space and personnel, or the sharing of academic credits when the interdisciplinary project is part of a course. This dialogue must be started early, as the solution may be found in unexpected locations.

In spite of these challenges, new interdisciplinary modes of creativity and presentation for classical music and opera can become the single most effective way to experience new paradigms, both in the realm of our imaginations and in the form of a ritual. Members of a diverse community can take part of a common artistic goal, and in so doing, diversity and inclusion can be achieved, not by learning guidelines but rather by doing something meaningful together.

Conclusion

— WILLIAM BANFIELD —

[The slaves] would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune . . .

I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do . . . they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains.

—Frederick Douglass (ca. 1817–1895), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845, 13–14)

PRELUDE OF A LAST SONG

I realized, albeit exciting, a set of essays focused on the huge issue of value construction is daunting. We press forward in the hopes of shaping a better world to be a part of. Without doubt, since 2020, we have been facing the most arresting cultural shakeup of our times. This has rattled every common endeavor we have known.

We began this collection of essays by exploring the critical perspectives on the rich and always moving multiple meanings of modern culture and arts perspectives, which included thinking about the products of the creative humanities, fine arts, music, literature, film, politics, and society, including approaches about cultural symbols, practices, intriguing personalities, movements, and histories that contribute to the landscape of contemporary modern living and that create generational bridges.

Our idea was to consider the roles of power, ritual, identity, gender, expression, race, and ethnicity, to draw many readers in and to give them glimpses of what cultural expressions and ideas mean today. My role was to keep the contributors moving toward the goal of speaking to who we are as artists and thinkers in this time. How do we name, establish, reboot old, and build new value sets for the way forward? As we teach, share, and explore ideas, we hope our general thesis provides a “curriculum set” based on music, dance, writings, and paintings of social protest to encourage creative freedom from which comes all of the expressive culture we have seen in contemporary culture for the past 120 years. The vault is wide open and inviting to collect that gold and to establish our value sets agenda. Films, magazines, television, and media are all open for the dance. That’s where our value sets can be ritualized. The very exploration of values is, in itself, a spiritual quest for living and a search for redemption through creativity and ritual.

We have been under a “social-political-economic-psyche-health-spiritual-shake-up malaise.” The dark cloud of the COVID-19 disruption and the national political imprisonment and chaos of the reign of President Trump, 2016-2020, is lifting, and people are bursting to get on with life. Let’s hope our complacency with the poisons of privilege, power, and greed has been lessened and replaced with compassion and care for others.

We hope, too, that our cultural arts narratives in these collected essays present a tapestry of the documented presence of creative arts accomplishments and reflections that define modern living. We speak of an intersection of intercultural and generational visions and expressions in American culture. These narratives that define our human condition are the records that tell of our values and that suggest ways our lives are being lived. We believe this deepens our commitment to contributing to our human stories. Race, class, and economics are still the quintessential divisions in our land that raise pertinent questions about how and what we value. I am reminded of Spike Lee’s 1989 film *Do the Right Thing* in which Mookie asks “the mayor” (Ozzy Davis) what to do. The old man responds, “Do the right thing.” In the heat of that night as the whole block is lit up in a rage over these questions, Mookie throws a garbage can through a shopkeeper’s window. Was it the right thing?

CULTURAL STUDIES

We are talking about cultural studies as an important operating mechanism allowing us to identify and define our value codes. Culture is most powerful when we understand it as a carrier and critique that challenges accepted problematic norms, but it also defines and sets the bar for new norms. Culture is critical to thinking about the possibilities of living together.

Culture defines and gives direction to agency. Agency directs our attention to setting norms, standards, and the pursuit of the good, as defined through many shared conversations. Culture, as we’ve demonstrated, stands in to represent, substantiate, and propagate our humanistic propositions and universal measures of values. Culture, too, is about our moral dimension’s compass. Forward thinking is needed to counter elitist ideas and lean toward common good and citizenry. Some people have spoken of this as a search for meaning, our collective symbolic discourses, including certain kinds of significance with signifiers. This meaning is how humans measure and interpret our actions, beliefs, institutions, and identity. Value construction is a tall order, for sure, but it’s increasingly essential.

WITHOUT A WORLDVIEW, YOU HAVE NO VIEW IN THE WORLD

I wanted to curate a book that asked us to share what it means to consider art expression and ideas related to society and why this is of value today. How is this culturally defined? A cultural lens is the barometer for how we measure what has worth.

One of the main concerns in 2020 and beyond is what will be, as has been termed “the new normal.” Certainly, our defined values will have shifted. So, how do we now live as we move forward through these various engagements? This is, as we have shared, important stuff.

These thoughts combine to provide a view of culture and the by-products of that culture that are our human expression, actions, and ideas communicated through arts, education, and the relational congruency of economics and societal governance that represents our organized society.

The ideas discussed in this collection, one would hope, instill within us a determination to continue to search for and hold up practices and ideals that secure the best of what we need to define our passions and purpose for living. Simply citing and celebrating the status quo, the existing state of affairs, and statistics with ignorance and delusion do not enable us to make any better adjustments or arguments. Nor do we deserve any awards for knowing the long historical trajectory of the worst of modern American's poisoned practices. You get up every day and live a life that is representative of the best you have to offer.

That's why many people have committed to represent art and work in education, to be committed to turning up the dials of a potentially sleepy mind, and to championing the causes, the voices, and the experiences that we need to be drawn toward and the songs and the dances that heal the land.

DISLOCATED

Today's thinkers are deeply involved in a tussle and a dance with major paradigm shifts in culture, including what defines us and what delivers. The quintessential question we must ask is, What must we do with the gifts we have to put out into the world? What does it mean, where will it matter, what is this commitment, what focus will it bring, and how will it all matter in shaping one's life in this world? And, what is the sound of that world of ideas we live and breathe in? You have to acknowledge, understand, and accept your gifts and then use them to transform the world with work that inspires and lifts people. We need to repair our dislocation in this time of huge disruptions.

In 2020 I found myself near death and in the cold grips of an intubation-induced dreamscape after a devastating COVID-19 attack of my bodily systems. I had to find my way home to consciousness and health. So, I spent the summer of 2020 gaining and restoring my health and in the process, trying to understand, through spiritual and artistic contemplation, what it means to think about life. We all did.

So much has been stated of American creative artistry in the 20th and 21st centuries in all its forms, which have become a revolutionary force of human expression that has deeply affected and influenced the world. Where else can human truths be found? Where else can the most critical questions of our culture come from? Why else would we be devoted to culture, music, arts, and expression?

ARTS: THE HOPE FOR A SINGING SONG

For me, music is reality . . . the true position of music is at the center
of human culture . . .

—Stravinsky, "Music and the Statistical Age: An interview with Igor Stravinsky" (1966)

[Inspiration] is found as a driving force in every kind of human activity, and is brought into action by effort . . . (174)

Yet art postulates communion, and the artist has an imperative need to make others share joy which he experience himself . . . (175)

I live neither in the past nor in the future. I am in the present . . . I can only know what truth is today. That is what I am called upon to serve, and I serve it in all lucidity. (176)

—Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (1936)

Music is the sound of the universe telling you it's time to listen. If, with the arts, we could strike a blow against mediocrity, thumb our noses at power, hate, and unjust action, lift a story that inspires joy, pull from life a creative melody that guarantees a sigh and wonderment about beauty, build a room in which everyone could find a friend, and change the mind of a young person to find a better truth for themselves, well, that would be a goal to work, live for, and die happily having tried to reach. Teach, share, and change our world.

If arenas, dance halls, and concerts halls were to blast our unifying themes and value sets, these would come through the practitioners of arts, education, and societal norms that are hugely shaped by economics and politics, which define our societal and structural policies.

The story of arts, our music, and the cultivation of ideas becomes the expression of people and transports our cultural heritage, which has immense power and value. Our very existence and definitions of identity reside in these relevant cultural expressions. That's the meaning of the song being sung today.

Arts can inspire and fire up imagination and agency. Education prepares the mind for engagement, and economics, paired with political position, can power our sustainable ideas forward. So the arts, education, economics, and politics (as in civic engagement) are the four-pronged partnership needed to transform our society in measurable and sustainable ways.

We shared of arts that speak of hard work. Let's face it: music and the arts are being challenged by all-consuming competing forces that are driven by soured politics and commercial economics. What is relevant and being valued is now different from what we remember when we grew up. We worked hard to make it our bright shining spectacle. Perhaps we'll just have to accept that the times have shifted in how young people see art. That shift doesn't alter or lower the value of this work, nor what is produced and seen as positive moving forward. The better our work, the better it stands out, and in time, folks will see the difference in this type of work and run toward it. There is so much noise and clutter and toys on the table. It is no wonder that nobody can feel a good tone anymore or hear a timeless lyrical tale. But I hope our songs will resonate with people today who need a singing song.

We return to John Coltrane's 1962 remarks on this larger premise when he concludes:

The 'jazz' musician . . . does not have this problem at all [having difficulty in finding a positive philosophy of justification for their art] . . . the whole face of the globe is our community. You see it is really easy for us to create. We are born with this feeling that just comes out no matter what the conditions exists. . . . Any music which could grow and propagate itself as our music has, must have a hell of an affirmation belief inherent in it . . . we all know that this word which so many seem to fear today, "Freedom," has a hell of a lot to do with this music. . . . Truth is indestructible. Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, [artists] are forever guided by that great and eternal creative urge. (Coltrane 1962)

To be forever guided by that "great and eternal creative urge" demands a certain perspective, a certain determined agenda. Arts allegiance is governed by the power of creativity. That commitment never seeks to be powerful over anybody. It seeks to be of service to others.

One of the byproducts of art at its best is that when others experience art, creativity, and the expressions of that creative work, they can experience an inward engagement to tap into that larger creative power that brings about a transformative energy. For lack of a more concrete explanation, art lifts the soul.

"The exposure of art transforms," Pam Grier shared in a retrospective on the work of Black women in the 1960s and 70s in films (Richen 2021). That word *free* is used in all kinds of contexts and deserves clarity each time. As in the Coltrane reference, the Pam Greer quotation speaks to moving the dials; moving people to justice, equity, and empowerment; seeking better spaces; learning how we live, love, and aspire; and understanding how we build community, family and, our common values in society.

This work to lift others is what a true artist understands their human purpose to be every time people are met by creative acts of love and that love is witnessed in a painting, or seen in a dancer's swirl, or heard in the evocative words of a great story or poem, or felt when listening to a great band. This grounded allegiance of the arts, this cultural paradigm, transcends all national and global boundaries. People in every culture are giving voice to their deeper human meaning through participation in the rituals of arts that both record and fuel human experiences. The more we seek to understand what it means to be human, the more we extend our own existence. Today, the bigger a journey becomes, we must ask, How does one become a model human being in the society we live in?

As shared in the introduction, we get to the answer only with the intersectionality of dialogues that allow us to see more clearly the ways in which the collision of abuses, unfair actions, discrimination, and disruption can be seen as a connected system of harm. The cultivation of art and ideas is understood more deeply as a counter to this harm. It is the springboard to actions, as we can do better. Comfort makes it difficult to see and hear tangles. A reboot from all sides is necessary to ensure that what others need, and how we respond defines and informs this much-deserved comfort. To achieve this, we have to find that "Great Good Place," (Murray 2012, 11) and define that place in ways that speak

to common experiences. Then, people have to find that they value that place, walk to get there, and stay.

So, these throughlines, as we have tried to define them, have come to be about defining artistic roles, positions, and rituals and functions over time that exist within artistic practices as outgrowths of an expression of phenomenology. The essential premise is that creative individuals have an important voice in describing our ultimate concerns and explaining how the world is viewed as well as how the interpretation of that work can be understood. This effort comes out of creative expressions, perspectives, and journeys in our history and through popular arts forums. This is all about *culture* as the paradigm for all points moving forward in human interaction.

We have expressed concerns about the potential deteriorating impact of our current construction of modern culture. A guiding idea (i.e., agency) demands we not conform to the world but rather transform it. Arts, in all genres, have at their disposal languages of experiences that position them to address life in many colors, sometimes all at once, and this committed work, we argue, conveys critical messages.

We have argued, too, that contemporary education equips our society in this era to think about a sense of ourselves as participating and contributing to culture from the standpoint of an individual, critical, creative thinker. These are important aspects of artistry, history, culture, values, and spiritual-social-political plains. My own comfort as an artist and educator has allowed me to fully extend the argument that arts examine our human condition and pose important questions about self, reflection, and our lives and about what and who are around us.

Our artists ask important compelling questions, seeking to find meaning and a purpose in life, and then demand that we explore and reflect on those pictures of life. Life is a waiting canvas upon which to paint. Be artists and paint moving forward.

EDUCATION IS ELEVATION

In our culture, a good and proper education is a social justice ideal and a civil rights mandate. An empowered society is one in which everyone is given the right to participate in education and has economic rights. The gears of the politics of improvement and power can lead directly, perhaps, to the path to achieve financial stability. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) were attempts to close the achievement gap, and although parts of this legislation were problematic, connecting these issues to education reform directly affects communities and attempts to move us toward societal stability.

From his *I Got Schooled*, M. Night Shyamalan, shared, “when it comes to education, change means changing people’s minds” (Shyamalan 2013, 11). America did not become a nation of educational apartheid entirely by chance. A chunk of the problems was self-inflicted. We did this to ourselves. In 1779, in the Massachusetts Constitution, John Adams wrote, “The preservation of [the people’s] rights and liberties . . . depend[s] on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among different orders of the people . . .” (Mass. Const. 1780).

Since the late 1980s, academic circles have moved to make higher education lean more heavily toward being culturally centered, to being bound more by living relevancy than by academic theory, and to exceed the limits of the canon. The dilemma and the challenge, of course, is to find a balance and a dialogue of what is relevant, what values and practices are to be revered, what is relational, what connects, what moves life forward, and what matters most. In an arts conceptual world, it's a bit strange to think of any of this as new or that culture, theory, and practice could be disconnected. As we have shared, in Black music practice in particular, from reggae, to church, to bebop, you are not allowed on stage or in the ring cycle to participate in the ritual of playing music unless you *can* play. And you are not allowed to play anything unless you have "something to say," and saying something, having soul, or being able to swing is about the people in your community that you represent.

Art is how and what the musicians speak about; it is the condition of the times we live in. This is a social-aesthetic-cultural-performance analysis of James Brown, Aretha Franklin, The Rolling Stones, Ellington, Run DMC, and John Coltrane. Again, everybody has to be invited to the dance halls and the concert halls to be part of the sharing.

My entire research focus as an artist-scholar-teacher has been to explore, document, and value the exchange of artists' ideas in music, culture, and history and to focus on things like the value of history and spiritual-social-political meaning in music. Everything I know about my people, my cultural history, is given through Black music and arts. So, for me, that makes this history and the arts critical to life, not to analysis. If you study this history, this great evolving story, you will find life has greatly sculpted a movement of personalities, ideas, hearts, values, spirit, science, innovation, music, literature, and arts.

So how do we move forward?

We have to teach and preach a dialogue and discussion model of practices within a contemporary social-cultural education. This is what music once sounded like, this is how the artists looked, this is what they said about how they looked and sounded, and this is what it means when we say, "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing" (Ellington 1931). Today, you've got/we've got a flow and a bounce. This is how we find where the ideas are, this is how the people respond, and this is where we are today. Now, how do we bring the best of these traditions and models together and connect them to move forward? A more complete approach requires cross-relational, multidisciplinary ideas.

As this relates to cultural transfer, the biggest challenge in social-cultural education is to engage the youngest generations in these legacies, to generate interest in these multiple forms of expressions, and to connect older traditions in relevant and real ways—in jazz, for example, connecting Louie Armstrong to Christian Scott, Oscar Pettiford to Esperanza Spalding, Mary Lou Williams to Erika Badu, the Bad Plus, and Robert Glasper.

If programs, faculty, and community leaders do not make these styles and eras valuable and fail to meet definitions of current consciousness, then passing on a sustainable torch of ideas that matter and have meaning for everyday people will be all the more challenging in the days ahead.

The elephant in the room is generational value transfer. This values-engagement work is critical because, as these essays make clear, values are what people believe in, and people

are committed to do the work for what they believe in and live for. If we instill the right values across the cultural spectrum, we can ensure the power of the people of the youngest generations to move forward and transform the world we live in and experience.

ECONOMICS AND POLITICS: THE POLITICS OF PURPOSE

Many people today have deep concerns and suspicions that this current status quo, this societal, economic, cultural system is hugely challenged. The economic-political structure of our culture has slow-dragging heavy feet and is coupled with the chains of greed and poisoned power ethics. Far too many people, from both sides of the aisle, are corrupt, hateful, and careless.

Many things during the COVID disruption were really put to the test. Arts and education were effectively halted in the public sphere, especially in close quarters engagement, including education, singing, wind-instrument blowing, and indoor art performances for live audiences. The songs were silenced in 2020, education was redirected, and those halts in dances and concerts were tied directly to health concerns and matters of public safety, all of which were directed by our political, economic, and social machinery. According to Julius P. Williams, president of the National Guild of Conductors,

This is really out there. Boston Symphony can't do choir. Brass and woodwinds these days can possibly spread COVID in their spray. It's all quite interesting. Studies in Music, the National Conductors guild . . . has been looking at how COVID impacts music ensembles, which have to be 6 feet apart, no more than 14 players. Music is in trouble right now! There are no audiences allowed. My group is 100 players, we are now mandated to 14. What can you do? Even with hybrid, the restrictions and regulations make it, well it's very interesting, unbelievably unbearable.

The economy that got hit clearly directed the arc of the narrative surrounding mainstream market street culture. Commercial sales affect everything in culture and are powerful and poisonous.

In 2020, echoing James Brown's 1970 song "Super Bad," and with a "Watch Me Now," "Super Bad" attitude, millions of people took to the streets. These people saw injustice and police brutality as an all-encompassing, out-of-balance system that needed to be held accountable, as Black Lives Matter. That value dial-up made these issues relevant again in the public mindset, crisscrossed and connected generations and races, formed global allegiances, and put the social-political-economic madness in a reset mode. We are still waiting for the new normal.

MUSIC AS A THROUGHLINE: THE PATHWAY THROUGH HOPE

The music of hope and courage makes us remember the Declaration of Independence. This is a profound truth, and it is a part of our pathway through hope to justice. These melodies

and themes were not written by the faint of heart, but rather with a strong faith to endure. Across the African diaspora, to Western shores, the story endures and transforms the land. People hear and are moved by the message of reaching liberation on the promised land. Yes, yes, we celebrate history and we make history. Life is the vision beyond the status quo. How do we stay resilient and hopeful? Where do people go for hope? They go to the music of hope, which requires listeners to remember the themes and the values in that music. The journey of justice is never a straight line. That's in the music of hope.

If you're going to sing the song of hope, you need to learn this tune and this theme. You have to look back and learn the lessons from your past to move forward. The closed heart and mind are not open to God's blessings. Keep doing the right thing. But don't be a prisoner of the past. Be able to "flip the script." Hold onto the memories that teach us to trust and hope in God. These memories are worthy of our attention. The music of hope can be found in our trying times in a traditional spiritual that traces back to the 19th century. "Over my head, over my head, I hear music in the air, there must be a God somewhere."¹

MARKING MODELS AND LIVING MANTRAS

Three large shifts have occurred over the past few years:

- cultural chaos and political and social value shifts
- crisis of relevancy, within traditional church, political, economic, and education systems (What matters now in a "new normal"?)
- the elusive golden ring and the emergence of pressing, empty, entrepreneurial enterprises

Writing in his Harvard resignation letter, Cornel West stated, "I try to tell the unvarnished truth about the decadence in our market-driven universities! Let us bear witness against this spiritual rot!" (West 2021a) and "The disarray of a scattered curriculum, the disenchantment of talented yet deferential faculty, and the disorientation of precious students loom large" (West 2021b).

We have raised in this collection that besides the value of this work, the goal is to consider some of the cracks in our cultural systems. The idea by Toni Morrison in "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear," that "chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge—even wisdom. Like art," (Morrison 2015) makes the case that wisdom earned is most likely to reveal the ways to engineer a sustainable transformation that can provide a lasting impact. That's the value of a values exploration. If we could approach our lives with that kind of measured relevance, it would move us closer to the next higher plateau.

Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act* (1995) continues to be enlightening on so many levels, especially as it relates to the triumphant courage and deep moral fiber and actions

1. Adapted from Reverend Ray Hammond, Bethel AME church, Boston, January 6, 2021.

of people in the face of continual dishonor and disregard. That duty and sense of moral responsibility to speak of what is critically human, as life passion, is incredibly inspiring and informing.

Freedom is a long-fought-for concept that continues to echo in our struggles with power. I learned about Albert Woodfox, of Louisiana, who is a member of The Angola Three. Woodfox is the most incredible, brave individual I know of. He was wrongly imprisoned for 40 years, and yet he preserved his dignity and resolve and provided a powerful example of human tenacity, integrity, and selflessness.

We need to pay more attention to this failure of the system to preserve justice for its citizens.

Right now, we are in a revolutionary time that feels like and dreams of a reform, refinement, realignment, reboot, and refresh. These times call for us to get involved and to get busy with threading and connecting human rights with the long arm of justice, making it really matter. We all need to be walking and living in the better spaces that we know are needed. So, I ask, “what you gonna do?”

This set of essays for the Smithsonian Institution has helped me wrestle with how we define value codes for survival. We do not start with human subjects as the victim. We explore the inner territories of the expression of this desire to get to the better part of life, and we uniformly hope for that “Great Good Place.” Now, that journey for us may, in fact, be a blocked journey. There will be challenges, for sure, but the range of humanity and these possibilities are what I think about. What are our underlying motivations? This valued magnanimous quest is our collected virtue of our minds and hearts. This is our uncompromising willingness to face these contemporary challenges with actions that can transform us.

I end with a note raised by art, writing, and music: today’s social movements (Black Lives Matter, MeToo movement, and other post–civil rights movements) will demand that our values be steeped in love and human rights. My concern is that our culture is being handled in a very dangerous and precarious way, which has already done damage to generations of our most highly-valued creative arts, education, and cultural accomplishments.

It must be the next generation, with their newfound connections and boldness, who will move all of us forward. Our values must be steeped in love and human rights to defy restrictions and to avoid being distracted by the contradictions and restrictions of the current times. We must pray that they now find their throughways and throughlines.

Our story, characters, circumstances, faith, and conviction provide a potentially lasting throughline of powerful arts, cultural voices, actions, and social movements. Living in pursuit of these values and truths is a worthy investment of our time. Our work should be about all of those things—the focus to channel parts and follow the paths of those powerful griot voices and to call upon them as we craft new norms. We are in dialogue and in step with the youngest generation’s call for justice—the voices and visions of our times that inform the frontlines. Keep on keeping on!

REFERENCES

- Coltrane, John. 1962. John Coltrane to Don DeMichael, June 2, 1962. In *Coltrane: a Biography*, by Cuthbert Ormond Simpkins. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1975.
- Douglas, Frederick. 1845. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston, MA: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 13–14. <https://www.loc.gov/item/82225385/>.
- Ellington, Duke, composer. “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing).” By Duke Ellington and Irving Mills. Recorded February 2, 1932. Brunswick Records.
- Ellison, Ralph. 1995. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage International.
- Mass. Const. of 1780, Part the Second, ch V., § II.
- Morrison, Toni. 2015. “No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear,” Features, *The Nation*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/no-place-self-pity-no-room-fear/>.
- Murray, Albert. 2012. *The Hero and the Blues*, 11. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Richen, Yoruba, dir. 2021. *American Masters*. Season 35, episode 1, “How It Feels to Be Free.” Aired January 18, 2021, on PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/how-it-feels-to-be-free-lena-horne-abbey-lincoln-nina-simone-diahann-carroll-cicely-tyson-and-pam-grier-documentary/16905/>.
- Shyamalan, M. Night. 2013. *I Got Schooled: The Unlikely Story of How a Moonlighting Movie Maker Learned the Five Keys to Closing America’s Education Gap*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Stravinsky, Igor. 1966. “Music and the Statistical Age: An interview with Igor Stravinsky.” Interview by Commentary Magazine. *Commentary*, September 1966. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/igor-stravinsky/music-and-the-statistical-age/>.
- West, Cornel (@CornelWest). 2021a. “This is my candid letter of resignation to my Harvard Dean. I try to tell the unvarnished truth about the decadence in our market-driven universities! Let us bear witness against this spiritual rot!” X, July 12, 2021. <https://twitter.com/CornelWest/status/1414765668222869508>.
- West, Cornel. 2021b. Cornel West to David N. Hempton, July 30, 2021. In West, Cornel (@CornelWest). 2021. “This is my candid letter of resignation to my Harvard Dean. I try to tell the unvarnished truth about the decadence in our market-driven universities! Let us bear witness against this spiritual rot!” X, July 12, 2021. <https://twitter.com/CornelWest/status/1414765668222869508>.

Postlude: Sing-a-Song

WILLIAM BANFIELD

In closing, this was a love letter about why it is important to cultivate ideas around living in a world you care about. These ideas inspire, lift people, and transform the communities we live in. In thinking through the cultural meanings in so much of our creative work, it's easy to put this in artistic terms if you understand that the intentionality of arts and creative thinking is to map meaning in human experiences sonically, inwardly, and experientially. Every stroke of the musician or painter equals the cultural values that are contained and carried in dance steps, poetry, lyrics, written words, and performance.

To have a collection of ideas from creative thinkers on the role of arts and ideas that define and carry societal value is important work. As I said in the introduction, we consider life a gift, and thus the work people put forward to continually transform our time and celebrate the gifts in life can make a difference in the ways we actually live.

The musical chords that repeat, the rhythm section (bass, drums, guitar, piano) that locks the groove in, the dance, the painting, the poetry, a focused essay, the instrumental colors of the horn lines, the vocal lines and strings, and the songs are all crafted to tell the story contained in these human-reporting expressions.

In terms of general human content, these workings in arts create affection, which equates to emotional meaning. That's a value. I remember a great line from the movie *Oh, God* (1977), in which George Burns's character says, "The heart is the temple where all truth resides." I love that line. How we feel in our hearts allows us to connect our work to shared values, like being soulful and reflective, and raise a community by giving, sharing, and participating. Culture defines words, values, and actions that point to direct human experience. The music, poetry, dancing, and painting attempts, in the hands of caring artists, to replicate those ideas and principles and to sculpt singable melodies and supportive chord sequences that carry and underscore the sounding to replicate the ideas spoken in the poetry and lyrics.

You would have had to have grown up living in a time in which people loved music for the uplifting feelings it represented to have understood how it served and how the musicians ministered, to really appreciate this. Maurice White of Earth, Wind & Fire explained in a live performance called "That's the Way of the World" that this immediately allows the meaning, characterization, feeling, groove, and spirit of the song to resonate with fans.

At that moment, the artistic sounding of ideas establishes a sonic cultural performable ritual that is located in every pass of the main melodies, the painting of background sing-along verses, and the playing of meditative chords and a sing-song repeated melody. Arts, in all these forms of crafting transformative ideas, carries and underscores the essential meaning and intention of creating shared value spaces—that is, the dance for what we know is essential to our living codes. So, sing a song today . . .

Acknowledgments

This is a thank you to two very special people who made this book of essays on arts and culture possible. Thank you so much to Dr. Camille Colatosti for your impeccable work, patience, charm, and grace in editing these pieces with your very watchful eye. Thank you to our dear Ginger Minkiewicz, director of Smithsonian Scholarly Press. I so much appreciated your encouragement, directions, and willingness to be there in place to advise and keep me laughing through the wonderful process. Book writing should always be so rich.

Thank you to all my author contributors—your work stands tall as justice is true!

This book is dedicated to Dr. Carmen-Helena Téllez, who we lost very shortly after she finished her essay. Loved you hugely; we miss you greatly.

Huge thanks.

Love,

Bill

February 2023

About the Contributors

T. J. Anderson III, poet and musician, was born in Guthrie, Oklahoma. He is the author of *Devonte Travels the Sorry Route* (Omnidawn Press, 2019), *Cairo Workbook* (Willow Books, 2014), *River to Cross* (The Backwaters Press, 2009), *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (University of Arkansas Press, 2004), *Blood Octave* (Flat Five Recordings, 2006), and the chapbook *At Last Round Up* (Lift books, 1996). He has had fellowships with the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA) and the MacDowell Colony. He teaches at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia.

Maybe it's more appropriate to say that there is "a change in the wind," as this speaks to a kind of ancient shifting. Maybe it is that same wind that blew open the sails of great ships that transported harvested human beings? So, I feel I'm writing to you at the edge of yet another set of crossroads. . . . Finding the articulation of your vision in a place that is always in motion, always engaging in the process of transformation. In the same way that art can transform an individual, it can also transform a culture. No question that we are creators and what we put out presents an opportunity for examination.

William "Bill" Banfield is from Detroit, Michigan. He currently serves as professor emeritus at Berklee College of Music and as the Black music culture studies research associate at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. He is the author of "Black Music as Beautiful Noise: From Blues to Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar." In it, he shares,

I'm concerned today about the deteriorating impact that our modern culture construction is having, by what I call the suffocation and soiling of the oxygen of our creative soul. And media, mainstream televised and electronic culture, politics, wealth value attachments, become not just preoccupations but prescriptions.

Ysaye Barnwell is a leading artist and teacher and "walking historian" of Black music practice. Dr. Barnwell served as the foundational bass for the world-renowned Sweet Honey in the Rock from 1966 until her retirement in 2012.

The greatest joy as an artist I have had is being with Sweet Honey. Being with a group of women who knowingly were drawn together to try to recapture our history through music. And they illustrated how we understood—the rhythms, the harmonies, the songs that tell of the joy and the meaning of who we are.

Daniel Callahan is a transmedia artist who has merged a plethora of mediums to create immersive experiences, incorporating story, ritual, and the human form to explore aspects of human resilience and mysticism. A graduate of the UPenn School of Design and Emerson College, where he received an MFA in Film and Video, Callahan's work has been featured

at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, the Queens Museum, and the New Orleans Museum of Art, as well as in publications, such as *Believer* magazine and *Words Beats & Life: The Global Journal of Hip-Hop Culture*.

[F]or Afrofuturism to stay relevant . . . it must grow beyond its original ideas. It must expand past its mission to merely Africanize the future and devise a melanated science fiction. It must imagine and create futures whether aspirational, dystopian, or otherwise for people of the African diaspora that inform both our present and potential. It must continue to create new paradigms of art, thought, and experience. It must resist capitalistic exploitation and commercial manipulation. And most important, it must be championed and controlled by the practitioners, not the critics, the media, or even the well-meaning cultural theorists.

Su Ozer has worked as an artist relations manager and onboarding specialist in media technology. She attended Berklee College of Music.

Aminah Pilgrim is a mother, artist, author, community organizer, and award-winning educator. She holds undergraduate degrees from Duke University and a doctorate in history from Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She is the founder of the HIPHOP Initiative (2004), a critical-learning community that explores the history, context, and themes of hip-hop, Black life, and the African diaspora. She is the cofounder of SABURA Youth Programs (2013) and the cofounder of PODEROZA: International Conference on Cabo Verdean Women (2016). Since 2001, Pilgrim has led critical conversations and facilitated trainings on social justice, African American history, African diaspora studies, Cabo Verdean history and culture, oral history, and hip-hop. She currently resides in Massachusetts with her son Akein, close to their large extended family. For more, see www.AminahPilgrim.com

Dwandalyn Reece serves as curator of music and performing arts at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

That's what I love about "materials culture," holding *culture in view*. This is how we find so many learning pathways. This shows the true picture of what was done, and how these materials were used and appreciated. The sense of renewal, discover, and revisiting is hugely important as historical experiences and events, which is exhilarating. It gives us glimpses of the lives, different ways to get to know these artists. These things have a very important educating social and political purpose.

Carmen-Helena Téllez (1955-2021) was a conductor, composer, interdisciplinary artist, creative producer, and Latin American music scholar. From 2012 until her untimely passing in 2021, she was the professor of conducting and interdisciplinary arts at the University of Notre Dame. From 1992 to 2012, she was professor of conducting and director of the eminent Latin American Music Center at Indiana University in Bloomington. She directed two

artistic projects, Kosmologia and Aquavá New Music Studio, with whom she developed new works exploring co-creativity and interactivity with the performers and audience. She commissioned, premiered, and recorded dozens of new compositions from Latin America, Europe, and the United States. She is greatly missed.

I assert that new interdisciplinary modes of presentation of classical music can offer rich opportunities for the examination of diverse cultural and social ways of being, through the exchange of methodologies with other arts and the humanities, the artistic use of technology, and the generation of opportunities for co-creativity or interactivity between performers and the audience. New modes of presentation can help us achieve goals of diversity and inclusion, while opening classical contemporary music to 21st century expressivity and signification.

Victor Wallis is the author of *Red-Green Revolution: The Politics and Technology of Eco-socialism* (Political Animal Press, 2018), *Democracy Denied: Five Lectures on U.S. Politics* (Africa World Press, 2019), and *Socialist Practice: Histories and Theories* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). He taught political science for many years at Indiana University-Purdue and University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) and, since 1996, has been on the Liberal Arts faculty at the Berklee College of Music. He is editor-at-large of the journal *Socialism and Democracy*. For more, see <https://www.victorwallis.com/>.

The economic engine of capital is driving us relentlessly to our collective doom. . . . My goal in this essay, after providing an overview of the current U.S. scene, its historical grounding, and my place within it, is to suggest the potential of present-day musical culture to contribute to the necessary—and necessarily revolutionary—popular response.

Aja Burrell Wood is an ethnomusicologist and the managing director for Berklee's Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice. Wood currently implements vision and strategy, oversees institutional initiatives and programming, teaches courses related to gender and justice in jazz and Black music history, and produces events for the Berklee community. She has extensive experience as an educator and a curator, with a background in development and violin performance. She most recently taught courses on music, history, and culture at the City College of New York and Brooklyn College's Conservatory of Music. Her work includes research on musical community among Black classical musicians, women in jazz, jazz in the digital era, music and civic engagement in Harlem, and other related genres of the African diaspora, such as blues, hip-hop, soul, and West African traditions. She has been a visiting fellow at the New School, in addition to her role as guest lecturer at New York University and various institutions throughout New York City.

Beyond the use of recordings as in "Jazz (We've Got)," personal relationships and musical training also have played a role for some hip-hop artists in the turn to jazz, as a source of sonic material, technique development, and conceptual approach.

Biggie Smalls learned diction and phrasing from jazz saxophonist Donald Harrison, Rakim played the saxophone and notes John Coltrane as an influence, Ishmael Butler of the Digable Planets has described his access to his father's jazz records, and Nas is the son of jazz musician Olu Dara. All these examples are not happenstance or coincidental; the relationships to jazz for these hip-hop artists and others are evidence of a much more general trend in urban, African American communities. Experiences of jazz and its recordings are often rooted in familial values and community relationships and may transcend those of, say, simply stumbling upon an old jazz record. In other words, a record is not just any record, it's "your dad's record" and can come to be associated with everything it means to him, to you, and to your relationship, it's worth in Black values!

John S. Wright, professor emeritus, University of Minnesota, is faculty scholar for its Givens Collection of African American Literature and pioneering NEH Harlem Renaissance exhibition. Senior editor of Coffeehouse Press's *Black Arts Movement Reprint Series* and Simon & Schuster's *Givens Collection Series*, he published the critically acclaimed intellectual biography *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*; and has consulted for such television documentaries as *Africans in America*; *Midnight Ramble: the Cinema of Oscar Micheaux*; and PBS's *Free to Dance* series. As performer, he headlined revivals of Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama: Twelve Moods for Jazz* at Minneapolis's Walker Art Center on a double-bill with Imamu Amiri Baraka and on stage with John Faddis and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band in its production.

As best we know from the still murky details, on May 23, 1968, while seated unarmed in a Harlem subway station, a 33-year-old father, husband, teacher, and emerging writer named Henry Dumas was confronted by a New York City Transit policeman who, in a case of "mistaken identity" or imagined provocation, summarily shot him dead. . . . From today's vantage point five decades later atop the Afrofuturist movement, it is easier to see that, beyond any sort of insular, self-referential "blackness," Dumas's revolutionary literary form and content bespeak an eclectic, hypermodern sensibility that fuses motifs of Pan-African ancestralism with the futuristic premises of science fiction and "crosshatched" fantasy tales, or with New Age political discourses familiar on the countercultural New Left. . . . "A cult has grown up around Henry Dumas—a very deserved cult," Toni Morrison proclaimed in the course of welcoming ardent new proselytes, such as Angela Davis, Melvin Van Peebles, and John A. Williams; and she offered a devout rationale for their fervor: "he had completed work the quality and quantity of which are almost never achieved in several lifetimes. He was brilliant. He was magnetic, and he was an incredible artist."¹

1. Toni Morrison, "On Behalf of Henry Dumas," *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Summer 1988): 310–311.

Index

Page numbers in italics refer to figures.

1% versus the 99%, 135
 2008 Great Financial Crisis, 135
 2020 U.S. election, 136
 3+3 (Isley Brothers, The), 38, 49, 50, 52,
 54, 62
 5th Dimension, The, 51

A

Aaliyah (Aaliyah Dana Haughton), 56
 ableism, 136
 Achebe, Chinua, 99, 100; *Things Fall Apart*, 99
 Adams, John, 162
 aesthetics, 3–5, 6, 7, 11, 19, 21, 58, 71, 89,
 91, 99, 101, 115–117, 123, 151, 152, 163;
 “anchoring aesthetic,” 12; Black aesthetic,
 97, 99, 106, 115–117, 120
 Afghanistan, 133, 133n9, 134
 Africa, 71, 101, 112, 122. *See also*
 individual entries
 African Americans, 50, 52, 73, 89, 101, 107,
 123; and arts, 91–92, 100, 115; and
 communities, 90, 97; culture, 75–78, 95,
 115, 123; history, 75–78, 95, 104; music of,
 90, 123–124; and myth, 99, 107, 123. *See*
 also Black people
 Africana Studies Center of Berkeley, 11
 African diaspora, 67, 71, 72, 76, 78, 98, 120,
 122, 124, 165
AfricanFuturism, 123
 Africanization, 124, 174
Africanjujuism, 123
 African Socialism, 97

Afrofuturism, 95–96, 115–124, 174
 Afro-psychedelic music, 108, 110–111
 ageism, 136
 agency, 18, 24, 69, 101, 109, 146, 147–148, 158,
 160, 162. *See also* self-agency
 Akinmusire, Ambrose, 92, 93
 Alaturca music, 31
 aliens, 120, 121, 122; abduction parallels to
 enslavement, 122
 Allende, Salvador, 131
 Almost 8 Dixieland, 131
 American Dream, 33
 “American Idiot,” 138
 American Roots music, 11–12
 American transcendentalism, 99, 104
Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the
 Veil of that Saitic Isis; or an Inquiry into
 the Origin of Language, Nations, and
 Religions, 101
 Anansi, 121
 ancestors, 13, 32, 76, 84, 85, 104, 105, 123;
 ancestral legacy and art, 83–85, 123
 anchoring aesthetic, 12
 Andean divinities, 152
 Anderson, Carleen, 91
 Anderson, Marian, 77
 Anderson, T. J. III, 87
 androids, 120
 “And Still I Rise” (Angelou), 84
 Angelou, Maya, 84; “And Still I Rise,” 84
 Anglo-Irish Renaissance. *See* Irish Renaissance
 Angola Three, The, 166

anticommunist panic, 136
 Antidote, The, 91
 anxiety, 112
 Appalachia, 76, 130
 Apple Inc., 30
 Arabesque music, 31
 Argentina, 151
Ark and the Ankh, The (Sun Ra), 109–113
 Arkestral, 108, 110
 “Ark of Bones” (Dumas), 98, 108, 112–113
Ark of Bones and Other Stories (Dumas), 98
 Armah, Ayi Kweh, 99; *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, 99
 Armstrong, Louie, 163
 artistic citizenry, 19–20
 artistic creation, 4–13, 17–27, 31–32, 68, 80–84, 92, 97, 115–120, 123–124, 139, 141–156, 157–166; artmaking, 75; hierarchical authorship of, 147; process-based approaches, 147
 artistic trends, 22, 90, 132
 arts, 3–5, 8, 18–27, 30–32, 66, 76, 96–112, 117–120, 124, 141–156 160–166, 169; and activism, 22, 97, 120, 138, 148; and commerce, 30–32; and critique, 137; Black, 11, 67, 96, 98, 101, 104, 110, 112, 122–123; contexts of, 149; commodification of, 45; downsizing, 55; interdisciplinary modes of, 147, 149. *See also* models of creativity; Black arts movement; individual entries
 Ashford & Simpson, 51
 Asian religions, 100
 astrophysics, 110
 Atlantic Ocean, 70, 71, 85. *See also* trans-Atlantic slave trade
 Atlantic Records, 42
 Atlantic Starr, 51
 audience, 38, 42–43, 51, 57, 73, 76, 77, 83, 89–92, 129, 132, 137, 145–155
 Aulette, J., 70
 Austin, Patti, 51

automatic writing, 100, 110
 automatons, 122
 Ayers, Roy, 91

B

Bach, Johann Sebastian, 154
 Bachofen, J. J., 101
 Bad Plus, The, 163
 Badu, Erika, 163
 Baldwin, James, 111
 Balkan music, 31
 ballads, 51, 62
 Banda, David, 67–69, 71
 Banfield, William “Bill,” 11, 29, 69, 71–73, 95, 97–108, 137, 141, 144; *Social Power of Music* (Banfield and Isley, Ernest), 12
 Bangladesh, 30
 Bantu, 101
 Baraka, Amiri, 46, 51, 67, 106, 107–108; *Black Fire*, 97–99, 101, 104, 106, 108; *Blues People*, 100; *Raise Race Rays*
Raze, 107
 “Barefoot Diva.” *See* Évora, Cesária
 Barnwell, Ysaye, 79–81
 bass, 40, 42, 48, 55, 62, 79, 169
 Batuka, 67–73
 Batukadeiras, 68–73
 Bausch, Pina, 146
 B. B. King (Riley B. King), 51
 Bearden, Romare, 106
 Beatles, 38, 46, 55, 57
 Beatty, Carl, 40
Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, The (Armah), 99
 bebop, 43, 163
 bel canto, 152
 Benson, George, 51
 Berklee College of Music, 11, 40–41, 63, 73, 92, 137
 Bernal, Martin, 101
 Berry, Charles “Chuck,” 76
 Bethune, Mary McLeod, 86

“Between the Sheets” (Isley Brothers), 39, 40, 56, 59, 63
 Bhachu, Diljeet Kaur, 142n
Bible, The, 107, 108, 113
 Biblical stories, 98, 121
 big band, 42, 67, 92
 Biggie Smalls. *See* Notorious B.I.G.
 Biggs, Frank “Mr. Biggs,” 62
 Bilal (Bilal Sayeed Oliver), 93
Billboard charts, 42, 63
 bin Laden, Osama, 133n9
Black Aesthetic, The (Gayle), 3
 Black American Literature Forum, 96
 Black artists, 117, 120, 124
 Black arts. *See* arts, Black
 Black arts movement, 96–100, 107
Black Athena (Bernal), 101
 Black churches, 5, 11, 13, 18, 42–44, 45, 62, 70, 75, 77, 163, 165
 Black Codes, 135
 Black Fire (Baraka), 97–99, 101, 104, 106 108
 Black Liberation Movement, 132
 Black Lives Matter (BLM), 4, 5, 14, 83, 164, 166
 Black music, 11–15, 22, 40, 42–44, 52, 67–68, 71–73, 76–78, 79–81, 163. *See also individual entries*
Black Panther (Lee, Stan), 115, 116
 Black Panther Party, 132, 135, 138
 Black people, 3, 13, 68, 87, 97, 115, 122–123; and identity, 76, 80; forced labor and, 122; violence against, 154. *See also* African Americans
 Black Planet, 117
 “Black to the Future” (Dery), 116
 Black–White dichotomy, 71
 Black women, 67–73, 77, 81, 142, 143, 144, 161
 Blake, William, 100
 Blakey, Art, 91; *Night at Birdland*, A, Vol. 1, 91
 Blind Boys of Alabama, 43
 Blue Note, 50–51, 91
 blues, 14, 26, 42–44, 67, 73, 77

Blues Mode and Rhythm, 22
Blues People (Baraka), 100
Body Kiss (Isley, Ronald and Isley, Ernie), 63
 Booker T. & the M.G.’s, 51
 Borges, Jorge Luis, 110
 “Born in the USA” (Springsteen), 138
 Boston Symphony, 164
 Bowers, Kris, 90, 92
 Brazil, 71
 Brooks, Gwendolyn, 97
 Brothers Johnson, The, 51
 Brown, James, 59, 90, 117, 163, 164; “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine,” 117
 Brown, Leonard,
 Bruner, Ronald Jr., 93
 Bryson, Robert “Peabo,” 51
 Buddha Records, 62
 Burns, George, 169
 Butler, Octavia, 115, 120, 122; *Earthseed*, 120, 122
 Byrd, Donald, 91

C
 Cabo Jazz, 72
 Cabo Verde, 67–73, 72n15; 67–73; Cabo Verdean music, 67–73, 68n2; Cabo Verdean women. *See also* Batuku
 Cadillac, 76, 120
 Cage, John, 155
Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land) (Césaire), 85
 call and response, 67, 70–71, 106
 Cameo, 51
Canto General (Neruda), 132
 capitalism, 29–30, 100, 127, 130, 132, 134
 Cargo, 90
 Carpenters, 38, 59
 Carpentier, Alejo, 110
 Carter, K., 70
 Cartesian science, 100
 “Cat Came Back, The,” 130
 Celtic Revival, 99–100

- Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), 11–12
- Center for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), 142n
- Césaire, Aimé, 85, 99; *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 85
- Chaka Khan (Yvette Stevens), 51, 59
- Channel No. 5, 55
- Chapman, Tracy, 138; "Talkin' About a Revolution," 138
- Chic, 51
- Childish Gambino (Donald Glover), 153–154; "This Is America," 153–155
- "Children of the Sun," 112
- Chile, 131–132, 134, 135
- Chi-Lites, The, 51
- choir, 151, 164
- choreography. *See* dance
- Christianity, 11, 62, 80, 98, 106, 107, 108, 113, 121, 124, 151. *See also* Black churches
- Chrysalis Records, 91
- Churchill, Winston, 59
- church music, 163. *See also* Black churches; gospel; spirituals
- Civil Rights Movement, 10, 11, 37, 102, 106, 132–133, 162, 166
- classical music, 76, 141–156; Black, 77; Western European, 150, 151, 154
- classism, 27, 31
- @claytoncrispim (Clayton Crispim), 71
- climate change, 29, 127, 134
- Clinton, George, 76, 115, 121
- clubs, 43
- Cobain, Kurt, 55
- co-creation, 147–150, 152–153, 155
- code-switching, 124
- Cogitore, Clément, 152
- COINTELPRO, 87
- Cole, Natalie, 51, 57
- Cole, Nat King. *See* Nat King Cole
- collaboration, 11, 31, 67, 91, 137–139, 149, 150, 151, 155
- collection, 12, 42, 59, 75–78
- colonization, 26, 116, 123, 129, 141–142, 147, 154; decolonization, 123, 142; neocolonization, 152, 154
- Coltrane, John, 52, 58, 85, 90, 98, 106, 161, 163, 175; *A Love Supreme*, 85
- Columbus, Christopher, 133
- commerce, 7, 12–13, 17, 22, 24, 30, 31, 55, 92, 116, 124, 137, 147, 160, 164; commercial exploitation, 116
- Commodores, 51
- Common Sense, 90
- communities, 3, 6, 8, 11–13, 17–26, 69–70, 75, 85–87, 90, 91–93, 116, 137, 152–156, 161–165; artistic, 116, 120; Black, 62, 77–78, 85–86, 89, 90, 96–97, 135, 142; faith-based, 105, 113; online, 89, 92
- composers, 76–78, 131, 141n, 142, 144–156
- "Compton MC's Second Major-Label Album Is a Masterpiece of Fiery Outrage, Deep Jazz and Ruthless Self-Critique, The" 93
- conductors, 141n, 143, 151, 164
- consumerism, 5, 30–32
- Cook, Sam, 11
- Cool Breeze, 122; "Dirty South," 122
- Cooper, Brittney, 3, 58
- Cornell University, 18
- corporations, 3, 6, 23, 25, 30–32, 58, 116, 129, 134, 136
- Cortez, Jayne, 96
- Cosby Show, The*, 89
- Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy* (Sun Ra), 108–110
- costume, 115, 120, 152
- COVID-19, 5, 26, 83, 85, 158–159, 164
- Crouch, Stanley, 23, 98
- Crusaders, The, 51
- Cuba, 85, 131, 134
- Cuban Revolution, 131
- cultivation of ideas, 20, 75, 160–161
- cultural codes, 7–8, 12–13, 25, 71–72
- Cultural Codes*, 12

- cultural expressions, 11, 15, 17, 19–21, 77, 130, 152, 157, 160
- cultural heritage, 5, 11, 13, 17, 23, 40, 50, 89, 109, 123, 142, 160; relay race as, 84
- cultural impulses, 18, 21, 27
- cultural relevance, 20, 25, 44, 45, 141
- Cultural Unity of Africa* (Diop), 101
- culture, 17–27, 29–32, 37–42, 44, 45–46, 48–49, 51, 59, 62–63, 67–68, 71, 72, 75–78, 79–80, 85–86, 89, 105, 109–110, 115, 116–117, 120, 122, 123–124, 127–130, 134–136, 141–145, 147–156, 157–159, 161–166, 169; counterculture, 51, 98; paradigms of, 3–8, 21, 110, 122, 124, 142–156, 159, 161–162; pedagogy for, 22. *See also* culture throughlines
- culture throughlines theory, 17–27; art, 26; and artists, 26; faith, 26; impulse of, 27; industry, 27; marketplace, 27; politics, 26; and society, 26; tools of, 27
- “Curriculum for the Soul” (Olson), 85
- C. W. Post College, 38
- D**
- Dahomean Narrative* (Herskovits), 104, 105
- Da Luz Gonçalves, Manuel, 72
- dance, 4, 7, 13–14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26–27, 42, 44, 51, 55, 62, 70, 76, 81, 101, 120, 146, 152–154, 157, 159–161, 163, 164, 169; choreography, 146, 152–153; Lindy Hop, 42
- Dara, Olu, 90, 176
- data, 32–33
- Davenport, N’Dea, 91
- Davis, Angela, 96
- Davis, Miles, 51, 117
- Davis, Ozzy, 158
- Davis, Sammy, 77
- dead, the, 100, 104, 112–113; “living dead,” 100; resurrection, 104
- Dean, Diane R., 25; *Generation on a Tightrope* (Levine and Dean), 25
- Declaration of Independence, 164–165
- de Clive-Low, Mark, 92
- “Decolonising Music Studies,” 142, 142n
- Decolonization. *See* colonialism
- Deep South folksay, 108
- Delany, Samuel, 116
- Dembélé, Bintou, 152–153
- demo, 70
- democracy, 12, 128, 132, 134–139
- Democratic Party of the United States, 129, 132, 136; Democratic Leadership Council, 132
- deregulation, 132
- Deren, Maya, 100–101; *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, 101
- Derulo, Jason, 31
- Dery, Mark, 95, 116, 120–122; “Black to the Future,” 116
- descendants of enslaved Africans, 128. *See also* enslaved people, Africans; racism, systemic
- detoxification programs, 138
- devil, 98, 105, 106, 112
- Digable Planets*, 90; *Reachin’ (A New Refutation of Time and Space)*, 90
- digital natives, 8, 25
- digital technologies, 57; digital music technology, 62, 89, 91, 146, 148, 151, 155
- Dilla, 90
- Diop, Cheikh Anta, 101; *Cultural Unity of Africa*, 101
- “Dirty South” (Cool Breeze), 122
- discrimination, 26, 150, 161
- Dis Is da Drum* (Hancock), 91
- Disney, 60, 115
- Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (Deren), 101
- Dixie Hummingbirds, The 43
- DJ Premier, 91
- DJ Spinna, 91
- Dobbs, Mattiilda, 77
- Dogon beliefs, 101, 124
- Dorsey, Thomas, 43
- Do the Right Thing* (Lee, Spike), 158
- Douglas, Alexander, 142, 154

Douglass, Frederick, 157
Downbeat, 43
 downbeats, 9, 40
 “Draft Dodger Rag” (Ochs), 131
 Dramatics, The, 51
 drums, 38, 40, 47, 48, 55, 62, 69, 72, 79, 85–86, 106
 D’Santiago, Dino, 69, 71
 Du Bois, W.E.B., 18, 86, 101, 117; *World and Africa, The*, 101
 Dumas, Henry, 95–113; *Ark of Bones and Other Stories*, 98; *Echo Tree*, 98, 110, 112–113; “Fon,” 97–106; *Goodbye, Sweetwater*, 98; *Jonah and the Green Stone*, 101; “The Metagenesis of Sun Ra,” 112; “Rain God,” 103; “Rope of Wind,” 103; “Scout,” 112
dyeli. See *griot*
 Dylan, Bob, 131; “Masters of War,” 131

E

Earthseed (Butler), 120, 122
 Earth, Wind & Fire, 51, 56, 169
Ebony, 8
Echo Tree (Dumas), 98, 110, 112–113
 ecological collapse, 129, 134
 economic classes, 29–30, 135–136, 142, 158; loyalty to, 136; middle class, 134; the rich, 29, 134; upper-middle class, 150
 Ecuador, 151–152
 education, 12, 19, 20–21, 23–26, 29, 40, 45, 52, 56, 80, 159, 160, 162–166
 Egypt, 108, 110
 Egyptian beliefs, 104, 124
 Ekwensi, Cyprian, 99; *Jagua Nana*, 99
 Electoral College, 128
 electronic dance music (EDM), 120
 Ellington, Duke, 23, 41–42, 43, 60, 75, 106, 108, 163; “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing),” 41–42, 163
 Ellis, Raydar, 92
 Ellison, Ralph, 87, 101–102, 111, 165–166; *Invisible Man*, 101–102; *Shadow and Act*, vii, 165

Emotions, The, 51
 employment, 87, 134; and the working class, 134
End of Nature, The (McKibben), 134
 engagement, 5–6, 17, 20, 25–26, 69, 83, 110, 131, 135, 149, 150, 158, 160–161, 163–164
 Engels, Fredrick, 101
 England, 46, 49
 enslaved people, x, 13–15, 26, 43, 68–71, 84–87, 122, 127–129, 136, 157; Africans, 26, 71, 77, 128, 129; escape, 120, 129; and personhood, 127–129; and U.S. politicians, 127–128. See also slavery; marronage
 environmentalism, 134–136, 146
 erasure, 17, 26, 46–47
 Ertegun brothers, 42
Eternal, 63
 Ethnomusicology, 12, 22, 96, 100
 Eurocentrism, 122, 149
 Europe, 31, 68, 99, 101, 116, 129, 141–156, 175
 evangelization, 141, 144
 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 162
 Evolution Jam Session at Zinc Bar, 92
 Évora, Cesária, 69
 Executive Office of the United States, 129
 expatriation, 76
 expression, 3–5, 11–15, 17–27, 37, 41–42, 50, 52, 57, 58, 68, 69, 70, 76, 78, 79, 91–93, 106, 113, 116, 122, 127, 130–131, 144, 149–155, 157–163; commercial aspects of, 25. See also art, commodification of

F

Facebook, 32, 57
 faith, 21, 26, 58, 80, 105, 136, 165, 166,
 familial relationships, 13, 37–41, 58, 59, 62, 89, 90–92, 176,
 fascism, 67, 122
 Fat Jon (Jon Erin Marshall), 90
 Fats Domino (Antoine Dominique Domino, Jr.), 77
 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 132
Federalist Paper No. 10 (Madison), 128

- Feliciano, Jose, 38, 49
 Festival of American Folk Music, 72
 “Fight the Power” (Isley Brothers), 4, 39, 53, 60
 Flack, Roberta, 51
 flamenco, 67
 Flemons, Dom, 77
 Fluxus, 155
 folklore, 99, 112
 folk music, 13–15, 72, 75, 112
 folk traditions, 13–15, 23, 99, 111
 “Fon” (Dumas), 97–106
 forced labor. *See* enslaved people; mass incarceration; slavery
 Four Tops, 51
 Foxconn, 30
 Fox News, 20
 Fox Theater, 76
 France, 85
 Franklin, Aretha, 11, 51, 163; “R.E.S.P.E.C.T.,” 48
 French Baroque opera-ballet, 152
 French Enlightenment, 153
 Freudian psychology, 110
 Fuller, Charles, 99
 funk, 37, 39, 46, 51, 55, 62, 77, 90
- G**
 G–8 countries, 29
 @gabrielmahalem (Gabriel Mahalem), 71
 GameBox, 21
 Gang Starr, 90, 91; “Words I Manifest,” 90
 Gap Band, The, 51
 “garbage offensive,” 138
 García Alarcón, Leonardo, 152
 Garcia Marquez, Gabriel, 110
 Garvey, Marcus, 121
 Gaye, Marvin, 51, 55, 138
 Gayle, Addison, 3; *The Black Aesthetic*, 3
 generational value transfer, vii–viii, xi–xii, 164
Generation on a Tightrope (Levine and Dean), 25
 generations, vii–ix, xi–xii, 4, 6–8, 12–15, 17, 18, 20–21, 29–33, 163–164, 166; alpha, 29, 30, 33; baby boomers, 29, 37, 39; millennials, 29, 33; Y, 29, 33; Z, 29, 33
 genetic engineering, 111
 genre, 31, 76, 98, 115, 122–123, 149, 156, 162; literary, 122; musical, 39, 67–70, 72, 73, 75, 76–77, 89–92, 141, 142–144, 151, 152, 153–155;
 George Clinton’s Funkadelic Spaceship, 76
 “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine” (Brown), 117
 ghost stories, 98, 104
 Glasper, Robert, 92–93, 163
 Glass, Philip, 146
 globalization, 32, 70, 121, 133
 Glover, Donald, 153–154. *See also* Childish Gambino
 gnosticism, 108, 111
God’s Bits of Wood (Sembene), 99
 go-go, 76
 Golden Gate Quartet, 43
 Golijov, Osvaldo, 151; *La Pasión según San Marcos*, 151
Goodbye, Sweetwater (Dumas), 98
 Goodman, Benny, 42
 Google, 32
 gospel, 11, 37–39, 42–44, 46, 48, 50–51, 62, 75, 77, 154, 155. *See also* church music; spirituals
 Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 138
 “grand narrative,” 136
 Great Depression, 26, 87
 “Great Good Place,” xi, 161–162, 166
 Greece, 101, 131, 134
 Greek music, 31
 Green Day, 138
 “Green Dolphin Street,” 89
 Grier, Pam, 161
 Grimm Brothers, 99
 griot, 69–72, 72n14, 99, 166
 griotology, 69, 69n1, 71–72
 guitar, 38, 40–41, 48–49, 51, 52–53, 55, 62, 169; electric, 49, 131; Guild, 49; Isley-Hendrix Strat 49; Stratocaster, 49, 53

Guru (Keith Edward Elam), 90, 91; *Jazzmatazz* series, 91

Guthrie, Woody, 11

H

Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll, 76

Hampton, Fred, 136

Hampton, Lionel, 42

Hancock, Herbie, 91; *Dis Is da Drum*, 91

Hansen, James, 134

Harlem, 95, 96–97

Harlem Boy Scouts, 112

Harlem Renaissance, 108, 111

harmony, 6, 22, 31, 43, 47, 89, 101, 109

Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, 51

harp, 77

Harris, Joel Chandler, 99

Harris, Wilson, 111, 112

Harrison, Donald, 90

Harrison, Paul Carter, 98

Harte, Bret, 99

Harvard University, 132, 165

Hathaway, Donny, 51

Hathaway, Lalah, 93

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 104

Haydn, Joseph, 130; “Haydn No. 98,” 130;

“Symphony No. 5,” 130

“Haydn No. 98” (Haydn), 130

Hayes, Isaac, 49, 51

healthcare services, 129

health insurance, 129

Hebrew Cabala, 100

Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, The (Sun Ra), 108

Henderson, Stephen, 96

Hendrix, James “Jimi,” 38, 40–41, 47, 48–49, 51, 55, 131; “Testify,” 47; *West Coast Seattle Boy: The Jimi Hendrix Anthology*, 47

“Here Rattler,” 130

hermeticism, 100

Hernton, Calvin, 99, 101

Herskovits, Melville, 104; *Dahomean Narrative*, 104, 105; *Myth of the Negro Past, The*, 104

Higgins, Godfrey, 101

highlife, 120

hip-hop, 31, 39, 56, 63, 67, 72, 75–77, 89–93, 120, 133, 137, 152, 153–154

Hip Hop, Race, and Cultural Politics (Wallis and Nuruddin), 133

History of Rock and Roll, 50

Ho, Fred, 6

Holiday, Billie, 41, 43, 55,

homophobia, 136

“Hood Politics” (Lamar), 132

hooks, bell, 68–69, 68n2, 71; “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister,” 68

Hoover, J. Edgar, 132

horns, 42, 49, 52, 55, 77, 169

Hot 97, 57

Houston, Whitney, 51, 111

Hurricane Katrina, 77

Hurston, Zora Neale, 106

hymns, 131

I

“I Ain’t Marchin’ Any More” (Ochs), 131

“I Am a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra” (Reed), 108

“I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar,” 14

Ice Cube (O’Shea Jackson Sr.), 56, 63

identity politics, 136

I Got Schooled (Shyamalan), 25, 162

Illmatic (Nas), 90

“I’m Every Woman,” 14

imperialism, xi, 107, 116, 131, 134,

incarceration, 58, 87, 128–129, 135–137, 166. *See also* mass incarceration, of people of color

indigenous people, 26, 86, 117, 120, 133; arts of, 152; music of, 14, 77

indoctrination, 134, 153

inequality, 14, 29, 33, 128, 135

Ingram, James, 51

inspiration, vi, 60, 68, 130, 160

Instagram, 32

instrumentation, x, 79, 169

instruments, 78, 43, 47, 51, 76, 78, 87, 90, 131, 133, 151–152. *See also individual entries*

Internet, 4, 20, 24–25, 27, 29, 31–32, 57, 83, 117, 124, 143

Inti Illimani, 131

Invisible Man (Ellison), 101–102

Iraq, 134

Ireland, 99–100

Irish Renaissance, 99–100

Islam, 101, 133; scripture of, 101

Isley Brothers, the, 4, 11, 63; 3+3, 38, 49, 50, 52, 54, 62; “Between the Sheets,” 39, 40, 56, 59, 63; “Fight the Power,” 4, 39, 53, 60; “It’s Your Thing,” 39, 48–49, 59, 62; *Mission to Please*, 62; “Shout,” 37–39, 41, 46, 59, 61, 62; *Tracks of Life*, 62

Isley, Ernest “Ernie,” 37–63; *Body Kiss*, 63

Isley-Jasper-Isley, 62

Isley, Marvin, 45, 49–51, 52, 62–63

Isley, O’Kelly Jr., 38, 45, 48, 50, 61–63

Isley, O’Kelly Sr., 43–45, 61,

Isley, Ronald “Ron,” 38, 45, 48, 50, 58, 62–63; *Body Kiss*, 63; *Mr. I*, 63

Isley, Rudolph, 38, 45, 50, 58, 61–63, 91

Isley, Sallye, 45, 61–62

Isley, Vernon, 45

Israel, 31, 141n

“It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)” (Ellington), 41–42, 163

Itinerant associations, 76

“It’s Your Thing” (Isley Brothers), 39, 48–49, 59, 62

J

Jackson 5, The, 51

Jackson, Brian, 51

Jackson family, 48, 57

Jackson, George, 135

Jackson, Mahalia, 41, 43

Jackson, Michael, 38

Jagua Nana (Ekwensi), 99

Jahn, Janheinz, 101; *Muntu*, 101; *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing*, 101

James, C. L. R., 99

James, Rick (James Ambrose Johnson Jr.), 51

Jara, Víctor, 131; “Plegaria a un Labrador” [Prayer to a laborer] (Jara), 131

Jasper, Chris, 50, 62

jazz, x, 6, 41–45, 47, 89–93, 110–111, 131, 161, 163

Jazzmatazz series (Guru), 91; *Vol. 1*, 91

jazz rap, 90–91

Jazz Rap, Volume One, 90

“Jazz (We’ve Got)” (A Tribe Called Quest), 89–90

Jenkins, Willard, 92

Jenson, Matt, 137

Jewish people: Sephardic Jews, 151. *See also* Hebrew Cabala

Jive Records, 90

Johnson, Francis “Frank,” 77

Johnson, Hall, 77

Johnson, Robert, 55

Jones, LeRoi, viii, 52, 97. *See also* Baraka, Amiri

Jones, Willie III, 92; *Next Phase, The*, 92

Jonah and the Green Stone (Dumas), 101

Joplin, Janis, 55

Jordan, 31

Jordan, Louis, 42

Jordan, Ronny, 91

Joyce, James, 99

Jubilee quartet, 43

justice, viii, 18, 97, 154, 161, 164–166. *See also* social justice

K

Karenga, Maulana Ron, 97

Kawaida System, 97

Kelley, Robin D. G., 17

Kennedy family, 48

Kennedy, John F., 61

Kente cloth, 124

Kenya, 154

Kichwa, 152

Killers, The, 138; “Land of the Free,” 138

King, Carole, 60

King John (Shakespeare), 104

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 48, 95–96, 136
 Kirby, Jack, 116
 Kiswahili, 98
 Kool & the Gang, 51
Koyaanisqatsi (Reggio), 146–147
 Kriola, 70–72, 72n15

L

LaBelle, Patti (Patricia Louise Holt), 51
La Flauta Mágica de los Andes (Teatro Nacional Sucre), 151
 Lamar, Kendrick, 90, 92–93, 132; “Hood Politics,” 132; “Rigamortis,” 92; *To Pimp a Butterfly*, 132
 “Land of the Free” (The Killers), 138
 Lane, Pinkie Gordon, 96
 language, 87, 97, 102, 107; African, 85, 101; Afro-Arabic, 97; creole, 85; English, 96, 110, 124; Kriolu, 69, 72; pigeon, 124; Spanish, 85, 152
La Pasión según San Marcos (Golijov), 151
 Latin America, 131, 151, 161; cultures of, 141, 141n, 143, 151; Latin hip-hop, 31
 Lawrence, Jacob, 106
 Laye, Camara, 99; *Radiance of the King, The*, 99
 Lebanon, 31
 Lee, Spike, 158; *Do the Right Thing*, 158
 Lee, Stan, 116; *Black Panther*, 115, 116
 LeFonque, Buckshot, 91
 legacy, 39–41, 123–124
 Legba, 83, 105
Les Indes Galantes (Rameau), 152
 Levine, Arthur, 25; *Generation on a Tightrope* (Levine and Dean), 25
 Lewis, C. S., 102
 LGBTQ community, 78, 136
Liberator, 97
 libretto, 152
 literature, vii, xi, 4, 27, 97–101, 157, 163
 “literature of the fantastic,” 102. *See also* Todorov, Tzvetan
 Lomax, Alan, 14

Los Angeles, 53, 56
 “Love Me, I’m a Liberal” (Ochs), 131
Love Supreme, A (Coltrane), 85
Low End Theory, The (A Tribe Called Quest), 89
 LP recordings, 130
 L.T.D., 51
 Luso-African people, 67–69
 lynching, 98–99, 102–106
 Lynn, Cheryl, 51
 lyricism, 106, 131, 153
 lyrics, 4, 15, 18, 51, 53–54, 59, 68–70, 89, 153, 169

M

Macbeth (Shakespeare), 146
 machine agencies, 148
 machine learning, 32
 macho values, 139
 Maciunas, George, 155
 Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, 100, 111
Madame X (Madonna), 68–69
 Madhubuti, Haki R., 96
 Madison, James, 128; *Federalist Paper No. 10*, 128
 Madlib (Otis Jackson), 90
 Madonna (Madonna Louise Ciccone), 67–73; *Madame X*, 68–69
 “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister” (hooks), 68
 magic, 87, 97, 100, 106, 113, 120. *See also* occult philosophies
 magical realism, 98, 99, 110
 “Make America Great Again,” 122, 132
 Malawi, 67, 69, 72
 Malcolm X, 52, 136
 Malian mask, 117
 “Man Who Could See Through Fog, The,” 112
 marches (songs), 130
 marching, 81, 121
 Marley, Bob, 51, 55, 137
 marronage, 122. *See also* enslaved people; slavery, freedom from

- marronage societies, 120
- Marsalis, Branford, 91
- Martinique, 85, 99
- Mason-Dixon line, 106
- Massachusetts Constitution, 162
- mass incarceration, 135–136; of people of color, 128–129
- mass killing, 4
- MassQ, 117–119, 120, 121
- MassQing, 117–120
- MassQuerade Ball, 120
- “Masters of War” (Dylan), 131
- materials culture, v, ix, 78
- Mawu, 106
- Mayfield, Curtis, 77
- McCarthyism, 26
- McGriff, Jimmy, 89
- McKibben, Bill, 134; *The End of Nature*, 134
- Mead, Margaret, 7
- media industries, 45
- melody, 89, 133, 160, 169
- mental illness, 139
- Meta. *See* Facebook
- metagenesis, 103, 109–111
- “Metagenesis of Sun Ra, The” (Dumas), 112
- metaphysics, 110, 112, 113
- MeToo movement, 166
- Metropolis: The Chase Suite* (Monée), 120
- Middle East, 31, 154
- Middle Eastern influence, 31
- militarism, 139
- Miller, Ethelbert, 96
- Miller, Lauren, 121
- Mills Brothers, The, 45
- minstrelsy, 43, 76
- Mirwais (Mirwais Ahmadzai), 71
- misogyny, 133. *See also* sexism
- Mission to Please* (The Isley Brothers), 62
- models of creativity, 150–155; co-creative model, 152–153; converse model, 151–152; linear model, 150–151; transformative model, 153–155. *See also individual entries*
- Monée, Janelle, 115, 120; *Metropolis: The Chase Suite*, 120
- Monk, Thelonius “T. Sphere,” 52, 106
- Morgan, Lewis, 101
- morna, 67, 72
- Morrison, Jim, 55
- Morrison, Toni, 7, 68n2, 96, 106, 110, 111, 165; *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 68
- Mos Def (Yasiin Bey), 91
- mostra*, 70
- Motown, 62
- movement, 76, 80–81; as expression, 81. *See also* dance
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 152
- Mr. I* (Isley, Ronald), 63
- MTV, 62
- Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* (Syms), 123
- Muntu* (Jahn), 101
- Museum of African History and Culture, 75
- Music: as expression, 131, 137, 160; of the 1950s, 37–39, 42, 58, 61–62, 99; of the 1960s, 38–39, 46, 47–50, 51, 99; of the 1970s, 50–54; of the 1980s, 37, 54–62; of the 1990s, 37, 62, 69, 72; aesthetics of, 89; and automation, 148; as documentation, 79–80; as escape, 154; and interactivity, 148; philosophy of, 58–60; sacred, 43, 76–77; as social catalyst, 147, 160; and spatiality, 148; as spectacle, 85; symbolism attached to, 151; teachers of, 75, 92; transmission of, 89, 141. *See also individual entries*
- musical culture, 127
- musical theater, 75, 146
- music recording certification system, 38; gold album, 38; platinum album, 38
- music studies, 142
- “My Brother, My Brother,” 112
- mystic correspondences, 100. *See also* occult philosophies

myth, v, xi, 38, 96, 98–107, 110, 111, 121–123, 152; Anglo Saxon, 100; Celtic, 100; classical African, 100; Ecuadorean, 152; Egyptian, 108; Germanic, 99; West African, 108. *See also* Yeats
Myth of the Negro Past, The (Herskovits), 104
 mythopoesis, 98, 100, 103, 105, 110–111

N

Nas, 90, 176; *Illmatic*, 90
 NASA, 134
 National Guild of Conductors, 164
 nationalism, 107; cultural nationalism, 97; literary nationalism, 98
 National Museum of African American History and Culture, 12, 75–78
 National Museum of African American Music, 78
 National Museum of American History, 12
 National Orchestra of Andean Instruments, 152
 Native Americans, 129. *See also* Indigenous people
 Nat King Cole (Nathaniel Adams Coles), 57, 59
 Neal, Larry, 96–101, 106–107
 Negritude, 99
 neighborhoods, 26, 42, 77, 80
Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing, 101; Jahn, Janheinz, 101
 neoliberalism, 3, 58, 132–135
 Neoplatonism, 100
 Neruda, Pablo, 132; *Canto General*, 132
 New Age Astro-Africanity, 110
 New Deal, 42, 132
 New Left, 98, 132
 “New National Anthem” (T.I.), 138
 news, 12, 20, 32, 54; state-owned outlets, 129
 New World Order, 106
 New York City, 56, 62, 89, 92, 95, 130, 146; Fifth Avenue, 130
Next Phase, The (Jones), 92
 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 99; *Weep Not, Child*, 99
 Nha Nacia Gomi (Maria Inácia Gomes Correia), 72
 Nigeria, 109, 123, 154
Night at Birdland, A, Vol. 1 (Blakey), 91
 Nillmon, 102–104, 106
 No Child Left Behind Act, 162
 Nonpersons, 129. *See also* enslaved people, and personhood; slavery, and personhood
 notation, 141
 Notorious B.I.G., The (Christopher George Latore Wallace), 40, 56, 63, 90
Nueva Canción [New Song] musical movement, 131
 Nuruddin, Yusuf, 133n7, 137; *Hip Hop, Race, and Cultural Politics*, 133
 Nyerere, Julius, 97
 Nyro, Laura, 60

O

O’Casey, Seán, 99
 occult philosophies, 96, 98, 100, 101, 107, 120. *See also individual entries*
 Occupy movement, 135, 137
 Ochs, Phil, 131; “Draft Dodger Rag,” 131; “I Ain’t Marchin’ Any More” (Ochs), 131; “Love Me, I’m a Liberal,” 131
Oh, God, 169
 Ohio Players, 51
 O’Jays, The 51
 Okayplayer, 91
 Okorafor, Nnedi, 123
 Olson, Charles, 85; “Curriculum for the Soul,” 85
 O’Neal, Moses, 13
 Opera Nationale de France, 152
 oral tradition, 99, 104
 oratorio, 151
 orchestra, 143, 152
 Order of the Golden Dawn, 100
 Orquestra Batukadeiras, 69–72
 Osborne, Jeffrey, 51
 Outkast, 115, 121
 outside agitators, 134

P

- Pacific Islanders, 120
- Pagan Enlightenment of the 18th century, 100
- Pakistan, 133n9
- Palm Wine Drinkard, The* (Tutuola), 99, 101
- Papa Legba. *See* Legba
- Parable of the Sower*. *See* *Earthseed*
- paradigm shift, xi, 21, 110, 142, 159,
- Paramount, 30
- Parker, Charlie, 55, 77
- Parliament-Funkadelic, 51
- parody, 111, 154
- parthenogenesis, 111
- Passion of Jesus Christ, 151
- Patiño, Chía, 152
- patriarchal systems, 142, 145, 146, 147
- Patrick, Pat, 12
- Patriot Act, 137
- Pendergrass, Theodore “Teddy,” 51
- People*, 61
- people of color, 18, 122, 128, 135–136, 143–144
- People’s History of the United States, A* (Zinn), 133
- performance, vii, 11, 22, 51, 55, 69, 75, 92, 111, 117, 120, 121, 127, 130–131, 141, 146, 148–149, 151, 155, 164, 169; conventions of, 18; ecologies of, 148
- Petropoulos, Nick, 131–132
- Pettiford, Oscar, 163
- Philip, M. NourbeSe, 85; *Zong!*, 85
- Philippines, 30
- piano, 40, 45, 53, 61, 75, 92, 108, 169
- Pickett, Wilson, 51
- Pinderhughes, Samora, 138; “The Transformations Suite,” 138
- Pitts, Charles “Skip,” 49
- Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Morrison), 68
- “Plegaria a un Labrador,” [Prayer to a laborer] (Jara), 131
- Poderosa International Conference on Cabo Verdean Women, 72n15
- Poderozas. *See* Kriola
- Pointer Sisters, 51
- police, 87; police killings, 95, 127, 135, 137; U.S. policing practices, 87, 135, 139; violence against Black people, 4, 48, 95, 127, 135, 164
- political correctness, 6
- political corruption, 154
- political force, 22, 129–130
- politics, 22–27, 29, 127–139, 153–156, 157–158, 160, 162, 164–165. *See also* individual entries
- polling stations, 128, 128n1. *See also* voting
- pop, vii, viii, 5–6, 22, 37, 39–40, 47, 57, 62, 71, 89
- popular culture, 89, 117, 127–139, 150
- Popular Unity Government of Chile, 131
- Portugal, 69–71
- postcolonial arts, 99, 115
- postmodernism, 24, 30, 136, 144, 146
- poverty, 6, 130, 133
- Power, Christopher, 73n19
- Presley, Elvis, 57
- Preston, Billy, 51
- Pride, Charley, 77
- Prince (Prince Rogers Nelson), 40; “Purple Rain,” 40; “When Doves Cry,” 40
- prison systems, 128–129, 135
- prophetic vision, 120, 122
- protest, 5, 6, 11, 14, 30, 37, 39, 47, 78, 79, 127, 131, 135–136, 137, 142, 157
- public spaces, 137, 138
- “Purple Rain” (Prince), 40

Q

- Queen Latifah (Dana Elaine Owens), 77
- Quilapayún*, 131

R

- race, v, 26, 50, 158. *See also* racism; enforcement of racial lines, 68n2, 139
- racism, 29, 30, 108, 136; ideology of, 127; racial bias, 26; racial oppression, 85; systemic, 122, 127–129

- Radiance of the King, The* (Laye), 99
radio, 32, 42–43, 48, 53; AM, 5, 53, 130; FM, 53
radio programs, 42–43; CBS, 43; Gospel, 43;
Let's Dance, 42
ragtime, 42
Rainey, Gertrude “Ma,” 73n19
“Rain God” (Dumas), 103
Raise Race Rays Raze (Baraka), 107
Rakim, 90, 175
Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and
Collections, 12
Rameau, Jean Philippe, 154; *Les Indes Galantes*,
152
Rampersand, Arnold, 96
R&B, 37–40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 62, 75, 77, 120
rap, 56, 91, 153
Rawls, Louis “Lou,” 51
Reachin’ (A New Refutation of Time and Space)
(Digable Planets), 90
reading, 83, 157; as transmitter of culture, 46, 80
Reagan, Ronald, 134
Reagon, Bernice Johnson, 11, 12
Reconstruction, 135
Redding, Otis, 51
Redmond, Eugene, 96, 98; *Rope of Wind*
(Redmond), 98
Reed, Eric, 92; “The Thorn,” 92
Reed, Ishmael, 98, 108; “I Am a Cowboy in the
Boat of Ra,” 108
reggae, 37, 39, 120, 163
Reggio, Godfrey, 146; *Koyaanisqatsi*, 146
remix culture, 123
Republican Party of the United States, 129,
132, 132n5
“R.E.S.P.E.C.T.” (Franklin), 48
Revivalist. *See* Revive Music Group (RMG)
Revive Da Live. *See* Revive Music Group (RMG)
Revive Music Group (RMG), 91–92
revolutionary, 127, 159, 166; aesthetics, 6, 47;
literature, 98; music, 6, 47
rhythm, 22, 31, 38, 40, 42, 55, 71, 77, 79, 81, 89,
101, 106, 153, 196
rhythm and blues. *See* R&B
“Rigamortis” (Lamar), 92
right to bear arms. *See* United States, gun rights
ring cycle, 163
“Riot or Revolt?” 112
Riperton, Minnie, 51
Ritchie, Lionel, 51
Rite of Spring, The (Stravinsky), 146
rites-of-passage rituals, 124
ritual, v, 4, 71, 96, 98, 101, 105, 108, 117, 120,
124, 141, 153, 155–157, 161–162, 163, 169;
ritual formation, vi, 13
R. Kelly (Robert Sylvester Kelly), 62
Robert Trotter Lecture of the College Music
Society, 141n
Robeson, Paul, 86, 130
rock and roll, 37, 39, 42, 46–47, 53, 61, 62,
76, 120
Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 61, 63
Rolling Stones, 59, 163
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 87
Roots, The, 90
“Rope of Wind” (Dumas), 103
Rope of Wind (Redmond), 98
Rose, Candida, 72
Rose, Tricia, 116
Ross, Diana, 51
Ross, Lázaro, 85; *Yemaya*, 85
Rovics, David, 138
Rufus and Chaka Khan, 51
Run DMC, 163
- ## S
- sacred music. *See* music, sacred
salsa, 67
samba, 67
sampling, 31, 40, 63, 89–90, 91,
Sanders, Bernie campaign, 135, 137
“Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” 14, 48
science fiction, 98–99, 108, 122–124,
Scott, Christian, 92, 163
Scott-Heron, Gilbert “Gil,” 51

- “Scout” (Dumas), 112
 Seals & Crofts, 38, 60
 Searight, Robert, 93
 Seeger, Pete, 131; “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy,” 131
 self-actualization, 122
 self-examination, 142
 self-exploration, 85; nodes for, 85
 self-pedagogy, 84–85
 Sembène, Ousmane, 99; *God’s Bits of Wood*, 99
 Senegal, 99, 152
 Senghor, Leopold, 99
 September 11th, 133, 133n9, 135, 137
 sexism, 29, 30, 136
Shadow and Act, vii, 165
 Shakespeare, William, 104, 146; *King John*, 104; *Macbeth*, 146
 Sheriff Vacy, 103
 “Shout” (The Isley Brothers), 37–39, 41, 46, 59, 61, 62
 Shyamalan, M. Night, 25, 162; *I Got Schooled*, 25, 162
 Silva Lima-Neves, Terza A., 72n15
 Sinatra, Frank, 59
 singing, vi, 31, 38, 41, 43, 46, 59, 69–70, 76, 80, 85, 151–152, 157, 165, 169. *See also* choir; vocals
Sir! No Sir!, 131
 Sister Sledge, 51
 slavery, x, 13–15, 26, 43, 68–71, 79–80, 84–87, 122, 127–129, 136, 157; and personhood, 129; trans-Atlantic slave trade, 68–70, 122; and U.S. government officials, 127–128. *See also* enslaved people; marronage; racism; violence, against Black people; white supremacy
Sleep No More, 146
 Sly and the Family Stone, 51
 Smith, Bessie, 41–43
 Smith, Chris, 93
 Smith, Lonnie Liston, 91
 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, 12
 Smithsonian Institution, 75
 Smith, Vincent, 106
 Smokey Robison and The Miracles, 51
 Snowden, Edward, 32–33
 social consciousness, vii, 5–7, 11, 22, 46, 50–51
 social-cultural education, 163–164
 socialism, 97, 131–136
Socialism and Democracy, 137
 social justice, 75, 162
 social media, viii, 7, 22, 25, 32–33, 67–71. *See also individual entries*
 social movements, 17, 29, 141, 166
 social polarization, 135
Social Power of Music (Banfield and Isley, Ernest), 12
 social services, 132
 social upheaval, 144
 solo performance, 31, 40, 43, 44, 47, 51, 62, 132, 152–153
 Sony, 30
 soul, 26, 37–40, 44, 50–51, 62, 90
Sounds of Resistance, 137
 South Africa, 117
 Southern, Eileen, 78
 South, The (of the United States), 130
 Soviet bloc, 133, 134
 Spain, 152
 Spalding, Esperanza, 163
 speaker systems, 124
 speciesism, 136
 speculative fiction, 95, 115, 122–123
 Spelman College, 133
 Spencer, Kady, 69
 Spinners, The, 51
 spirituals, 14, 44, 67, 77, 79. *See also* church music; gospel
 Springsteen, Bruce, 50, 138; “Born in the USA,” 138
 Stabile, Megan, 91
 Staple Singers, 51
 “Star-Spangled Banner, The” 131
 Stetsasonic, 90; “Talkin’ All That Jazz,” 90

- Stevie Wonder (Stevland Hardaway Morris),
56; *Sunshine of My Life*, 54; *Superstition*, 54
- Stewart, James, 98
- Stiles, Kristine, 155
- “Strange Fruit,” 130
- Stravinsky, Igor, 146, 159–160; *Rite of Spring*,
The, 146
- Strickland, Marcus, 93
- suicide, 30, 55
- Summer, Donna (Donna Gaines), 51
- Sun Ra, 115; *The Ark and the Ankh*, 109–113;
Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy, 108–110;
The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, 108
- Sunshine of My Life* (Stevie Wonder), 54
- superficiality, 32
- supernatural creatures, 100
- Superstition* (Stevie Wonder), 54
- Supremes, The, 51
- surrealism, 106–107, 110, 112–113
- surveillance, 33
- Swedenborg, Emanuel, 100
- Sweet Honey in the Rock, 81
- swing, 41–42, 58, 163
- symbolism, 76, 80, 98–100, 107, 109, 113,
151, 158
- “Symphony No. 5” (Haydn), 130
- Syms, Martine, 123; *Mundane Afrofuturist*
Manifesto, 123
- Synge, John Millington, 99
- synthesizer, 55, 62
- Syria, 31
- system collapse, 32
- systemic racism. *See* racism, systemic
- Szwed, John, 107–108
- T**
- talented tenth, 18
- “Talkin’ About a Revolution” (Chapman), 138
- “Talkin’ All That Jazz” (Stetsasonic), 90
- Tan, Shyr Ee, 142n
- tastemakers, 143
- Tate, Greg, 115, 122
- Taylor, Clyde, 100
- Taylor, James, 60
- Taylor, Johnnie, 51
- Taylor, Otis, 76
- Teatro Nacional Sucre, 152; *La Flauta Mágica*
de los Andes, 151
- techno, 55
- technology, 32; defining arts, 21
- Telemann, 154
- Temptations, The, 51
- “Terrible Child” (i.e., Sun Ra), 111
- terrorism, 4, 23, 133–137, 133n9
- “Testify” (Hendrix), 47
- Thailand, 30
- theme songs, 89
- Theodorakis, Mikis, 131–132
- theosophical cosmology, 100–102, 107–111
- Things Fall Apart* (Achebe), 99
- “This Is America” (Childish Gambino), 153–155
- Thomas, Igmar, 92
- Thompson, Lucky, 89
- “Thorn, The” (Reed), 92
- throughlines. *See* culture throughlines theory
- Thundercat (Stephen Lee Bruner), 93
- T.I. (Clifford Joseph Harris, Jr.), 138; “New
National Anthem,” 138
- time: cyclical, 115; linear, 115; modes of, 115
- T-Neck Records, 49–50, 62
- Todorov, Tzvetan, 98, 102
- Tolkien, J. R. R., 102
- Toomer, Jean, 106
- To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar), 132
- Tracks of Life* (The Isley Brothers), 62
- trans-Atlantic slave trade, 68–69, 78, 104, 122.
See also enslaved people; slavery
- transphobia, 136
- “Transformations Suite, The” (Pinderhughes),
138
- transracial adoption, 69
- trauma, vi, 33, 83–85, 122–123
- travel, 31, 43, 76, 121
- Traylor, Eleanor, 96

Tree of Knowledge, 100
 Tree of Life, 100
 Tribe Called Quest (ATCQ), A, 89, 90, 91;
 “Jazz (We’ve Got),” 89–90; *The Low End
 Theory*, 89
 trickle-down economics, 134
 Troupe, Quincy, 96
 Trump, Donald, 69, 135–136, 158
 Turkey, 30
 Turner, Joseph “Big Joe,” 42
 Turntables, 90, 124
 Tutuola, Amos, 101; *The Palm Wine Drinkard*,
 99, 101
 Twain, Mark (Samuel Clemens), 99
 “Twentieth Century Creators.” *See* Weusi

U

Ubuntu, 73
 Ueno, Ken, 142n
 Uncle Sam, 102
 underrepresented groups, 147, 150
 unemployment, 87
 United States, 12, 31, 69, 72, 75–76, 87,
 129–138, 143–144, 151; antidemocratic
 practices of, 139; domestic policy, 139;
 federalism, 129; foreign policy, 139; global
 influence of, 127; and gun rights, 129, 139;
 imperialism, 134; and militarization, 139;
 and rights, 129, 139; States’ rights, 129;
 vigilantism, 139; and war, 139; as “world
 leadership,” 139
United States Constitution, 127–128
 United States Senate, 129
 Universal, 30
 University of Cambridge, 142, 142n
 urban contemporary music, 37, 39, 42, 50, 62,
 144, 151

V

value systems, v–xii, 3–7, 11, 30, 159, 163–166;
 value codes, vi, xi–xii, 25, 27, 158, 166. *See*
 also cultural codes; values transfer, vii–viii

Vandross, Luther, 51
 Van Peebles, Melvin, 96
 Varrett, Shirley, 77
 Venezuela, 134, 141n, 143, 151n5
 Vietnam, 48, 131, 134
 vinyl, 90
 violence, 5, 45–46, 122, 129, 135, 153–154;
 against Black people, 129, 135; against
 women, 142; gun-based, 153–154; in
 media, 139; and police, 135
Vision, A (Yeats), 100
 Vocal Group Hall of Fame, 63
 vocals, 40, 43, 51, 55, 133, 151, 169; hip-hop,
 133; spoken, 133. *See also* singing
 Vodou, 83, 104
 Vodun, 105
Voices of the Black Nation, 97
 voodoo, 107
 voting, 128–136; voter suppression, 128,
 134–136

W

Wagner, Richard, 99
 “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” (Seeger), 131
 Walker, Margaret, 3, 96
 Wallis, Victor, 22; *Hip Hop, Race, and Cultural
 Politics*, 133
 Walsh, Martin, 68
 War (band), 51
 War on Drugs, The, 132–135
 Washington, Kamasi, 93
 Water Protectors (WP), 83
 Waters, Ethel, 75
Weep Not, Child (Ngũgĩ), 99;
*West Coast Seattle Boy: The Jimi Hendrix
 Anthology* (Hendrix), 47
 West, Cornel, 165
 Western literature, 99, 110; canons and
 canonicity, 68n2, 99, 110, 146, 151–152, 163
 Western philosophy, 99
Weusi, 97
 Weusi Mchoro, 97–101

“When Doves Cry” (Prince), 40
 Whispers, The, 51
 White, Barry (Barry Eugene Carter), 51
 White, Josh, 130
 White, Maurice, 169
 White mediation of Black culture, 115–116, 142,
 White privilege, 67, 68, 68n2, 76, 115
 White spaces, 26, 86, 102–103
 white supremacy, 102–106, 122–123, 127, 145,
 153. *See also* racism
 Whitman, Walt, 99
 Whittier, John Greenleaf, 99
 Williams, John A., 96
 Williams, Julius P., 164
 Williams, Mary Lou, 163
 Willis, Deborah, 19
 Wilson, August, 110
 Wilson, Phil, 131
 wind instruments, 164
 Winehouse, Amy, 55
 Winnie the Pooh, 113
 Withers, Bill, 51
 women’s rights, 14, 37–39, 70–72
 wonder tales, 113
 Woodfox, Albert, 166

Woodstock Festival, 131
 “Words I Manifest” (Gang Starr), 90
 Works Progress Administration, 87
World and Africa, The (Du Bois), 101
 World War II, 136
 World War III, 130
 writers, v, xi, 3–4, 86, 96–100, 122; African, 99,
 100, 110; American, 99–100; Black, v, 86,
 97, 100, 108; Caribbean, 99; Francophone,
 99; postcolonial, 99; songwriters, 14, 38,
 40, 48, 60, 78, 137. *See also* Negritude;
 postcolonial arts.

Y

Yeats, William Butler, 99–100; *A Vision*, 100
Yemaya (Ross), 85
 Yoruba, 110
 Young Lords, 138
 YouTube, 21, 55

Z

Zinn, Howard, 133; *A People’s History of the
 United States*, 133
Zong! (Philip), 85
 Zouk, 67

