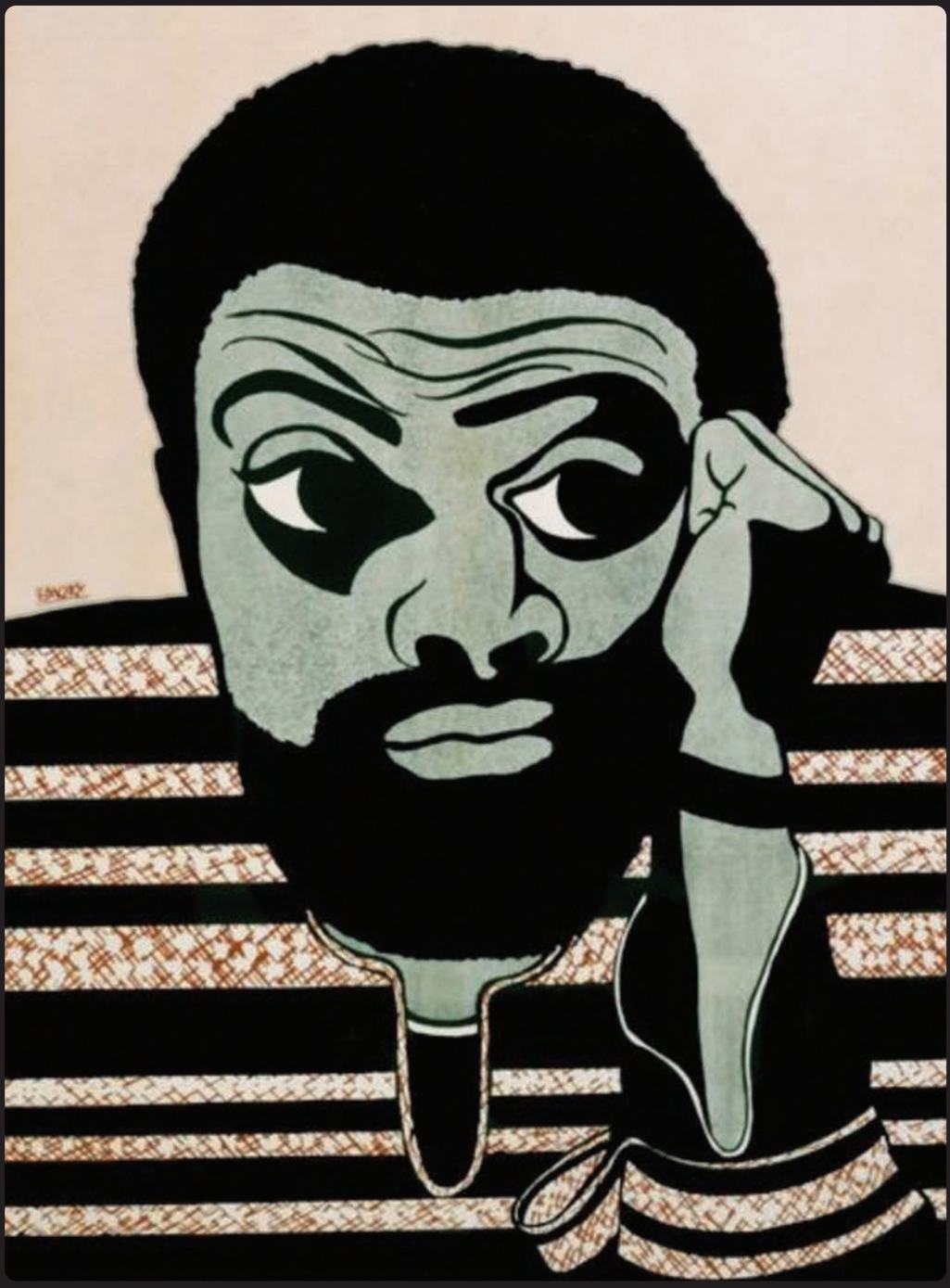

BRICK CITY VANGUARD

Amiri Baraka, Black Music, Black Modernity

JAMES SMETHURST

This page intentionally left blank

BRICK CITY VANGUARD

A Volume in the Series

AFRICAN AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Edited by

Christopher Cameron

BRICK CITY VANGUARD

Amiri Baraka, Black Music, Black Modernity

JAMES SMETHURST

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS PRESS
Amherst and Boston

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-62534-515-8 (paper); 514-1 (hardcover)

Designed by Sally Nichols
Set in Neutra Display Titling and Linotype Centenial
Printed and bound by Maple Press, Inc.

Cover design by Sally Nichols
Cover art: *Portrait of Amiri Baraka,* 1967.
© 2020 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Smethurst, James Edward, author.
Title: Brick city vanguard : Amiri Baraka, black music, black modernity / James Smethurst.
Description: Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 2020. | Series: African American intellectual history | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019044529 | ISBN 9781625345141 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781625345158 (paperback) | ISBN 9781613767641 (ebook) | ISBN 9781613767658 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: African Americans—Music—History and criticism. | Baraka, Amiri, 1934–2014—Criticism and interpretation. | Black nationalism—United States—History—20th century.
Classification: LCC ML3478 .S6 2020 | DDC 780.89/96073—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019044529

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Portions of chapter 2 appeared in different form in "'Formal Renditions': Revising the Baraka-Ellison Debate" in the *Massachusetts Review* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 41–59; portions of chapter 3 appeared in different form in *Some Other Blues: New Perspectives on Amiri Baraka,* edited by Jean-Philippe Marcoux (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020).

TO MAE AND DICK SMETHURST

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was a long time in germinating. As with any scholarship, it is a collective project—though, of course, its shortcomings and mistakes are strictly my own. Many, many people have knowingly or unknowingly contributed to my thinking and research on Amiri Baraka over the years. I am grateful to all of them. So, as always, please forgive me if I forget someone.

I am particularly indebted to Amina Baraka for her generosity, her political and cultural acumen, and her artistry. I am also deeply grateful to the many people who answered questions, gave me leads, shared their research, helped me better understand black art and Black Arts, read portions of this study, and encouraged me in ways large and small, again, whether they knew it or not: Nadia Alahmed, Jim Alexander, Flávia Araújo, Amina Baraka, the late Amiri Baraka, Kimberly Benston, Peter Blackmer, Tony Bolden, Melba Boyd, Charisse Burden-Stelly, Ras Moshe Burnett, Julie Burrell, Jim Carroll, Alex Carter, Margo Crawford, Markeysha Davis, Doris Derby, Brent Edwards, Ashley Farmer, Jonathan Fenderson, Chris Funkhouser, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Don Geesling, John Gennari, Ernest Gibson, David Goldberg, Farah Jasmine Griffin, William Harris, Mae Henderson, John Higginson, Kiara Hill, Gary Holcomb, Geoffrey Jacques, Meta Du Ewa Jones, Emily Lordi, Allen Lowe, Haki Madhubuti, Jean-Phillippe Marcoux, Carter Mathes, Allia Matta, Bill Maxwell, Kim McMillon, Kelli Morgan, Bill Mullen, Donna Murch, Aldon Nielsen, John O'Neal, Howard Rambsy, Eugene Redmond, Ian

Rockborough-Smith, Jacinta Saffold, Kalamu ya Salaam, Sonia Sanchez, Scott Saul, Lauri Scheyer, Kathy Lou Schultz, Mike Sell, Michael Simanga, Judy Smith, Werner Sollors, James Spady, Candy Tate, Jean Theoharis, the late Lorenzo Thomas, Chris Tinson, Askia Touré, Cheryl Wall, Mary Helen Washington, Jerry Ward, and Komozi Woodard.

I wish to thank my past and present colleagues in the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for answering questions, discussing their research, giving much needed advice and critique, and generally providing practical and emotional support: Ernest Allen Jr., John Bracey Jr., Yemisi Jimoh, Agustin Lao-Montes, Toussaint Losier, Traci Parker, Femi Richards, Britt Rusert, Archie Shepp, Manisha Sinha, Nelson Stevens, William Strickland, Esther Terry, Ekueme Michael Thelwell, Steven Tracy, and Robert Paul Wolff. The chair of the department, Stephanie Shonekan, has helped in multiple ways, included responding to workshop presentations of portions of this book. As always, I am thankful to Tricia Loveland, the organizational heart of the Du Bois Department, for practically everything. Thanks, too, to Julie Hayes, the dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts at UMass Amherst, for her support of my scholarship.

I want to acknowledge the help I received from the staffs of the W. E. B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Columbia University, the Woodruff Library at Emory University, the Moorland-Springarn Library at Howard University, the Beineke Library at Yale University, the Main Research Branch and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, and the Tamiment Institute Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University.

I want to thank also the editorial and production staff at the University of Massachusetts Press, especially Mary Dougherty, Matt Becker, Rachael DeShano, and Margaret Hogan, for their support and advice at different stages of this process. I am also grateful for the extremely helpful comments of the press's two anonymous readers.

I also owe many thanks to my family: William Smethurst (from deep in the heart of Jersey), Ludlow Smethurst, Richard Smethurst, Mae Smethurst, Andrew Smethurst, Alejandra Ramirez, Katie Smethurst, Jacob Smethurst Rubin, Silvie Schlein, Thea Schlein, Rachel Lee Rubin (provider of comradely support and criticism), Jessie Rubin, Merle Forney, and Margaret Forney. I am extremely grateful to Carol Forney for love, insight, and editing.

This page intentionally left blank

BRICK CITY VANGUARD

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

BRICK CITY VANGUARD

The first thing to say is that Amiri Baraka loved "the music," which was jazz in the first place but also almost all forms of black music. Unlike Stuart Hall, who famously claimed that he "doesn't give a damn" about popular music except as a site or arena for political contestation, a place "where socialism might be constituted" (a claim that I do not really believe, given Hall's early fondness for jazz, especially the work of Miles Davis), Baraka would not have advanced such an argument.[1] I can recall going to interview Baraka at his house in Newark and waking him up late one morning. After he invited me in and before he began his other morning rituals, he immediately turned on the Newark, New Jersey, public jazz station WBGO. Certainly he was concerned with music and popular culture as spaces of struggle for black liberation and socialism. That concern is an important facet of this book, that is, examining Baraka's notion that "the music" was a fundamental instrument, so to speak, in the creation and tracking of a radical black working-class consciousness. It was this consciousness, he believed, that would propel black workers, in alliance with other sectors of the world population, to transform society, carrying out a socialist revolution. Still, Baraka's sheer pleasure in music (and much popular culture generally) has to be recalled.

However, the focus of this project is not primarily Baraka's aesthetic assessments of black music nor is it, as most scholarly considerations of Baraka's engagement with and writings on

black music have been, the impact of black music, particularly the blues and jazz, on the aesthetics, the formal arrangements, sound, and performance of his own work, particularly his poetry, plays, and short fiction. Such scholars and poets as William J. Harris, Aldon Nielsen, Meta Du Ewa Jones, Fred Moten, Carter Mathes, Nathaniel Mackey, Kathy Lou Schultz, Tony Bolden, Werner Sollors, Kimberly Benston, Jean-Phillipe Marcoux, and Lorenzo Thomas, to name a relative few, have already done this quite adeptly—though there is obviously room for more work in this vein. A number, from Kimberly Benston's groundbreaking *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (1976) to Kathy Lou Schultz's excellent *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka* (2013), have taken up the interrelation between music and black history. Such an interrelation is a natural concern given Baraka's own work in this vein from *Blues People* (1963) forward—and a subject important to this study. The focus here, which obviously builds on that earlier scholarship, is considering how Baraka's writing on and actual performance with music proposes an influential model of the creation of an African American people or nation, and the growth and consolidation of a black working class within that nation with important ties with other working-class sectors outside the black nation. I am also concerned with the ways that Baraka used music to figure the encounter of the African American people and the black working class with what many have called neoliberalism—though that is not a term for which Baraka ever showed much affection—as well as a vision of a liberated black future.

One might say that this vision is all about the relationship among black modernity, modernism, postmodernism, and futurism—though again, Baraka's take on things might vary considerably, though not inevitably, from the way these terms tend to be used in the academy. One of the most important ideas at stake here is taking Baraka seriously as a U.S. Marxist and Marxist thinker more than generally has been the case in critical assessments of him and his work. "U.S. Marxist" is used here because, contrary to some still common claims about the nature

and practice of Marxism in the United States, Marxism here, at least the varieties that evolved from the Third or Communist International, has long seen class *and* race (or nation) as important, interrelated analytics rather than competing lenses for seeing society and the struggle for social liberation.

Baraka was long a major Marxist figure in U.S. thought and culture as well as an important progenitor of cultural studies in this country, albeit an activist iteration of cultural studies that was perhaps more akin to, but predating, that which arose out of the British New Left at the University of Birmingham than the generally less-politicized way it became institutionalized in the United States. In fact, it is extremely difficult to think of another major U.S. author who grappled with Marxism so intensely over such a long time as Baraka. For him, Marxism was not simply an oppositional badge or a general ideological stance. His Third World Marxist work over forty years displays a deep engagement with the writing of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Georgi Plekhanov, Mao Zedong, Amilcar Cabral, A. M. Babu, and, yes, Joseph Stalin, among many other Marxist thinkers. Another argument that underlies this project is that while Baraka's political and aesthetic stances changed, or evolved if one prefers, considerably over the course of his career, there is much continuity in the different periods of his work and thinking. Central to this continuity is the meaning of black music and its role in helping shape an African American people and a black working class that became the heart of the black nation, as well as music as a sort of index or history of the material, psychic, and ideological development of black people. And, of course, as a Marxist activist artist, critic, and scholar for the majority of his career, he wanted to change the world, not merely study it.

The genesis of this project is in large part the result of my thinking about the meaning of Baraka's 2014 wake and funeral in Newark. For a variety of reasons, I am not normally inclined toward personal anecdotes in my scholarly writings, though I have no a priori problem with people who do have that inclination. Perhaps, in part, I am mindful here of Baraka's story about

Albert Ayler chastising him for thinking that "it is about you" in Baraka's music criticism—though I suppose that all of our scholarly and critical work is about us, albeit often through a glass darkly (pun in all its seriousness intended).[2] But the spark for this project, though it was a long time coming, was my experience sitting in the balcony of Symphony Hall (formerly the Mosque Theater) in Newark (a city with which my father's family has had a lengthy and deep connection, basically one as long as the Smethursts have been in the United States), at Baraka's funeral. The stage featured nationally famous musicians, poets, scholars, rappers, theater workers, activists, and politicians, as well as locally important Newark politicians, community activists, scholars, and so on. The Newark police worked smoothly with the Nation of Islam, people from local community organizations, and other segments of organized black Newark to guide the crowd to their seats. One of the most surprising and moving moments to me and people around me (and I would guess the vast majority of the audience) was when the Newark Fire Department pipe band (all white as far as I could see and, I suspect, mostly Irish American) rose to play a musical elegy to the passing of a native son. This was a group and demographic that had frequently been in conflict with Baraka over hiring practices but which nevertheless gave a final recognition to a man (and a family) that had remained devoted to the city and that had championed the labor rights of public workers.

However, what made the deepest impression on me was the audience, the thousands of people who packed the theater, of whom I would guess at least three-quarters were local people, which is to say, black Newarkers. I had been similarly impressed the day before when I attended Baraka's wake at a Baptist church in the Central Ward, the historic heart of black Newark, and stood on a long line that snaked around the block. Again, as far as I could tell, the thousands inside and outside the church who came to pay a last tribute to Baraka and console his family were overwhelmingly black Newarkers. To some considerable degree this had to do with the political efforts of the Barakas: Amiri; his wife, Amina; and their children, especially his son Ras, an

educator, former high school principal, city councilperson, and soon to be elected mayor of the city. It seemed to me that I stood on line with every black teacher in Newark, judging from some of the conversations around me at the wake. No doubt, Ras Baraka had some influence on this due to his work in the schools.

Still, it struck me then, and now, that there had probably never been a wake and funeral for a poet in the United States like those for Baraka. At least, I had never heard of one where community people in a depressed midsized deindustrialized U.S. city that was not known nationally as an arts hub (outside of those people who study the Black Arts Movement through professional and/or personal interest) turned out in such numbers for a local writer, especially one who was such a public radical, a communist in fact. Even the funerals of James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, both beloved in the broader black community, were much more celebrity affairs—and, of course, their funerals were in New York (Baldwin's actual hometown and Hughes's adopted hometown), not Newark. In other words, there was something special about Baraka, about Newark, and about Baraka's relation to his native city, which he had left to become a writer and to which he returned and remained for almost fifty years. One (or at least I) could not help but wonder about "all these blues people," as Baraka called them in his play *Dutchman.* Who were they? And why were they in Symphony Hall and the Metropolitan Baptist Church? Somehow the audience, the music in the hall (from a rendition of Paul Robeson's version of "Ol' Man River" with its altered line of "must keep fighting until I'm dying" to jazz by Craig Harris, David Murray, Oliver Lake, the late Hamiet Bluiett, and other leading musicians, to the Fire Department Pipe Band), Baraka lying on the stage in an open casket, the various verbal tributes (some by local politicians who had ambivalent relationships to the Baraka family), and the city of Newark itself combined to make me think about Baraka, music, the city, and what it was about Baraka, Newark, and its black community that could produce such amazing events. This, in turn, made me think about Baraka's longstanding and deep interest in (and writing on) Newark's black musical history—an interest greatly influenced, I

argue, by his wife, Amina Baraka. This interest revolved around the city as a landscape for black music and its evolution, and how the city allowed him to articulate the larger meanings of black music in more concrete, grassroots ways than he had before.[3]

Basically, what I want to talk about is how Baraka came to understand, track, and theorize the creation of a black nation and a black working class through his writings about and performances with black music. Another key argument is that while Baraka's efforts in this regard only fully matured with his move to Marxism, this vision of black music both as an index of and tool in producing a black nation and class was present in embryonic form in his work from almost the very beginning. He wrote in the 1963 pre–Black Arts "Jazz and the White Critic":

> The notes of a jazz solo exist in a notation strictly for musical reasons. The notes of a jazz solo, as they are coming into existence, exist as they do for reasons that are only concomitantly musical. Coltrane's cries are not "musical," but they *are* music and quite moving music. Ornette Coleman's screams and rants are only musical once one understands the music his emotional attitude seeks to create. This attitude is real, and perhaps the most singularly important aspect of his music. Mississippi Joe Williams, Snooks Eaglin, Lightnin' Hopkins have different emotional attitudes than Ornette Coleman, but all of these attitudes are continuous parts of the historical and cultural biography of the Negro as it has existed and developed since there was a Negro in America, and a music that could be associated with him that did not exist anywhere else in the world. The notes *means something;* and the something is, regardless of its stylistic considerations, part of the black psyche as it dictates the various forms of Negro culture.[4]

In many respects, this is a project about Baraka's understanding of black modernity and what comes after modernity, whether "black postmodernism," "deindustrialization" and the "urban crisis," the "end of the world as we know it," and/or "black futurity." However, again, taking Baraka's Marxism seriously, this was an understanding that was predicated on the need to not merely study the world but change it into a socialist society with, in the words of the Staple Singers, "no economical exploitation and no political domination."[5] Or, to put it another way, Baraka pressed us to always ask the question posed by the title of a 1975 Sonia

Sanchez play, "Uh, Uh; But How Do It Free Us?" in our analysis.[6] Of course, one does not necessarily ask that question in the middle of the aesthetic experience itself, but at some point, one always needs to reflect on the political and ideological work that art does. One might disagree with Baraka's particular variant of Third World Marxism or question the manner of his pursuit of it, but it is hard for me at least not to honor this faith in these difficult and depressing political times. One ancillary argument of this study with respect to Baraka's move to Marxism is that it was with this move that Baraka reached his fully developed mature style as one of the most powerful literary performers, poets, and prose writers of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, instead of seeing that shift as a marker of a decline in his work.

This work is in some senses akin to Alexander G. Weheliye's excellent *Phonographies* in which Weheliye proposes to "trace the rhizomatic vibrations of sonic Afro-Modernity through a variety of historiocultural patterns." However, Weheliye, oddly, barely mentions Baraka (only once in the introduction) despite the fact that Baraka was probably more directly involved in the chronicling of black music and its recording, indeed more deeply a part of the music industry through his writing of liner notes, than any major black writer since James Weldon Johnson with the possible exception of Langston Hughes. Then again, perhaps it is not so odd since Weheliye's book is deeply concerned with the interface of technology and "sonic Afro-Modernity," and Baraka, unlike the audiophile Ralph Ellison, was not so directly interested in the audio technology of the music industry except in how it was related to modes and means of industrial production and of transmission to mass black audiences. Also, Weheliye resolutely refuses to go down the path of considering black music as resistance and as an indicator of black struggle. While he does not derogate such a path, that is simply not his project. Rather, he is interested in thinking about black music, technology, and mass culture and their role in the production of "Afro-Modernity," which he argues is not particular to black people but a major constituent part of anything one might think of as "modernity" generally, especially in the United States.[7] While the Marxist Baraka

(and the Marxist me, I suppose) certainly was concerned with the ways that black music contributed to a U.S. modernity, both in terms of what black people were owed for their willing and unwilling contributions to the United States and of understanding the multinational and multiracial U.S. working class, he was all about struggle and liberation, and any account of his writing on and with black music must reflect that.

In the manner of a radical who wants to understand the world in order to change it, Fred Moten is probably the scholar whose critical work is most closely related to this study in terms of unpacking the social meaning and political effects that Baraka intended in his histories and interpretations of black music. However, Moten's writing to this point has been directly concerned with a much more limited subset of Baraka's writing on music than is this book.[8] One thing that Moten's writing on Baraka's essay "The Burton Greene Affair," along with the scholarship on U.S. popular music by Rachel Lee Rubin, provoked in me was a new appreciation for Baraka's take on the production of music by black artists as skilled labor, the sort of labor that is frequently ignored, undervalued, or labeled as somehow instinctual or natural by white commentators. Yet, as Baraka recognized, this was something that was sounded, thematized, and contextualized by the music and the musicians themselves. James Brown (frequently referenced in Baraka's criticism and poetry), after all, billed himself as, among many other things, "the hardest working man in show business." However, the key, as I discuss most explicitly in chapter 4, is not simply the intensity of the labor but also the skill.[9]

One aspect of this skill, as in many lines of work, is that after an apprenticeship, it becomes a sort of second nature, seemingly instinctive. Again, music provides a way of looking at this question of instinct, or to use another key term of Baraka's, "spirit." "Spirit" meant different, if sometimes overlapping, things for Baraka at different times in his career. There is the Hegelian notion of "spirit" as the tenor or guiding principle of an age that, like dialectics, is an idealist concept that Marx famously turned on its head so that it became the material base of productive

and class relations that determines the spirit of the age and its motion. Another sense of "spirit" in Baraka's work is the sacred sense, especially of a connection to a higher, divine world, whether actual or metaphorical. Present too is the idea of "spirit" as a collective consciousness of class, of nation, of tradition that binds people together and provides linkages to the past, as in the tie of black people everywhere to Africa in the first place. During the second half of his life as a Marxist, it was the first and last senses of "spirit" that predominated, though a materialist version of the sacred, of a connection to something larger, to a better, purer self remained, with some tensions and contradictions. The last notion of "spirit" is often contrasted to the figure (and condition) of the "ghost," which remains tied to death and a deathly whiteness (figuratively and literally), insatiable hunger for the living, and being trapped in past structures of oppression and exploitation, not unlike the captain of the Flying Dutchman referenced in Baraka's *Dutchman.*[10] One question that is raised in the fifth chapter, when discussing Baraka's gloss of Curtis Mayfield's "Freddie's Dead" in a performance with William Parker and his band on the recording *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,* is Baraka's/the speaker's comment about seeing the dead Freddie sometimes and wondering whether he's now free or still a "slave," which is to say, wondering if he is a "spirit" or a "ghost."

Similarly, Brent Edwards's *Epistrophies* greatly aided me in my thinking about Baraka and music, particularly in thinking about what some consider ephemeral or ancillary forms of literature, especially long-playing album liner notes, the subject of chapter 3.[11] However, interestingly, Baraka is more of a presence than a direct subject of inquiry and interpretation in Edwards's book. Another helpful concept here is Margo Crawford's notion of a "Black Post-Blackness," which she sees as an update of Baraka's "changing same" for the twenty-first century. Crawford's positing of Black Arts as imparting a sense of what is left and what is left behind, of, as Crawford uses a phrase of Nathaniel Mackey, "lingering while moving on," is a very useful lens to look at how Baraka deployed black music to sound and break down what is

always left of blackness, the black nation, and the black working class, as well as what is left behind in the motion of history.[12] And, as noted elsewhere in this introduction, though "post-blackness" is a term that Baraka himself would probably not have ever used as a mature artist, except as an epithet to attack an ideological and aesthetic opponent, the idea of "post," of "postness," of futurity was very much on his mind, especially in his engagement with black music.

Despite the usefulness of these works, and the scholarship of Harris, Nielsen, Jones, Mackey, Schultz, Mathes, Sollors, Bolden, Thomas, and others, the thinker who helped me parse Baraka's work in this regard the most was Baraka himself, in both his writings and in interviews. Whatever Baraka's blind spots, quirks, and shortcomings, he had a capacity for self-criticism, often talking about himself almost as if he were another person, to a degree that I have not encountered in any other artist. As Aldon Nielsen observes about Baraka's autobiographical novel, *Six Lives,* "The narrator is particularly hard on the earlier versions of himself."[13] That is to say, Baraka thought a lot about his past ideological and aesthetic stances and was willing, almost obsessively willing, to offer sharp comments about their strengths and weaknesses.

This self-reflection had its limits though, particularly with respect to gender. One of the interesting things about Baraka is that he had strong women partners in so many of his major projects: Hettie Jones as a coeditor of the journal *Yugen,* Diane di Prima as a coeditor of the journal *Floating Bear,* and Amina Baraka as a partner in almost everything he did after his return to Newark in 1966, to name the major examples.[14] These women were partners in practically every other way too. While he was willing to criticize himself for his male supremacy in different moments of his career, when one reads Baraka's autobiography and interviews, one does not get anything like a full sense of the intellectual and artistic contributions of women to the political and cultural projects with which he was most associated, and to his thinking, aesthetics, and literary and political activities. This gap in Baraka's self-awareness and the articulation of that

self-awareness is particularly addressed in the first chapter on the importance of the landscape and soundscape of Newark in his conception of the genesis of an industrial black working class and what that means for the character and destiny of a black nation. That chapter argues, among other things, that Amina Baraka was practically and ideologically a key (really *the* key) shaper of Amiri Baraka's understanding of the music and culture of his hometown, even if, interestingly, she came to differ with him considerably in her understanding of Marxism, the "national question," and how one approaches coalition-building and practical political activity. (Basically, Amiri Baraka remained a "Third World Marxist" heavily influenced by Maoism while Amina Baraka became closely connected to the Communist Party of the United States of America [CPUSA], an organization most Maoists and post-Maoists saw as "revisionist" and reformist.)

The organization of this book is roughly chronological but often with some considerable temporal overlaps, moving ahead and behind the beat, to invoke Ralph Ellison's famous prologue to *Invisible Man.* The first chapter, "That's Where Sarah Vaughan Lives': Amiri Baraka, Newark, and the Landscape and Soundscape of Black Modernity," obviously encompasses the time period of Baraka's entire life, from his earliest days to his death. There is a partial time-out for the portions of his life at Howard University, in the U.S. Air Force in Puerto Rico, and as a black bohemian artist and early Black Arts initiator in New York—though, as we will see, the landscape and soundscape of the Newark of his youth were not insignificant to the development of his writing during his time in New York, even if they did not have the centrality they would assume in his later literary efforts. For Baraka, Newark and its sound epitomized the black modern. Baraka's vision of black modernity entailed the creation of a black industrial working class and a black working-class experience and culture in the wake of the Great Migration from the South to Newark and other northern industrial cities, a migration that continued for most of the twentieth century, constantly renewing the connection of black workers with the culture, traditions, and sensibilities of the black South—itself increasingly urbanizing as

the century wore on.[15] This was a class forged by industrial and urban organization, exploitation, racism, and struggle against class and racial exploitation.

Baraka framed what came after modernism not so much as "postmodernism," as it is normally used in the academy, but as historian Thomas Sugrue, among others, has called the "urban crisis" of deindustrialization vividly seen practically everywhere in Newark and the assaults of what many would term the "neoliberal" regime.[16] The focus here is on how the cultural geography and history of Newark informed Baraka's positing of a popular avant-garde continuum of black culture and politics. It also takes up the vastly underestimated influence of Amina Baraka on Amiri Baraka's knowledge and understanding of Newark and the meaning of its music, which is to say, on virtually the entire body of Amiri Baraka's artistic output after his return to his hometown. When Amiri Baraka came back to Newark in 1966 after a considerable hiatus, Amina Baraka, who had never left the city and played an important part in the radical black cultural and political world of Newark, was Amiri Baraka's guide, intercessor, and interpreter to early Black Arts Newark, especially its local music scene. Even later, many of the important cultural initiatives in Newark associated with Amiri Baraka, such as Kimako's Workshop and the Newark Music Project, were significantly the brainchildren of Amina Baraka.

Chapter 2, "'Formal Renditions': Revisiting the Baraka-Ellison Debate," focuses on the key text of Baraka's music writing in the run-up to the Black Arts in the early 1960s, *Blues People,* and the debate that arose after Ralph Ellison, whose *Invisible Man* Baraka much admired and drew on in *Blues People,* savaged Baraka's book in the *New York Review of Books*. This conflict between Baraka and Ellison foreshadowed larger debates over the relationship (or nonrelationship) of African Americans to the United States in the Black Power and Black Arts period. This debate used models of black music, particularly what Baraka termed a "blues continuum" rooted in the South and continually transformed in urban industrial centers while retaining a blues core (the "changing same" as Baraka would famously term it later), as guides

for black artists in other genres and media, whether to enmesh themselves further in the fabric of "America" or to draw away to some other notion of polity or nation. This debate, particularly the Ellison review, was also about Ellison's reinterpreting or recontextualizing *Invisible Man* in terms of a liberal vision of U.S. democracy and culture, a reading that was not apparent to readers and reviewers previously despite the novel's obvious anticommunism in its final published form. One claim here is that Ellison's review and the ensuing debate not only provided a new frame for reading *Invisible Man* but also, for better and worse, cemented the reputation of *Blues People* as the epitome of criticism that brings history, politics, anthropology, and sociology to bear on popular music in order to understand the social meaning and work of that music, making *Blues People* a landmark of cultural studies before the Birmingham School—and long before British cultural studies circulated in the United States.

Chapter 3, "'A Marching Song for Some Strange Uncharted Country': The Black Future and Amiri Baraka's Liner Notes," looks at the album liner notes Baraka wrote between 1959 and the flowering of Black Arts in the mid-1960s. The concern here is not simply how his liner notes and other music marginalia became a sort of literary subgenre and of a piece with his more obviously "literary" work, albeit more obviously bound up with mass culture and commercial production than much of his other work. It is also about how his liner notes evolved to express Baraka's sense of radical black nationhood (including the emergence of a black working class), internationalism, and black modernity in a way that anticipated his later calls for social (and socialist) transformation seen through the lens of black self-determination.

Chapter 4, "'Soul and Madness': Baraka's Recorded Music and Poetry from Bohemia to Black Arts," covers roughly the same period as the preceding chapter. As William Harris points out, not only did Amiri Baraka's politics change over the first half of his career but so did his voice on the page and on the stage.[17] This chapter tracks the changes in Baraka's poetic voice and the role his understanding of black music played in those transformations, particularly in his combinations of poetry and music

(and other forms of black expressive art). Another related topic is the significance of the process of transformation itself, of the transformation of language into poetry, of sound (including language) into music, of motion into dance, of "Negro" into "Black," of farmer into worker. As others have noted, the notion of poetry (and music) as a process of transformation rather than a finished product have a foreground in the New American Poetry of the 1950s and 1960s (a concept that Baraka had a major part in conceiving), notably in the theoretical work and poetry of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School. Nevertheless, Baraka used black music (and other black writers who drew on black music to inform and contextualize their work, especially Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown) as a way of thinking about black process, black transformation, and black revolution (and ultimately social transformation and revolution generally—though with the black working class in the lead).

The fifth chapter, "'I See Him Sometimes': William Parker Reimagines and Amiri Baraka Glosses Curtis Mayfield," takes up Baraka's work with William Parker and a band that Parker led on the musical project *The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield* in roughly the first decade of the twenty-first century. During this time, Baraka toured and performed frequently with Parker and his band, performances that have produced two live recordings to date. The heart of this chapter is readings of Baraka's performance with Parker's band captured by the recording *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield* (2010). What is intended by "reimaginings" here is not any deep critical term that will be deployed in other contexts beyond this study but simply that *The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield* was not a tribute project (or only a tribute project) or some sort of repertory set of performances but a recasting of the songs in which their interpretation, or the measurement of what Baraka called the psychic "weight" in *Blues People,* of that music is pushed to the fore.

The conclusion of this study says something about what I see as the larger takeaways from Baraka's writing on and with music. In brief, these are the pioneering of an activist form of cultural studies. I make the argument that Baraka is the author of one of the

greatest, if not the greatest, body of Marxist thinking about U.S. culture, particularly music, in the history of the United States, and that, contrary to some critical accounts, his move to Third World Marxism grew organically out of his earlier work and thinking, with some obvious breaks and leaps. This Marxist engagement with and explication of black music enabled him to produce some of his best work, both in published form and in performance, practically until his death in 2014, reaching an audience that was perhaps not entirely appreciated until one saw the crowds at Symphony Hall and the Metropolitan Baptist Church.

A few comments on terminology might be helpful here. When I use the upper-case "Communist," I refer to the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and its political and cultural circles—or one of the CPUSA's sister Communist parties. The lower-case term "communist" denotes Marxists in the Leninist stream who are not affiliated with the Communist Party USA. According to this accounting, Amiri Baraka was a "communist" but not a "Communist" for the second half of his life.

While "cultural nationalist" can have a variety of meanings, in this study it is used to identify those groups, institutions, and individuals that subscribed to the neo-African Kawaida ideology of Maulana Karenga and his US organization to one degree or another. As is discussed in this study, the issue of the influence of Karenga and Kawaidaism can be murky because, unlike the CPUSA or the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, US did not have official branches outside of Los Angeles and San Diego; rather, various groups, institutions, and activists declared their general acceptance of Karenga's principles without having formal ties to US or embracing any sort of what the CPUSA or the Black Panthers might think of as "party discipline" and national structures to enforce that discipline. In other words, Karenga could not expel people from the Newark chapter of US in the manner that people were periodically thrown out of the Panthers and the CPUSA since there was no official Newark chapter of US, no matter how Kawaidaist the Committee for a Unified Newark and the Congress of African People might have been for most of their existences. Consequently, Kawaidaists outside of Los Angeles felt

relatively free to reject elements of Karenga's thought. For the purposes of this study, the most important result of this comparative freedom on the local level was Baraka's rejection of Karenga's condemnation of the blues and other related forms of black popular music during the Black Arts/Black Power era.[18]

Finally, the term "nation" is generally used in the Marxist sense of "a people" descended from the Third International on the "National Question," a line that exerted tremendous influence on the "Third World Marxism" of Amiri Baraka—indeed, also on the positions of non-Marxist "territorial nationalists," such as the Republic of New Africa.[19] This sort of Marxist "nation" is distinguished from the nation-state, though a central tenet of such Marxism is that nations have (or should have) the right to self-determination, including the ability to form a nation-state, without ruling out the possibility of a multinational state. The term can get a little murky when trying to parse the distinction between a "nation" and a "national minority" in this school of Marxist thought. (Basically, a nation occupies a more or less contiguous territory while a "national minority" does not, hence the Comintern and CPUSA notion that African Americans in the "Black Belt" of the South constituted a nation while those in the urban ghettoes of the North and West did not.) Also, while this Marxist notion of a nation with a common language, economic life, territory, psychology, and so on intersects with older black nationalist ideas, it also conflicts with the common black nationalist sense of Africans and African descendants everywhere as being "a" people—or, as Maulana Karenga and Kawaidaists would say, Africans (or "Afrikans") on the continent and in the diaspora. Both the Third International/Third World Marxist sense of a black nation or people and the black nationalist/pan-African vision of nation and people coexist in Baraka's work, even at times in his Marxist period. It might be worth noting that though such nations may be, after Benedict Anderson, imagined communities, those imaginings had and have tremendous power and material consequences, as seen in the situation of the Kurds in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran as I write these words in late 2019.[20]

CHAPTER ONE

"THAT'S WHERE SARAH VAUGHAN LIVES"

Amiri Baraka, Newark, and the Landscape and Soundscape of Black Modernity

Amiri Baraka was the poet laureate of New Jersey, but his deepest connection to the state was to the relatively small, densely populated portion comprising the city of Newark, "Brick City," where he lived the majority of his life. His work is filled with not only the sights of Newark but also the city's sounds, musical and verbal. These sounds intertwine in ways that display their polyglot, multi-accentual nature in dialogue with each other, corresponding to the groups of people and social classes that made up Newark, with the emphasis on what he saw as the black core of the city. What is notable about the soundings and representations of the black neighborhoods of Newark in Baraka's poetry, fiction, criticism, drama, and autobiographical narrative is the way he depicted the social, cultural, historical, and geographical particularities of the city while portraying Newark after the onset of the Great Migration as representative of the struggles, strengths, and weaknesses of urban African American communities, of a black nation, his nation, in general:

> But for me, this city has always been the measure of everything else. The future the past, the roaring silence we think of as Now. It has been, and is, a measure, a set of standards and life influencing principles it carries with it, that I always related to in one way or

> another, even far away from Home. Because there is a depth, a realness, a harsh confirmation that wherever I might go and whatever I might do, no matter how it was rendered glitter and dazzle or transcendent revelation or even triumph, there was a link or tether, a chain of brick, a rein of concrete that held me to the early perception and subsequent rationale I got walking these mumbling streets that the American Dream, if you will, was only that, and a bitterly corny one at that.[1]

Perhaps paradoxically, even as he remarked on Newark's particular significance to black history, politics, speech, art, literature, dance, and especially music, Baraka insisted that the largely occluded contributions of the Brick City mirror similarly hidden histories in other old industrial centers where African Americans migrated and were changed by their encounters with a multiracial and multiethnic working class (which often not only included so-called white ethnic groups but also Asian American, Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, and already existing, longstanding African American communities) and urban, industrial life. In fact, for Baraka Newark epitomized "the West," though, as he remarked in his poem "I Am," his definition of "West" did not mean "Europe" or the legacy of "Europe" but a polyglot, multinational, polycontinentally descended industrial society with people of African descent at the center:

> We are being told of the greatness
> of Western Civilization
> Yet Europe
> is not the West
>
> Leave England headed West
> you arrive
> in Newark[2]

For Baraka, Newark, particularly "the Ward" (the Third Ward, which was folded into the new Central Ward in the 1950s, the historic heart of black Newark west of Downtown) and its musical and verbal sounds, embodied the black modern that he posed against more restrictive (and politically conservative) notions of "high modernism," especially those enshrined in the

New Criticism, as well as against more depoliticized and whitened versions of bohemia and what followed this modernity. If one thing that Baraka got from Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School was an attention to geography as a central concern of poetry, as Aldon Nielsen points out, Baraka was important to Olson in providing a sense of the "geography of race."[3] Increasingly, as Baraka's career progressed, it was the specific geography of the Third/Central Ward on which he mapped the meaning of race, class, and nation. His vision of the black modern in literature, music, dance, theater, and visual arts, as well as politics and social consciousness, entailed the creation of a black industrial working class and a black working-class culture. This was a group and culture forged by industrial and urban organization, exploitation, racism, and struggle against class and racial exploitation.[4] The Great Migration from the South to Newark and other northern industrial cities, a migration that continued for most of the twentieth century, constantly renewed the connection of these black workers with the art, culture, traditions, and sensibilities of the black South, or as Baraka described it, "New Ark, the Brick City. Half Country Half City. Half Funk Half Pretty, the South always and yet still ring in our bones."[5] This view rethinks the modern and modernism in the United States generally as being coterminous with the Great Migration from the onset of World War I until the 1970s. That is to say, one of the defining characteristics of modernism and modernity in the United States is the forging of a black industrial working class and class consciousness.

Baraka too was deeply invested in what becomes of the black working class, and the black nation, after modernism when, to quote William Junius Wilson, "work disappears" in the era of "neoliberalism."[6] Of course, Baraka's particular variant of Marxism to which he adhered for half his life would much more often employ notions of "imperialism" or "capitalism" than neoliberalism. However, Baraka's vision of a black working-class ethnogenesis and Newark's devolution into a postindustrial ghastliness antedated his move toward "Third World Marxism" in the mid-1970s—in fact, it laid the groundwork for that move in many

respects.[7] ("Ghastly," with its connections to "ghost," was a term that Baraka used to describe Newark, particularly during the Black Arts era.) The focus here is on how the cultural geography and history of Newark, which is significantly a geography and history of black music, informed Baraka's positing of a popular avant-garde continuum of black culture and politics. Baraka saw this formulation as issuing from a black modernist tradition significantly descended from Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and their readings of the meaning of black music, especially jazz and the blues, but with a black Jersey accent, so to speak.[8]

The first black mayor of Newark (and a major East Coast city), Kenneth Gibson, probably under the influence of Baraka, placed Newark firmly in the U.S. urban vanguard during his 1970 election campaign, declaring, "Wherever American cities are going, Newark will get there first."[9] Given the demographics of Newark in 1970 (African Americans were about 60 percent of the population, if a smaller portion of the electorate), Gibson was really talking about a black vanguard. That is to say, Gibson meant, "Wherever American cities are going, Newark will get there first—and the black working class will take it there." Despite their later break with Gibson, Baraka and his Committee for a United Newark (CFUN) were the architects of Gibson's election. (CFUN, a black cultural nationalist political organization influenced by the Kawaida philosophy of Maulana Karenga, later morphed into the Newark chapter of the Congress of African People [CAP], a major Black Power organization in which Baraka was the key figure.) Gibson's visionary rhetoric based itself in Baraka's sense of Newark as a "New Ark," which obviously riffed on the biblical ark and less obviously (to non-Newarkers) reproduced the way that black southern migrants pronounced the name of the city (as opposed to many white and some longtime black Newarkers, who said something closer to "Nerk"), and as an archetypical modern and increasingly postindustrial urban U.S. landscape. It also invoked jazz musician and composer Sun Ra and his Arkestra, a group that Baraka brought to Newark on a number of occasions. The proto-Afro-Futurist black nationalism of Ra's

group (which sonically and visually encompassed everything from Egypt and ancient Africa through the spirituals, blues, early jazz, swing, bebop, doo wop, hard bop, r&b, soul, and free jazz) suggested that the ark carrying black people through the floods of late capitalism and racism would be as much one of music, art, and culture as physical plant.

NEWARK, NEW BLACK NATIONAL GENESIS, CLASS FORMATION, AND WORKING-CLASS MODERNITY

Baraka wrote in his early Black Arts poem "Return of the Native" that "Harlem is vicious modernism."[10] The description is apt enough, but no doubt Baraka was also thinking of the "vicious" modernism of his native Newark, where cleavages, conflicts, exploitations, and solidarities of class and race were in many ways sharper and the distinctions between the small black intelligentsia and the large working class much blurrier than in New York, even when displaced onto Harlem. One might say that Baraka's urban landscapes always resonated with or were shaped by Newark, even if they were ostensibly of Harlem, the urban South, or the nearby New Jersey city of Paterson.

Newark, a notoriously corrupt city long dominated by sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating criminal mobs, is the last major passenger stop on the old Pennsylvania Railroad, now Amtrak, from the South before New York City. It was a city of about 450,000 at the time of Baraka's birth in 1934. While a manufacturing city about three or four decades past its industrial prime at that time, it still had enough factories and service jobs to provide employment to a black community with very old roots but that had grown exponentially with a huge southern migration, primarily from the Atlantic seaboard, augmented by some Caribbean settlement, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Baraka's parents arrived in Newark as teenagers from the South (Alabama and South Carolina), by way of Pennsylvania in Baraka's mother's case and directly in the case of his father. The migration of both his father and mother involved a flight

from immediate racist violence in addition to a search for better material conditions. According to family lore, Baraka's mother's family had come North after jealous racists burned down their store in Gadsden, Alabama. His father, an usher in a movie theater as a teenager, fled South Carolina after getting into a fight with a white patron.[11]

Alongside the Great Migration, Newark was (and continues to be) a landing place for hundreds of thousands of immigrants, beginning with mass migrations of Irish and Germans in the 1840s, who in their own ways early set their mark on the political and cultural life of the city. The Irish, for example, dominated the city's politics in the twentieth century almost until the beginning of the Black Power era, while the Germans did much to establish the city as a center of breweries, beer gardens, and taverns. The Irish and the Germans were followed by Eastern European Jews, Italians, Poles, Ukrainians, Greeks, Chinese, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Central Americans, Ecuadorans, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Jamaicans, and Brazilians, to name some of the larger groups. The languages of these immigrants, including their particular variants of English, clashed and coexisted with and inevitably shaded each other.

Throughout Baraka's youth, the dominant ethnic groups of the city were Irish, Italian, Jewish, and black. The political, economic, and cultural relationships of the black and Jewish communities were particularly close, if sometimes troubled, due to the close proximity of Jews and African Americans in the Third Ward. That relationship had considerable consequences for the black music scene of Newark. The gangster Abner (Longy) Zwillman and his largely Jewish crime organization (though with black affiliates) dominated the rackets, economy, and politics of the Third/Central Ward, originally the nexus of working-class Jewish life in the city, which became the economic, demographic, cultural, and political center of black life. The numerous clubs and taverns of the Third Ward, where many black musicians played and which catered to black or mixed-race audiences from the 1930s to the 1950s, were tightly controlled by the Zwillman group. (The epicenter of the

Italian Mafia, which both cooperated and competed with Zwillman's gang was in the largely Italian First Ward, which became part of the new North Ward in the 1950s.) Although there were some black-owned clubs, the owners of the majority of bars and clubs in the Third Ward were Jewish—and all were beholden to Zwillman's gang, to one degree or another. After Zwillman's death, which was officially ruled a suicide but many considered a mob hit in 1959, the Italian Mafia led by Ruggiero ("Richie the Boot") Boiardo of the Genovese crime family was the principal criminal influence in the city, even in territory that had been dominated by the Zwillman organization.[12]

An Irish-dominated machine largely controlled the formal political establishment until the early 1960s. This machine was displaced after considerable struggle in the 1950s, relatively briefly, by Italian politicians, notably Hugh Addonizio (who was, ironically, given later turns in Newark politics, elected mayor in 1962 with the support of the black community, which then saw him as a civil rights candidate), with ties to the Mafia.[13] The Italian-dominated machine was largely replaced in turn, often with great resentment on the part of Italian Americans due to the shortness of their period of political ascendancy and what they saw as a sort of jumping of the line of ethnic succession politics, by black politicians in the 1970s. Despite the new ascendancy of black politicians, the North Ward remained (and significantly remains) a stronghold of machine politics in both the city and Essex County based in the Italian community (and later the Puerto Rican community, as Italian Americans decamped to the suburbs). This machine often opposed independent black initiatives and certainly the initiatives supported by Amiri and Amina Baraka and their family, including their son Ras Baraka, who was elected mayor of Newark in 2014 after his father's death.

This ethnic schema of class and the succession of power is necessarily more simplified than the reality of Newark politics. For example, there was a Jewish mayor, Meyer Ellerstein (allegedly a Zwillman client), during the Depression and an Italian mayor, Ralph Villani, relatively briefly, in the early 1950s. During the

first half of the twentieth century, the left, particularly those segments connected to the Communist and Socialist Parties, had significant influence in organized labor (particularly the National Negro Labor Council; Newark Teachers Union; United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers; Fur and Leather Workers; and various other CIO unions) and neighborhood, civil rights (such as the National Negro Congress and the Civil Rights Congress), and cultural organizations. The left in Newark crossed racial and ethnic lines, though it was rooted most deeply in the black and Jewish communities by the 1940s. The so-called Old Left in Newark was, as elsewhere, much disrupted and weakened organizationally by the Cold War, including various local anticommunist hearings by the House Un-American Activities Committee and other legislative organizations, the expulsion of most of the left-led unions (including the Fur and Leather Workers and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers) from the CIO in 1949, as well as by intra-left factional struggles in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" about Stalin and his crimes at a congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. However, black radicals who emerged from that milieu, such as labor activists and community organizers Clarence Coggins and Ernest Thompson, maintained many of their earlier connections, and certainly their organizing skills, playing important roles in the African American upsurge in Newark and elsewhere in Essex County during the 1960s and 1970s.[14]

In addition, racially and ethnically identified groups and institutions sometimes allied in surprising ways in Newark politics—at least surprising to casual observers looking at Newark's politics from the outside. One such moment occurred when the Zwillman crime organization and black left-wing veterans of the Negro Labor Vanguard (including Coggins), the National Negro Labor Council, the Negro Labor Committee, and the Civil Rights Congress combined to help elect the charismatic Irvine Turner as Newark's first black city councilman in the newly created Central Ward in 1954, even as Turner was opposed by many of the

leaders of more established "elite" black organizations, such as the NAACP and the Urban League.[15] Of course, given that both organized crime and the organized left, particularly in the Central Ward and environs, drew on much the same demographic, which is to say working-class Jews and African Americans, perhaps the alliance that elected Turner is not so surprising since many of these people probably grew up together. A sort of ethnic/racial imaginary of black, Jewish, Italian, and Irish types (or stereotypes) profoundly marked Baraka's writing in the 1960s and 1970s, as a way of representing white power (e.g., Jewish "owners" and betraying liberals, Irish police and politicians, and Italian gangsters and politicians) and black oppression and revolt (and, in some cases, cooptation). This imaginary was based on a reading that was legible outside of Newark but nonetheless rooted in the particular demographics—especially the demographics of political power—of Newark in Baraka's youth and young adulthood. That such an imaginary is based in a certain kind of material reality in Newark, it is worth observing, does not mitigate its ugly antisemitism—as Baraka himself would retrospectively admit in the essay "Confessions of a Former Anti-Semite."[16]

Beyond the black, Jewish, Italian, and Irish segments, Poles, Ukrainians, Greeks, and other smaller groups of Eastern and Southern European descent, as well as a diminishing but still noticeable German community, were significant parts of the industrial working class of Newark during Baraka's youth, augmented by a rapidly growing Puerto Rican community in the 1940s and 1950s. The German and Slavic communities of Newark had strong traditions of radical activism. During the early years of the Great Migration, there was a large Chinese community in Downtown Newark east of the center of black Newark near what is now Government Center. Although that community would be dispersed by police raids, deportations, anti-Asian nativism, exclusion laws, and so on, by the 1930s, there were still vestiges of it and certainly local memories of it in Baraka's youth.

Newark would increasingly become a semi-southern city culturally as the migrant black community grew to a majority of

the population. According to a survey done in 1958, more than three-quarters of what were described as the "heads" of black households had been born in the South.[17] Regardless of the somewhat vague, and possibly problematic, gender implications of such a formulation, the survey indicates that the adult population of black Newark was overwhelmingly southern-born at the beginning of the 1960s. Nevertheless, Newark was not, in Baraka's estimation, simply the South up North. It was an urban cauldron where the culture, language, sensibilities, and history of the rural black South were transformed, though definitely not destroyed, by an encounter with industry and a multiracial and multinational industrial working class. In this cauldron, black modernity was expressed significantly through music and speech tempered by this encounter. This was no "melting pot" where cultural difference was burned away but one in which the black working class as a subset of the black nation was shaped in an urbanized and industrial form with its distinctive features and identity. Both speech and music were indices of the continuities and ruptures between the black culture of the rural South and the new urban black working class.

Baraka describes the impact of the transformation of the rural folk into black workers on his voice (and the voices of his urban black peers) in *The System of Dante's Hell,* where a semiautobiographical character remarks on both his connection and disconnection with the southern black people he meets while stationed in the South during a time in the air force. When he arrives in "the Bottom," the narrator is strangely pulled back to black Newark: "The Bottom was like Spruce & Belmont (the Ward) in Nwk. A culture of violence and foodsmells. There, for me. Again." At the same time, for the people of "the Bottom" (and even for the narrator himself), the sound of his voice, an urban black voice with "the quick new jersey speech, full of italian idiom, and the invention of the jews," doesn't quite register as black. It is worth noting, however, despite the "quick New Jersey speech" with the influences of other Newark ethnic groups, "the Bottom" in its southern blackness actually brings the narrator back to Newark

("Again") and that it was his time, ironically, in a historically black college and later in the air force that had truly taken him away.[18] Once again, the Newark dialectic of the transformation and renewal of southern black culture is made clear—though in this case it is made apparent not by the experience of the black southerner coming North but that of the black northerner going South. This is Baraka's complicated revision of the black immersion narrative that reaches back at least to Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), where the alienated black northern intellectual/artist/subject returns to the southern folk and a sort of cultural renewal.[19] What complicates this revision is that the descent into the South returns him to Newark, where the cultural journey from South to North (and back again) was sounded for Baraka most profoundly in black music and the active reception of that music by a grassroots black audience. The "quick New Jersey speech" is black but with admixtures of other speech communities spoken at double-time speed.

The tempo and utilization of different nonblack oral and aural resources within a black frame is an analogue to the admixtures of musical idioms and influences that went into bebop, an emphatically black music but one with a famously catholic approach to musical resources on the part of its foremost innovators, such as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Lester Young. There is always a certain tension in this relationship between the new black urban working class and its language and music with their incorporation and transformation of various nonblack elements and southern black culture, language, and music. The southern black influence is seen by Baraka as somewhat more fixed but is nevertheless dynamic in its movement North, recalling northern black working-class culture to its origins and keeping that transplanted community from drifting too far from what might be thought of as the blues matrix associated with the South, whatever new and even avant-garde forms the blues might take up North. One might object that this assessment takes an overly fixed view of southern black culture, itself dynamic and increasingly urban as the twentieth century wore

on. Still, as a model, this is a version of Baraka's the "changing same" embodied in black Newark, where Baraka was living again when he wrote "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" in 1966 and first published it in the 1967 *Black Music*.[20]

THE JERSEY CRESCENT: BLACK CLUBLAND IN NEWARK

Due in part to the power of organized crime in Newark and in part to the city being a center of beer brewing reaching back to the days when Germans were a dominant immigrant group, Newark had more bars, clubs, and taverns per capita than any other U.S. city at the time of Baraka's birth.[21] The greatest concentration of these clubs, taverns, dance halls, and so on was in the Third Ward, which had shifted from a largely immigrant Eastern European Jewish (and Irish and German) neighborhood to a predominantly black neighborhood by the 1930s as Jews, Irish, and Germans moved further south and west and eventually out of the city altogether, and African Americans from the southern Atlantic seaboard continued to arrive. The density of clubs and bars, along with the institution of the rent party that flourished during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in the Third Ward, gave local and visiting musicians many opportunities to play and develop their craft. It also provided local people opportunities to hear that music in clubs, homes, and on the streets. This interchange between clubs and the streets was particularly noticeable in districts where black working-class bars and clubs clustered, as in the area of Howard Street, a short street in the heart of the old Third Ward where Amina Baraka spent her childhood, and nearby Halsey Street, immediately west and south of the city's main shopping district on the eastern edge of the black community. Halsey Street featured some of Newark's best-known jazz clubs, such as the Key Club and the Cadillac Club (later Sparky J.'s), where nationally known (if often also local) musicians such as Sarah Vaughan, Betty Carter, Stanley Turrentine, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Jimmy Scott played in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.[22]

Quite a few performers in the larger black musical circuit were

in a sense semiprofessionals. Amina Baraka's grandparents held rent parties at her family's apartment at which her grandfather, a laborer in the construction trades, sang the blues. While he made money in this performing context, he did not perform in local clubs. Nevertheless, he was part of the larger musical culture of the city, as were other working-class black performers.[23]

Newark's proximity to New York encouraged musicians to travel back and forth across the Hudson River. Some great Newark musicians, such as the stride pianist Donald Lambert (especially later in his career), were uncomfortable in New York and rarely crossed the river. However, others associated with Newark, such as pianist James P. Johnson, the king of Newark stride playing; Willie "The Lion" Smith; the swing band the Savoy Sultans (which worked as the intermission band at the famed Savoy Ballroom in Harlem); and Sarah Vaughan, were stars on both sides of the Hudson.

Many bands primarily associated with New York found the audiences in Newark to be friendly and enthusiastic with a particular attachment to the blues. Duke Ellington, for example, cited Newark, which he called the "springboard" for the "Jersey Crescent" in his autobiography, as a particularly good place to play. (Ellington may have had a special fond spot for Newark because the great arranger and composer Billy Strayhorn joined Ellington's band at a concert in Newark.)[24] Newark was also a place where artists who had lost their ability to play clubs in New York due to violations of that city's notorious cabaret laws could find work.[25]

Due to the intense southern connection of most black Newarkers, the blues in various forms long remained a central feature of black music in the city. Newarkers heard the blues performed by such locally popular singers as Miss Rhapsody (Viola Wells), who lived across the street from one of Baraka's childhood homes and who Baraka would see leaving for her work as a performer (reminding him that musicians were workers too), and Carrie Adams, as well as more nationally known blues musicians such as T-Bone Walker, Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Louis Jordan, and

Bobby "Blue" Bland touring in Newark. However, virtually every genre of black popular music found a receptive audience in Newark from the stride to bebop (especially in the Lloyd's Manor and Sugar Hill Clubs) during the twentieth century. And, as Baraka observed, many of the big swing bands that played Newark knew to emphasize the blues in their performances.[26] Similarly, blues singers like Miss Rhapsody sang a repertoire that included "classic" blues numbers from the 1920s, like Bessie Smith's 1923 "Down Hearted Blues," to swing blues of the 1940s.

It is also important to recall that the Great Migration from the South to the urban North continued until the 1970s. Baraka described the Central Ward in an essay written just after the uprising of 1967 as a place "where Southern Black People fall off greyhounds everyday 'too scared to go to Harlem.'"[27] So even as a black industrial working class was forged in Newark (and other industrial urban centers) in contact with other racial and ethnic groups (or "national" groups, as Baraka might say after his move to "Third World Marxism"), the black southern content of African American culture was constantly replenished and displayed in the music of Newark clubs and theaters, particularly in the Howard Street area.[28] This renewal by recent southern migrants reinforced already existing, if somewhat changed, cultural imports from the South. Again, this dynamic was complicated since the South too was in cultural, social, and political transformation, increasingly urbanizing and industrializing throughout the period of the Great Migration. Many of the migrants to the North came from southern cities rather than the countryside. (Baraka's mother's family came from Gadsden, Alabama, an important industrial center; poet and playwright Sonia Sanchez spent the first ten years of her life in Birmingham, Alabama, a major hub of steel production, before moving with her family to Harlem.)

There was a certain dialectic, then, between the transformative power of the industrial North and its multinational, multiracial working class and the constant renewal of southern black cultural roots, especially music and speech. This dialectic can be seen in the evolution of Baraka's performance style. William J.

Harris observes in his groundbreaking essay "'How You Sound??': Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz" that one can hear the movement of Baraka toward a deeper mode of blackness by tracking his recorded readings of "Black Dada Nihilismus" in 1964 to the later "blacker" performance of "Dope."[29] However, as is discussed at more length in chapter 5, perhaps the issue was not so much a contradiction between "white" and "black" in Baraka's voice as much as between modes of verbal blackness of North and South tied to musical forms. Both existed simultaneously in the northern urban center of Newark, where the southern current constantly flowed even in the late 1960s: "Parts of the Ward look just like a rural southern town. People sit out in the street and eat and talk and drink and laugh. And everybody knows everybody from block to block."[30] So one way of looking at the change in New Jersey–born Baraka's "blacker" performance style was a return to the blues and the South bequeathed to him by his family and neighbors, using himself as a sort of metonym for the "changing same"—though the sound of New Jersey (and occasionally even the old-school Newark locution "Nerk") never left Baraka's voice. This sound of Jersey was not a "white" voice (even if it might register that way in the South) but rather an indigenous black voice, a negotiation of modes of idiomatic southern blackness with admixtures of other speech groups that a black speaker would inevitably encounter from childhood if she or he grew up in Newark at the time that Baraka did. In this, the persistent interest in the relationship between music and speech among many free jazz musicians who quite purposively produced cries, shouts, and voices on their instruments makes sense. In Baraka's view, these musicians not only attempted to make music more directly legible and break down the barrier between art and the body but also sounded the complicated encounter of different modes of blackness, North and South, Africa and diaspora: "At the height of the music, the moaning and screaming came on in earnest. This is the ecstasy of the new music. At the point of wild agony or joy, the wild moans, screams, yells of life, in constant change."[31]

"ITS BEATING HEART WAS BLUE": THE BLUES IN NEWARK

The blues for Baraka remained the conduit that maintained the contact between South and North, between country and city: "But here come the blues. From out of the South, barrelin' in on them trains, lookin' for work. Moved into wherever, kept alive with a gut bucket. ('A bucket of guts to go, please, sir!') The blues would come into these cities and take over whole neighborhoods, not to mention horns and pianos and the rap of the drum always been there. Rap rap rap rap, drummer rappin. Like 'I rather drink muddy water an' sleep in a hollow log.'"[32]

However, the new urban life and industrial organization that Baraka saw as embodied in the "Brick City" of Newark called for new sorts of technologies, forms, aesthetics, and even modes of political response: "We had give up the 'Spanish' (Mississippi-Louisiana-Texas) guitar for the industrial one, the urban worker's guitar that needed electricity to tell its tale. In my generation we came up with the rise of rhythm and blues, the big-city blues of screaming horns and endless riffs. The big bands were actually big blues bands, and even the jazz bands were blues bands that also had another kind of story, one that included deeper histories and music so heavy it could call on an ology if it needed to explain itself."[33]

For Baraka, Newark becomes not only a beachhead of black modernity but of a black artistic modernism both expressed in and to a significant degree catalyzed by black music. This music was, in turn, shaped by the new modes of social organization, imperatives, and technologies of urban industrial life. It is not simply that black Newark was an important locus of jazz and r&b from the days of the stride piano of Willie "The Lion" Smith, James P. Johnson, and Fats Waller through the swing, bebop, post-bop, and r&b of the Savoy Sultans (including Grachan Moncur III's father, the bassist Grachan Moncur II, and his uncle, the reed player Al Cooper); reed players Hank Mobley, Ike Quebec, and James Moody; and singers Sarah Vaughan, Betty Carter (who is most associated with her native Michigan and New York City but lived for years and occasionally performed in and around

Newark), Miss Rhapsody, and Little Jimmy Scott (a soulful singer of jazz ballads with an amazing countertenor voice); to the new jazz of trombonist Grachan Moncur III, trumpeter Woody Shaw, and tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter. It was, as William Harris points out, the African American urban space where Baraka encountered a broadly radical African American aesthetic sensibility.[34]

If Baraka did not always recognize those radical aesthetics as such during the moment, and if the music did not necessarily originate in Newark, that city is where he found it. In that way, even out-of-town musicians playing in the Third/Central Ward or Downtown could be equally integral to his intellectual and artistic development and to the meaning of black Newark as he used it as a touchstone of his writing. It was both a particular place with its own history, geography, pantheon of local cultural heroes, and venues (and even jukeboxes) where one might hear or sometimes see a local hero, such as Miss Rhapsody, or national hero, such as Dinah Washington, Jay McNeely, or Louis Jordan (or an artist who was a local hero and national star, such as Sarah Vaughan), and a typical topos of everyday black modernity in a way that the much more internationally famous Harlem could never be:

> Saturday afternoons the whole of The Hill was music. Up top the blues, all kinds, country and city, guitars and saxophones, screamers and moaners. I dug the Ravens, the Orioles, Amos Milburn, Dinah Washington, Little Esther, Ruth Brown was our heartbeat, Larry Darnell, Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, Earl Bostic, Tab Smith. It was everywhere everywhere in that space, in the air, on the walls, in the halls, in the laundromats, whistled and sung and stomped to. It colored the vacant lots where barbecue was being perfected, it zoomed out of the bars and lit up our mouths, it bluesed us along through those gray streets and carried the message and feeling of black life.
>
> 'Cause Newark was iron grey for me then and it is still but now ripped apart by piled-up despair. But in those days grey and steel were its thrusts into me, its dominant unwavering tone. And the strongest, the deepest, the basic construction element of its design was the black of its bottom of the lives whose majority it held and spoke for. Such an ugly place, so hard so unyielding it seemed—grey industrial city. But black life made it blue. Its beating heart

> was blue therefore rooted in black life and its streets strummed my head like a guitar.[35]

As Harris notes regarding Baraka's description of a black communal response to saxophonist Jay McNeely's honking in a club in the short story "The Screamers," "The music is the instrument of extreme art and revolt, features Baraka incorporated into his own art."[36] For Baraka, that initiation into the radical aesthetic politics of black music, a politics that he would spend much of his career explicating and elaborating, is intrinsically tied to the Third/Central Ward of Newark. However, if the audience's response to the performance of McNeely and such other honking saxophonists as Illinois Jacquet, Gene Ammons, and Willis "Gator" Jackson was a rejection of everyday class and racial restriction, a sort of black utopian space of freedom, Baraka reminded the reader of the effort of the musicians, that they were working hard, that they were laboring to create a radical black sound and theater:

> Illinois would leap and twist his head, scream when he wasn't playing. Gator would strut up and down the stage, dancing for emphasis, shaking his long gassed hair in his face and cooly mopping it back. Jug, the beautiful horn, would wave back and forth so high we all envied him his connection, or he'd stomp softly to the edge of the stage whispering those raucous threats. Jay first turned the mark around, first opened the way further for the completely nihilistic act. McNeely, the first Dada coon of the age, jumped and stomped and yowled and finally sensed the only other space that form allowed. He fell first on his knees, never releasing the horn, and walked that way across the stage.[37]

Clearly, McNeely and the others were working—though in a black utopian mode of working for themselves and the audience, as well as in terms of who is actually paying them. It is worth noting that this notion of the musician, and even the audience, working for themselves (often with a sexual connotation) was frequently referenced in the black popular music of the 1940s and 1950s, as in McNeely's 1954 single "Let's Work."

Similarly, Baraka's deepest early transformation through his encounter with bebop took place within the context of black Newark:

> I want to explain how much BeBop changed me. Not in the superficial movie way that said, look, yesterday the hero wore glasses and had a limp, today he's whole and looks more like Ronald Coleman than he did with that funny disguise. Maybe there were some changes on the top some people could peep. But mostly it was interior. I hear this different music and different ideas, different images came to me. I thought about different things.
>
> I was still in the Central Ward, up over the oil-heater Polish couple, and could look down on Belmont Avenue weekends and see slick folks strut and drunks stagger into the Chinese restaurant for some chow mein. I was still going to the canteen on Sundays, and the National, and hanging out most times with the Hillsides. But now some other kinds of yearnings turned me around. I wanted to go to some other kinds of places, and usually by myself. Not because I suddenly felt "estranged" from people or what not. But because bebop, "The Music," had got into me and was growing in me and making me hear things and see things. I began to want things. I didn't even know what.[38]

Here, bebop put the contradictory uncertainties, anxieties, dissatisfactions, anger, fear, and sense of possibilities of urban black life of the 1940s, especially of the immediate postwar era, into musical form. This was a time in which Jim Crow domestically and colonialism internationally were being challenged in new and profound ways but when the shape of postwar race relations was in uneasy flux. After all, World War I had caused stress to the Jim Crow regime and inspired radical black political and cultural upsurges that we now broadly categorize as the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance. The deep wave of racist violence that followed that war and the growth of the Ku Klux Klan into a mass organization of millions was also a living memory, especially for families like those of Baraka's parents whose move North was in large part due to this violence. It was not out of the question, or out of the minds of black people, that such a reaction could occur again—a fear that was not entirely unfounded as the Klan and other racist organizations erupted in new paroxysms of racial terror in the postwar period embodied in the brutal murder of Emmett Till and the 1951 assassination of Florida NAACP leader Harry Moore. For Baraka this time was a beginning of the development of a new sort of revolutionary black consciousness, even if the end of this process was not at all clear at the time.

Bebop became a way of grasping the way black people and black culture were transformed in the industrial city as well as the uneasy, shifting new context of the often conflicting wartime and postwar racial and political reorganizations caused by the Cold War, the collapse of the old imperial order, and emerging decolonization movements. In a sense, it was a language for black seekers, a sort of analogue of the voice and movement of the bop era and post-bop literary protagonists in such narratives as Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) and *Lonely Crusade* (1947), James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *The Amen Corner* (1954), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and perhaps Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha* (1953) and Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) and *The Narrows* (1953).

If Baraka's life had been, as his critics (and some of his admirers) often remarked pejoratively, one of frequent, if not permanent, transformation, it was bebop as he heard it in Newark that sounded this imperative (and aesthetic) of radical transformation and permanent possibility, a "black" way of thinking about the avant-garde even on the streets and in the clubs of everyday Newark, no famous bohemian center:

> And I was not even sure what the music was. Bebop. A new language a new tongue and vision for a generally more advanced group in our generation. (Though that could always be turned around by the rich and the powerful and this will be the case until the oppressed have control over their own lives!) Bebop was a staging area for a new sensibility growing to maturity. And the Beboppers themselves were blowing the sound to attract the growing, the developing, the about-to-see. Sometimes even the players was carrying out the end of another epoch as they understood it. Though they knew they was making change, opening a door, cutting underbrush and heavy vines away to make a path. And where would that path lead? That was the real question. It is the real question of each generation. Where will the path you've shown us lead? And who will take it?[39]

It was through bebop in Newark that Baraka began to get a glimpse of what a black avant-garde might be, one, he emphatically declared, that was predicated on an alienation from the United States but not the black community. Or rather than primarily a form of alienation, it was an opening to new things, new

possibilities, freedom really, leading away from the United States while remaining connected to the community. This avant-garde or vanguard approach or sensibility that he apprehended almost intuitively through his growing attachment to bebop in Newark was one that he would have to relearn, significantly under the tutelage of Amina Baraka, who had remained in Newark and immersed herself in "the music" during and after his hegira in the downtown bohemia of New York City that was far more attached to alienation and estrangement.

Through bebop, Newark also made its most profound contribution to the institutional side of jazz in the form of the Newark-based Savoy Records. With a wide-ranging catalogue that included jazz, blues, r&b, gospel, and country, Savoy produced some of the earliest bebop recordings, including releases by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Don Byas, Sonny Stitt, Miles Davis, and Max Roach, to name only a relative handful of Savoy's bebop artists. The label even ventured slightly into the new jazz of the early 1960s, releasing *The Futuristic Sounds of Sun Ra* in 1961, recording it in Newark shortly after the move of Sun Ra and his band from Chicago to New York. In many respects, Savoy was a true Third/Central Ward story. Local businessman Herman Lubinsky, who owned a Newark radio parts store and a small radio station, recorded the popular Newark band the Savoy Dictators, which challenged the Savoy Sultans as the leading Newark swing group, in a hall over a Downtown tavern in 1939. Lubinsky issued this session as the first Savoy sides in 1942 (without telling the band). Few, if any, musicians had fond memories of their interactions with Lubinsky, who was difficult and financially ruthless, even by the low bar of the music industry—as his own children attested.[40] Still, aided by a savvy A&R man, Ozzie Cadena, and sharp talent scouts (such as the r&b bandleader Johnny Otis), Savoy expanded into bebop and many other musical genres, though black music in various forms remained the core of its offerings. While Baraka did not comment on the Newark connections of Savoy much in his earlier writings, later in his career he remarked on those connections and their importance as embodying the dialectic of vanguard and tradition

that he saw as characterizing Newark: "Plus for nearly ten years Newark was the single recording center for the most innovative works of Gospel, Blues, Rhythm and Blues, and Jazz, recorded right here by Savoy records, under the wise direction of legendary A&R man Ozzie Cadena. Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Max Roach, J. J. Johnson, Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Maybelle, Eddie Mr. Cleanhead Vinson all recorded for Savoy, right here in Newark."[41]

Beyond the nationally (and internationally) renowned musicians, Savoy also recorded local Newark musicians, such as the Savoy Dictators, Miss Rhapsody, Bonnie (Melba) Davis and the Piccadilly Pipers, and the blues singer Albennie (Albinia) Jones, whose reputations did not extend much beyond New Jersey for most of their careers. Whatever the hard-driving and at times unscrupulous behavior of Lubinsky, the Savoy catalogue includes a sort of sonic archive of local music that Baraka and the black communities of Newark and Essex County would have heard during his youth that we would not have otherwise.[42] Baraka's discussions of Savoy and its recording sessions also serve as a reminder that musicians *labored.* They were workers under contract who did not simply play to a black working-class audience in Newark and beyond but were a part of that class, perhaps organic intellectuals in the original Gramscian sense of intellectuals who grew organically out of the needs and structures of the class to which they were attached but nevertheless people whose labors in some fundamental ways mirrored those of their audience.

Baraka's location of black modernity in Newark was not limited to music, dance, and speech but also included other art forms, including literature—though most frequently literature with deep connections to black music. Baraka, in both his own writings and in interviews, frequently described how when he and his close friend, poet, music critic, and longtime administrator at the National Endowment for the Arts A. B. Spellman were students at Howard University, Sterling Brown took them in hand, as Brown did so many other artists and activists. He schooled them in both the history of black music and black music as a record of African

American history and expressive culture generally. Baraka, in fact, credited Brown with providing the seed that would eventually grow into Baraka's groundbreaking social history of black music, *Blues People*.[43] However, even before his time at Howard, Baraka encountered, if at second hand, an embryonic literary model who likewise drew on black music as embodying and encoding a double helix of black tradition and black modernity: Langston Hughes. Baraka said of Hughes, "He was a writer that I grew up with, in terms of black newspapers, and Langston was a possession of my own sensibility from the very beginning. I never had to look for Langston Hughes. He was very present even in a little town like Newark, which is hardly a literary town, but still I had continuous evidence that there was a colored poet in Langston Hughes."[44]

One is reminded here of the black Cleveland poet Russell Atkins's claim that there is a line of United States modernism descended from the work of Hughes.[45] If one thinks about the different strands of what became known as the "New American Poetry," a concept of artistic filiation that Baraka did much to bring into being, one of the primary things they had in common was that they were revaluations and reconsiderations of the modernist heritage. These reconsiderations consciously contested those of the New Critics (and the New York Intellectuals) and their politically and aesthetically conservative take on modernism, even if the modernist artists and tendencies to which the different New American strands were drawn varied (e.g., whether one was into Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Pierre Reverdy, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Paul Eluard, Antonin Artaud, or, indeed, Langston Hughes). While Baraka was notable in that he was engaged with all these strands of the literary counterculture (and many of their enthusiasms), he came to take seriously Atkins's proposition of a modernism descended from Hughes—and Hughes's longtime version of Baraka's later "changing same" of African American culture, from African music through the spirituals, blues, early jazz, swing, and bebop to free jazz. In Baraka's assessment of African American literature and culture and of his own work later in his career, he increasingly expressed his admiration and

sense of relationship to Hughes. Still, while it may have taken Baraka some time to fully appreciate Hughes and Hughes's line of modernism, nonetheless the model of Hughes as a poet deeply invested in black music was something he got early on in Newark, through black Newark and the African American press.

RED MICROPHONE: AMINA BARAKA, BLACK ARTS NEWARK, AND AMIRI BARAKA

The Central Ward (especially the eighty-one blocks that comprised the old Third Ward before its merger into the Central Ward) was not Harlem or the South Side or even the Cardozo/Shaw district of Washington, DC. Amiri Baraka's Black Arts/Black Power center, Spirit House, was located on the Central Ward's Stirling Street in a resolutely provincial city, even if that city was the largest in New Jersey. "Provincial" is used here not in a pejorative sense but in the sense of being proudly, even defiantly, rooted and local, not cosmopolitan. It was near, but not New York. ("Why, you ain't even in New York, boy. This year's New Ark," was how Baraka recalled it in the voice of the older generation of black Newarkers, including his father.[46]) One was constantly reminded, often quite pointedly, of being a provincial in every sense by the nearby metropolis of New York—as noted with Baraka's typical lacerating (and self-lacerating) humor in the play *Dutchman* (1964), when Lula says dismissively to Clay, who has met her on the New York subway while en route from New Jersey to a party in lower Manhattan, "They don't have lady wrestlers in that part of Jersey. That's for sure."[47]

Newark was and is the sort of place that an intellectually and artistically ambitious person, such as the young Baraka (and his contemporary the novelist Philip Roth), would almost inevitably leave for the metropolis—at least before the Black Arts Movement. It was also a place to which, as with Aimé Césaire (who much influenced Baraka as he moved toward Black Arts and Black Power), the native seeking rootedness might return. The attraction of this place was not for its singularity, except to the extent that every place has its particularity, but its typicality.

Unlike Harlem, the image of which in the public imagination of the 1960s still combined the contradictory identity of a sort of every-ghetto with the older "Capital of the Negro World," black Newark (which is to say, most of the city by the late 1960s) embodied the urban black experience and the connection between black history and culture reaching from slavery and the South to the industrial present to the black future in a far less ambiguous way. While Walter Lee Younger in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) defensively declares that "New York ain't got nothing Chicago ain't," even the most devoted partisan of Newark would not make that claim.[48] Rather Newark much more closely resembled midsized and larger industrial cities, such as Buffalo, Akron, Dayton, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Baltimore, Gary, and Detroit (and even Deep Southern industrial cities like Birmingham and Gadsden), where the majority of the black urban working class migrated, lived, and worked and which too were provincial in the U.S. cultural and intellectual scheme of things.[49] And yet Newark, like nearly all midsized American cities with large and longstanding black communities, had a significant cultural history, particularly of black music, dating back at least to the ragtime era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In this, Newark's proximity to New York, density of clubs and taverns, and often looser laws and enforcement of laws pertaining to clubs and entertainment than New York's made it an attractive and easy professional destination for New York–based musicians. The relatively cheap cost of living in Newark and its accessibility to New York similarly attracted black artists, including painter and playwright Ben Caldwell and singer Betty Carter, in the 1950s and 1960s. And, while those artists might have focused much of their careers on New York, they also took part in the cultural life of Newark. In short, Newark was in many respects a proudly provincial city that was arguably "realer," which is to say more typical of U.S. urban life, than New York, even Harlem, but it benefited culturally from its nearness to the metropolis.

Amiri Baraka left provincial Newark for Howard University in 1952. He would not return to live fulltime in Newark until after

a stint in the air force and a long stretch in New York City in the Lower East Side, Chelsea, and Harlem, following the 1965 implosion of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School (BARTS), largely due to intense internal conflicts that drove him from Harlem. Of course, his parents never left Newark, and so he retained that connection to the city. Still, when he came back to Newark in late 1965, it had been more than a decade since he had last immersed himself in the black cultural and political life of the city. In his writing, even as he moved toward Black Arts, as in *Blues People* and *Dutchman,* black New Jersey and his family in Newark in particular served as a sort of synecdoche for a kind of provincial, alienated (from both the United States generally and black working-class life) black "middle-class" mindset:

CLAY: My mother was a Republican.

LULA: And your father voted for the man rather than the party.

CLAY: Right!

LULA: Yea for him. Yea, yea for him.

CLAY: Yea!

LULA: And yea for America where he is free to vote for the mediocrity of his choice! Yea!

CLAY: Yea![50]

For Baraka, making the move from Newark to New York during the short period home after his discharge from the military was essentially embracing a life of art, leaving the more mundane workaday existence, indeed "America," behind. It signified not only the embrace of a new creative life but also the seriousness of his commitment after a series of false starts in college and in the air force, a new life and commitment in which his links to Newark other than to his family melted away: "I was a stranger in New York. The few friends I still knew in Jersey had vanished. Wilson and Davis had copped out. I had no phone, I couldn't even call anybody. That's a lonely feeling. But I had an apartment and a job. I was in New York on my own, by my lonesome, and that was good enough for me!"[51]

Baraka would go on to build a national literary reputation in

New York from his first days there on the Lower East Side to his time with BARTS in Harlem. Importantly, he assembled a network of connections to black artists, intellectuals, and activists—and lasting ties to important white and Latinx artists. Indeed, he kept in touch with artists and activists of many backgrounds who could be called on even when he had, for the most part, left the downtown New York bohemia (and eventually New York altogether) behind during the Black Power/Black Arts era. For example, Amina Baraka found Allen Ginsberg's name in Amiri Baraka's address book and contacted Ginsberg to help get Amiri Baraka out of jail after he had been beaten and arrested by the police during the Newark uprising of 1967.[52]

But as Amiri Baraka suggested in his *Autobiography,* as he built these new cultural and political networks, his old connections to his hometown outside of his family withered. So there was a sense that Baraka was a stranger in his hometown too, disconnected or only tenuously attached to his old friends and unfamiliar with the political and cultural landscape of a city that had changed considerably in his absence. In those years the black community of the city increased to a near majority (if not an absolute majority), the old Irish political machine was displaced by a new group based largely in the Italian community, particularly as embodied by Hugh Addonizio, and the economy continued to decay with businesses and factories fleeing or closing altogether as the black community grew and the white population shrank. Amiri Baraka was not very familiar with the music scene, the growing black arts (and Black Arts) initiatives, and the political players and dynamics in his native city.

To a very large degree his mentor, guide, and partner in the black Newark of the mid-1960s (and for the rest of his life) was Amina Baraka (Sylvia Robinson), a dancer, visual artist, actor, and poet who was deeply involved with the contemporary music of black Newark, especially jazz, and early pre–Amiri Baraka Black Arts music and arts institutions:

> So that her own cultural work was in and around Newark, against much heavier odds. But it was hooked up objectively to the same kind of thing we were doing at the Black Arts. But in those cities

like Newark, grim industrial towns in the real world, these kinds of projects are necessarily smaller but at the same time tougher and blacker because they are rooted in the absolute necessities of people's desired sensibility. People must fight to bring art to a place like Newark, it is not the tourist stop or great advertised mecca of commercial intellectualism that New York has been styled.

And so she had a whole life as cultural worker in Newark that paralleled what we were trying to do at the Black Arts in many ways. Therefore, a sensibility that was like mine in some ways, but without the tiresome "spaciness" of the middle-class intellectual, subjective and selfish as I and much of the New York crowd tended to be. There was much less room or tolerance for the "fake art" syndrome that is so ubiquitous in Manhattan, therefore it is much less fertile soil for the maddening and finally vapid "artsy-craftsy" personality type. Art was literally lifeblood in a place like Newark and its tenders and developers were, given the limitations of resources, etc., dedicated valuable people, with usually a great deal more of a sense of responsibility than their average New York counterparts.[53]

Amiri Baraka generally represented Amina Baraka as a sort of black working-class Newark muse, the embodiment of a provincial Black Arts Newark that was resolutely proletarian and firmly rooted in the city, never leaving:

Sylvia was raised by her grandmother and grandfather. He a construction worker and she, when she worked, a laundry worker in a Chinese laundry and a hairdresser. Sylvia had gone to Arts High School and wanted since her childhood to become an actress, then a painter, and then a dancer, or all three at the same time. It was this vector that had put her in motion in a direction that caused our paths to cross. An early bohemian, thought of by her mother and teachers as "weird," she was once sent home from high school because the teacher accused her of looking like "she belonged on a reservation." But hers, for the most part, was a black bohemianism. A white guy had come to her parents' house to try to see her when she was younger and her grandmother had driven him away, saying, "None of that!"[54]

However, despite the importance that Amiri Baraka assigned Amina Baraka as an unwavering figure of radical black working-class arts and politics in grassroots Newark who had not oscillated ideologically in the way that he (and, indeed, BARTS itself) had in New York, he never really described her intellectual and

practical contributions, both to his own renewed familiarity with and understanding of his hometown and to the various political and cultural projects in the city from Spirit House and CFUN/CAP to Kimako's Workshop and the Newark Music Project with which he was associated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[55] For one thing, though Amina Baraka certainly grew up in a black working-class milieu in which a working-class, pro-union consciousness was an integral part of her upbringing, it was a consciousness that promoted a vision of sympathy and solidarity with Italian, Irish, Jewish, and other white workers her mother and grandparents encountered in the needle and construction trades, as well as with those Jewish and Irish residents still lingering in the Third Ward during her childhood. In other words, though she had her own sojourn in cultural nationalism, her ideological and cultural inheritance from her family, while definitely black, was more inclined toward cross-racial class solidarity and coalition than Amiri Baraka's characterization of them would suggest.[56]

On a very basic level, it was Amina Baraka who introduced Amiri Baraka to the black artists' community of Newark, like the novelist Nathan Heard and Art Williams, Bill Harris, and Eddie Gladden of the Newark Jazz Arts Society, as well as to many of the black political activists of the city. While Amiri Baraka had a national reputation and some old friends and acquaintances in Newark, Amina Baraka was the one with the web of current personal relationships to the black artists, poets, actors, and visual artists of the city. She knew who these artists were, where they lived, their personalities, their politics, and their work. She had gone to Arts High School in the near Downtown, as many of the aspiring young black artists of Newark had for decades, especially musicians such as Sarah Vaughan, Melba Moore, Wayne Shorter, and Woody Shaw. Amiri Baraka went to the then predominantly white Barringer High School in the North Ward, a school with a largely Italian population with relatively few black students. In Amiri Baraka's time, most black students would have gone to Central or Southside High Schools, if they did not go to a more specialized school like Arts. So he did not even have anything like

an old high school network of black artists and activists in the way that Amina Baraka did.

Amina Baraka helped found the Jazz Arts Society along with jazz bassist Williams and other black musicians (of whom the one who achieved the most national success was the drummer Eddie Gladden) and visual artists in 1963. Arguably the earliest Black Arts group in Newark, Jazz Arts ran programs in a building on Shipman Street near Arts High School only a couple of blocks from where Amiri Baraka set up Spirit House on Stirling Street in 1966. Its most public face was a jazz and arts performance space, first The Loft and later The Cellar, managed by Williams. In addition to the group's activities on Shipman Street, it also organized events in Newark's jazz clubs, especially Six Steps Down on Broad Street near Military Park (and close to the cluster of jazz clubs on Halsey Street) in Downtown Newark. For example, when free jazz trombonist Grachan Moncur III returned to Newark to live, the Jazz Arts Society organized a "homecoming" for him at Six Steps Down.[57] While the group split over the question of whether to allow the participation of white people in its activities, Williams, who was open to the presence of white people both as performers and as audience members, continued to operate The Cellar, featuring local artists from New Jersey as well as leading and emerging free jazz musicians from across the Hudson in New York, including Albert Ayler, Sun Ra, Marion Brown, Pharoah Sanders, and Rashid Ali, well into the Black Arts era. As a part of the Newark Jazz Arts Society, Amina Baraka created, staged, and performed in jazz dance dramas, anticipating both Amiri's mature, multimedia and multigeneric performance style as well as the "choreopoems" of Ntozake Shange. She was the one who brought Amiri Baraka into this world, often surprising him with her previous personal familiarity with various important black musicians, writers, and theater workers with a reputation beyond Newark, such as Albert and Don Ayler, Grachan Moncur III (whom she had known as a child in Newark), and the poet and playwright Ben Caldwell, who lived in Newark before he became connected to BARTS.[58]

To a considerable degree, Amiri Baraka's opening of Spirit

House on Stirling Street was independent of the already existing Black Arts structure in Newark—though Stirling Street's location with its proximity to The Cellar as well as to Downtown Newark and its transportation hub of railroads, buses, and the PATH train to New York City was a consideration in Baraka's choice of location. It is worth noting that much of the early personnel and resources for Spirit House came from outside of Newark, largely New York and California:

> So this project drew some of the principal actors to the East and to Spirit House. Actress, Rosita Broadus (Furaha) was one of the first to come East. She became an actress with the Spirit House Movers and Players, our company's 1st name, later "and players" was dropped. (The theater was up the street from an actual household moving company.) Carl Boissiere was another Black Arts West actor to join the Spirit House. He was featured in the play, "A *Black* Mass," which was written in Harlem, but 1st performed at Newark's Proctors theater with Broadus, Boissiere, and Sylvia Jones who was later to become LeRoi Jones' 2nd wife, who became Amina Baraka, to Jones' Imamu Amiri Baraka, name given them by the Imam (Heesham Jabber) who buried Malcolm X.[59]

Of course, the activities at Spirit House did draw in some local black artists, actors, musicians, and dancers, notably Amina Baraka. However, it was only after her appearance and, more importantly, partnership with Amiri Baraka that the activities at Spirit House, including the rise of what would become CFUN/CAP, primarily featured local people.

Some of this unfamiliarity with or lack of direct connection to the black cultural scene of Newark and Newark's black cultural history can be seen in the 1966 essay "The Changing Same" in which there is a brief mention of activities at Spirit House and a sense that the "mystical walk up the street to a new neighborhood where all the risen live" is a transformed Central Ward in the first place and then, by extension, the non-fabulous ghettoes of urban industrial (becoming postindustrial) U.S. cities where the majority of black people, especially working-class black people, live. Still, if the new neighborhood of the risen was "the Ward," almost all the "New Black" musicians referenced in the essay were based in New York and the r&b/soul artists in the South and the Midwest.

This contrasts sharply with Baraka's later work, especially after his public embrace of Marxism, which frequently featured references to such Newark-connected musicians as James P. Johnson, Hank Mobley, and Sarah Vaughan. The one Newark-connected musician (and a singer to whom his family had a personal link) mentioned in the essay, Dionne Warwick, was used as an example of how a black artist could be pressured to move away from the blues matrix as opposed to the more resolutely "black" sound of the Georgia-based James Brown (Augusta) and Otis Redding (Macon).

One of Amina Baraka's most important impacts on Amiri Baraka was a positive vision of Newark and its cultural contributions, especially music. He initially viewed his return to Newark and early days there as a sort of defeat after his failure in Harlem, with the landscape of Newark reflecting a retreat from cosmopolitanism, even the black cosmopolitanism that was a part of his early vision of BARTS:

> I got out of my parents' house as well and went down to the flophouse to stay. As depressed as I was, that raunchy joint took me even further down and out. Bumi was a kid, almost completely unshaped. She was no Vashti, who was also youthful but sophisticated to within an inch of her life. Me and Vashti were like partners, like Nick and Nora Charles, brown style. Bumi knew next to nothing about music, art, poetry, politics—none of the stuff that animated my life. Yet for some absolutely stupid pathological reasons I found myself with her in some flophouse on Broad Street in Newark! The irony, the psychological cruelty of that punished me unmercifully. The same grey streets. The hopelessness and despair that walks through that city like its real owners. I was back here with it, without, even, the promise of youth.[60]

While recognizing the problems of the city, Amina Baraka has remained a partisan of the city her entire life, remarking that she gets homesick if she is away from the city for more than a couple of weeks.[61] She is not only very cognizant of Newark's musical past but is engaged with the dynamic black artistic scene in the city in the present. Even more a child of the Great Migration than Amiri Baraka since she was born in North Carolina and brought to Newark as an infant, she grew up in a black working-class

household with a strong union consciousness, particularly unions in the needle trade and construction industries in which her mother and grandparents worked. While her grandparents and mother were not political activists as such, they were strong union members in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Laborers International Union. She remembers her mother proudly showing the signs of a violent encounter on a union picket line when she was a child.[62]

Amina Baraka's household was also one where her family listened to and performed music at home as amateur musicians. As noted previously, her father sang the blues in a more professional way at the rent parties the family hosted. As a young person she embraced jazz, particularly bebop and the free jazz that emerged during and immediately after her high school years, while retaining a strong attachment to the blues. She never felt the need to escape Newark to become an artist in the way that Amiri Baraka did.

Amina Baraka saw the new Black Arts initiatives as growing out of the bedrock of working-class black culture in Newark. Growing up on Howard Street, her primary sense of that area's block of bars, clubs, pool halls, and music in the street was not one of a vice district (generally the way Howard Street was represented in the mass media) but a conduit of black culture, especially the black music that she heard everywhere as a child there. In that way, her reading of Nathan Heard's 1968 novel *Howard Street,* written and published while he was in prison, was not, as most reviewers saw it, a novel about ghetto pathology but a novel about the strength of black culture in Newark, as well as the pitfalls and oppression that working-class black people faced. In that, Heard's novel was more like one of his literary models, James Baldwin (especially Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*), than, say, Iceberg Slim or even Richard Wright. One thing that Amina Baraka notes about the book is the way it is saturated and undergirded by black music, both jazz and r&b, the soundtrack of Howard Street, highlighting a side of Heard, a jazz drummer and r&b singer in his youth as well as a criminal, that most critics of his first novel missed.[63]

In short, the deep enthusiasm for Newark (if tempered by the depths of its economic problems and oppression of its black residents), its working-class black culture, and its local contribution to black music (and the meaning of that music) that characterized Amiri Baraka's writing from the late 1960s on was really Amina Baraka's view in the first place and not characteristic of Amiri Baraka's writing before the later 1960s. Of course, he had been deeply into black music, particularly jazz, all through his career—and Newark figured in his work in various ways—but it was not until after his return to Newark at the very end of 1965 and his subsequent partnership (in every sense) with Amina Baraka that he became so engaged with landscape and the intertwined soundscape of Newark as a key for understanding the black nation and the black working class.[64]

As Michael Simanga observes, the influence of Amina Baraka as activist *and* theorist within the Black Power Movement has generally been greatly underestimated and understudied by Black Power scholarship.[65] Even when Amiri Baraka, Amina Baraka, and CFUN/CAP were most heavily influenced by Maulana Karenga's Kawaidaist principles of black women's complementarity and submissiveness, she was at the heart of organizing an informal black women's group to talk about politics (including gender politics), education, and culture, largely in response to the practical exclusion of women from CFUN's more official discussions.[66] This in turn led to the establishment of a more formal women's division of CFUN in which Amina Baraka was the cornerstone.

The women's division had a large, positive impact on CFUN when a split in the leadership, partly due to ideological differences over electoral political action and political education and partly to a clash of egos among the top male leaders, threatened to destroy the group. The women's division stepped up and established firm organizational principles, including such things as childcare and collective responsibility for domestic tasks to allow women to play a fuller role in CFUN, instead of the more laissez-faire approach that characterized CFUN even before the split. In other words, it was not simply that women did the nuts and bolts work, as was and is often the case in activist institutions, but also that women

conceived and established the practical framework that allowed CFUN to work effectively in the successful mayoral campaign of Kenneth Gibson in 1970. Amina Baraka was also instrumental in moving CAP (and Amiri Baraka) from the cultural nationalism of Kawaidaism to "Revolutionary Kawaidaism" (basically a meld of Third World Marxism and cultural nationalism) to Third World Marxism/Maoism, though Amina Baraka herself would become associated with the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) by the 1990s, a move that Amiri Baraka never made.[67]

The CFUN/CAP period of the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s was one in which the Barakas were much consumed by the practical minutiae of political organizing, though not to the total exclusion of their art, which they saw as an important piece of their political work. Still, it is the period in which Amiri Baraka did, in fact, develop a deep and lasting political and cultural network in the city of Newark and did come to see Newark in a different light, as a place of extreme oppression and decay but also one of a long and even glorious history of black working-class resistance to oppression and exploitation, especially through music, and of revolutionary possibility. This vision of Newark had a profound impact on his poetry and other writing. Again, Amina Baraka did a great deal to shape this view, which she had always held in many respects, and had a large influence on how Amiri Baraka would frame, interpret, and project the meaning of the soundscape of Newark. She makes a convincing argument that Amiri Baraka returned to Newark as "Roi," that is, the still somewhat bohemian black nationalist artist who was unfamiliar with the new cultural contours of Newark; then became "Imamu Amiri Baraka," with "Imamu" being a sort of cult of the personality title, not a name; and, finally, "Amiri," the artist and activist who was far more integrated into and aware of the grassroots cultural and political life and history of black Newark, especially its music.

"Roi," "Imamu," and "Amiri" were not separate people but were in her estimation separate stances with different degrees of rootedness in the city and its culture. In fact, if one looks at the community work Amiri Baraka did in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, much of it focused on arts projects, such as

the Newark Music Project, the Lincoln Park/Coast Cultural District (and the related Barbary Coast Renewal Project), Newark Mardi Gras (which featured Sun Ra and his Arkestra leading a Mardi Gras parade in Downtown Newark), and Kimako's Workshop (a performance series held in the basement of Amiri and Amina Baraka's house named in honor of Baraka's sister, theater worker Kimako Baraka, who was the victim of a homophobic murder). Almost all of these projects built on and celebrated the black musical heritage of Newark. In the Kimako's Workshop performances, the Barakas frequently included local Newark artists as well as better known writers and musicians who had close ties to the city, such as Wayne Shorter, Grachan Moncur III, Miguel Algarin, Felipe Luciano (of the Last Poets), and Claude Brown. While Amiri Baraka was often the name most prominently associated with these efforts, Amina Baraka was often the primary initiator and driving force in them. She was undoubtedly key to Amiri Baraka's evolution from a somewhat alienated returnee to Newark to an impassioned advocate for publicizing and restoring its black musical and literary heritage in both his community activism and his writing.[68]

WHEREVER AMERICAN CITIES ARE GOING: THE SOUND OF THE URBAN CRISIS

Amiri Baraka also used Newark and black music as a locus for understanding what came after modernism and the modern industrial system for the black working class (and the working class generally) in the United States. Newark, even before Detroit, became for Baraka (and the popular media to a large extent) an embodiment of the failure of modernity. This failure was not simply the spiritual, psychological, or aesthetic one that we often link to "high" modernist critiques of modernity and mass culture—after all, Baraka had a deep attachment to popular African American cultural forms of the high industrial era all his life. The failure was primarily economic and political. The factories were gone or going fast, the educational system

in ruins (and in the hands of racist outsiders in the New Jersey state government for the last couple of decades of his life), the infrastructure of the city severely decayed, the health care system serving black Newarkers working incredibly poorly, and so on. Certainly, this crisis had a major negative impact on black culture in Baraka's view. He frequently noted the destructive consequences of the near-elimination of music education from the Newark public schools. He was also not averse to remarking on what he saw as the corrupting influence of late capitalism on black music, particularly hip hop. But again, these critiques largely revolved around the material decay of black urban life.

For Baraka, what came after modernism and modernity was the landscape of the abject failure of capitalism for black people in the first place and working people generally in the second. From the Black Arts era onward, while remaining resolutely devoted to Newark and deeply involved its political and cultural life, he made the intense and visible decay of the city a constant refrain in his writing. "Newark is a ghastly looking place all the time," Baraka wrote in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze* (1966).[69] Again, it was black music, particularly jazz, and its relationship to the community through which Baraka sounded this failure. Often, ironically, it was a sort of silence or the loss of old musical venues, institutions, and opportunities that figured this failure. For example, Baraka used the musical education of the post–free jazz trumpeter Woody Shaw, who received much of his early training through the Newark public schools, as the occasion to point out that the Newark schools in the 1990s (then run by an often hostile New Jersey state government, which had taken control of the schools from the city and which would retain control until after Baraka's death) no longer taught music or art, another marker of a spiritual and intellectual collapse that mirrored the economic and infrastructural crisis of postindustrial Newark.[70] The 1995 "Lullaby of Avon Avenue" (from which the title of this chapter comes) refers to the street in Newark on which Sarah Vaughan (whom Baraka elsewhere called "the hippest, the most daring, and innovative, the clearest voice of the new music") lived. The destruction of Vaughan's house not far

from the Baraka home and her death mirrored the political and economic state of the city:

> As for the town, now
> Sassy told us
> just before she split
>
> I'm gone, now
> Send in
>
> The
> Clowns[71]

Of course, Amiri and Amina Baraka never gave up on black music in Newark, in agitating for and organizing black musical education and venues for bringing music to the grassroots. For them, music remained a space for black solidarity in the struggle against racism and late capitalism. They continued to recognize this struggle as significantly a cultural one. Newark's profile in the mass media, to the degree that it registered, was as a symbol for the old story of black failure and of blaming black people for their own oppression, as opposed to as an example of systemic failure. Thus, the struggle for black liberation and the empowerment of the black working class in Newark was an important and archetypal beachhead in the battle against late capitalism, a battle that necessarily had a major cultural dimension. The Barakas promoted jazz in Newark from the Jazz Arts Society and Spirit House in the Black Arts era through the Newark Music Project, the committee for the Lincoln Park/Coast Cultural District, the Newark Council for the Arts, and Kimako's Workshop in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Kimako's Workshop alone presented such artists as Abbey Lincoln, John Hicks, Hilton Ruiz, Max Roach, Andy Bey, David Murray, Nina Simone, Amina Meyers, Wayne Shorter, Grachan Moncur III, Quincy Troupe, Oliver Lake, Fred Hopkins, Vijay Iyer, Fred Ho, Cecil McBee, Steve Colson, Last Poets, Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Charlie Persip, Miguel Algarin, Rudolfo Anaya, Claude Brown, Makanda Ken McIntyre, Craig Harris, Frank Lowe, Askia Touré, and Reggie Workman.[72]

Amiri Baraka too praised the more conscious side of hip hop

and such Newark-connected artists as Naughty by Nature, Queen Latifah, and the Fugees as continuing old traditions of black music, capping and toasting in a new engaged modality.[73] However, Baraka deeply admired the way in which early hip hop, with its homemade sound systems, turntables, sampling, scratching, and so on, was a product of the crisis of late capitalism in the projects and poor black and Latinx neighborhoods of cities like Newark (and New York's poorest borough, the Bronx—in many respects the most removed from Manhattan's glamor), where there was no music instruction in schools in the ways that had previously existed and few community institutions and programs for learning instruments and singing outside of the church. In this way, hip hop and sampling is a postindustrial, late capitalist black sonic record of and tribute to the past and an avenue to the future even in the ruins. Again, it is hard not to consider here the double meaning of Kenneth Gibson's pronouncement about Newark and the future of U.S. cities, with its posing of Newark as a metonym of ultimate U.S. social failure or success—with utter failure a real possibility. Baraka recognized that while the decline of jazz in the city mirrored a similar collapse of jobs, housing, and so on, it also made clear that Newark's only hope, and by extension that of the urban masses of black America, was in a possible, plausible, revolutionary future that would have to be significantly determined by black people and their capacity, as in hip hop, to make something out of the ruins. Again, it was through a recollection, a remembering of radical black art in the form of John Coltrane's music early in his long Marxist period, stated most clearly in his 1979 poem "AM/TRAK," that Baraka was able to access such a revolutionary optimism:

> (I lay in solitary confinement, July 67
> Tanks rolling thru Newark
> & whistled all I knew of Trane
> my knowledge heartbeat
> & he was *dead*
> they
> said.

And yet last night I played *Meditations*
& it told me what to do
Live, you crazy mother
fucker!
Live!
& organize
yr shit
as rightly
burning![74]

Once more, it was in Newark after Baraka's return from New York following the implosion of BARTS that this transformative encounter or reencounter with the black avant-garde, post-bebop, post-Hughes (who died the year of the Newark uprising) vanguard sounded by the music of John Coltrane took place.

Similarly, the inclusion of such Newark-identified musicians as James P. Johnson, Hank Mobley, and Grachan Moncur III, each representing a different historical moment and mode of black jazz, in the sonic background of segments of Baraka's late epic poem of African American history and culture, *Wise, Why's, Y's,* presents Newark as a key site of the "changing same" of black culture and consciousness. In Baraka's collection of proto-Afro-Futurist stories primarily written in the late 1980s and 1990s, *Tales of the Out and Gone* (2007), horror tales of black people in Newark and the surrounding suburbs being liquified or sucked dry by late capitalism mix with wild speculative parables of prophecy and new black technologies of being and struggle created out of sound and spirit by street geniuses under the aegis of Sun Ra and Thelonious Monk (and Newark's Grachan Moncur III and Sarah Vaughan).

For most of Baraka's career, as expressed through the many genres and media of art in which he worked, the sweep of black life as seen through black music in Newark traced the arc of black modernity and the black revolutionary tradition. While Newark was Baraka's hometown where he lived the vast majority of his life and for which he had an abiding affection, its importance in his work and his version of black modernity and what came after

that modernity was not because of its uniqueness but its typicality. Very similar operations could be conducted with respect to other industrial (or formerly industrial) cities to reveal much the same general outlines, if somewhat different local particulars—for instance, the mediating idioms and linguistic and musical inventions might not be Eastern European Jewish or Italian, but Polish or Mexican. Newark was the epitome of the urban blues people: it was an industrial center where a rural people became transformed into something new with very old roots, a new and constantly renewing sort of nation within a nation—a continuum that was especially embodied in black music. It was a landmark of the abject failure of capitalism, especially for black people, a failure that called for a revolution, a New Ark.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER TWO

"FORMAL RENDITIONS"

Revisiting the Baraka-Ellison Debate

When thinking about Amiri Baraka's emergence as a major literary and intellectual figure, two milestones stand out in his early career. First is his work as a linchpin of the New American Poetry in his capacities as writer, editor, and publisher. Second, however, is his development into the only major black participant in the new wave of jazz criticism of the 1950s and early 1960s. This is the criticism that went beyond what Baraka saw as the "gee whiz" enthusiasm of the "jazz fan" and that took the bebop and "free jazz" revolutions seriously and considered what the music might mean socially. There were forerunners to this sort of criticism, notably by Sterling Brown and Sidney Finkelstein. But neither Brown nor Finkelstein published regularly in this vein—and Brown, though obviously a major influence on his former student, Baraka, was often ambivalent at best about the newer (and even some of the older) forms of jazz. Baraka's friend and former Howard University classmate A. B. Spellman likewise came to be an important black critic of jazz in the early 1960s, but to a large extent was able to do so because of the space Baraka cleared. As Spellman noted in an interview: "The simple answer is that I discovered that I could write about music and I had the opportunity. LeRoi Jones introduced me to Dan Morgenstern, who was then the editor of *DownBeat* [circa 1960s], and he let me write an 'Introducing Archie Shepp' piece and then made me a regular reviewer. A new and stronger motivation set in with the so-called

'New Thing,' which was resisted mightily by the critics who had defended bebop."[1] While Baraka established his reputation as a critic writing in *DownBeat, Metronome, Kulchur,* and other jazz and arts journals, it was the publication of his historicist study of the social meaning of jazz, *Blues People* (1963), that clearly marked him as the leading proponent of a new sort of black cultural studies.

If Baraka had never published anything but *Blues People,* he would still be an important cultural critic. The appearance of the book in 1963 is a plausible beginning for when and where cultural studies began in the United States, a starting point that, in fact, antedated the 1964 founding of the Centre for Cultural Studies by Richard Hoggart in Birmingham, England. As Nathaniel Mackey argued about *Blues People* in a groundbreaking 1978 essay on black music as impulse and theme in Baraka's work, "The book thus has to do with the various transformations—from African to Afro-American, slave to citizen, rural to urban—undergone by black people in the United States and the attendant transformations of Afro-American music."[2]

In 1964, Ralph Ellison published a review in the *New York Review of Books* excoriating *Blues People* for what he saw as its heavy-handed essentialism, especially in the conclusion. Ellison famously said that the sociological weight that Baraka heaped on the music "would even give the blues the blues."[3] The conflict contained in Ellison's review foreshadowed larger debates over the relationship (or nonrelationship) of African Americans to the United States in the Black Power and Black Arts period. Both sides in these debates often used models of black music, particularly what Baraka termed a "blues continuum," rooted in the South and continually transformed in urban industrial centers while retaining a blues core as guides for black artists in other genres and media, whether to enmesh themselves further in the fabric of "America" or to draw away to some other notion of polity or nation.

Blues People is an early and extended articulation of Baraka's notion of black music as both index and agent of a black national formation with the black working class at the center of that nation. It anticipated his later move to Marxism and the evolution

of his sense of black nationalism and internationalism. Ellison's response to it helped shape subsequent understandings of *Blues People* in terms of cultural studies and cultural critique, indeed, how we understand art and literature and what they are for.

Baraka and *Blues People* are at the center of this chapter. However, I argue that Ellison's goal in his biting, if funny, assault on Baraka's book was not only to dismiss *Blues People* because of its ideological and disciplinary stance but also to provide a new interpretative frame for his *Invisible Man* that had not seemed obvious to earlier commentators, black and white. In fact, these early critics often read *Invisible Man* in ways that might remind one of *Blues People*. Baraka himself cited Ellison's novel quite favorably in *Blues People* (and in other works throughout his entire career), even though he could be quite cutting about Ellison as a literary figure.

BLUES PEOPLE, NATION, CLASS, AND CULTURE

In many respects, *Blues People* is an ethnogenesis, the story of the creation of a people or nation in stages, as music history and historiography. It posits that the "formal renditions" of black music are black historical narratives as well as discussions of how those stories might be, indeed should be, told. It is also an account of class stratification within that people. In this account, the black working class is the essential core of the black nation, and the black "middle class" is a sort of self-hating ideological comprador whose witting or unwitting function is to pull the black nation toward "white" bourgeois values and interests. Baraka made his criticism of the middle class with a nod to Ellison that was perhaps ironic given Ellison's later takedown of *Blues People:*

> The blues people (as Ralph Ellison put it, "those who accepted and lived close to their folk experience") had their continuum, but the middle-class Negroes had gotten "free" of all the blues tradition, except as it was caricatured in white swing style, or the pitiful spectacle of Carnegie Hall boogie woogie, or Hazel Scott playing Grieg's *Concerto in A Minor* at Café Society. Assimilation, the social process they felt they must accept, always proposed that the enforced social scale of a people in American, or Western, society determined

> the value of that people's culture. Afro-American musical tradition could hardly be considered a social (or economic) asset in American society. Autonomous blues could not reflect the mind of the middle-class Negro, even if he chose not to deny his folk origins.[4]

Blues People proposes a movement of black people in what became the United States from "African" to "American," from slavery through Jim Crow to the civil rights present just before the onset of Black Power. With respect to black people, "American" here generally means something more like "African American," or a "blues people" shaped by the conditions, the economy, the geography, the politics, the history (or histories), the psychology (or psychologies), and so on of these shores, rather than "American" in any generic or already postracial sense. In other words, African Americans were neither Africans nor "Americans" in the way that most white people saw themselves (a way in which "white" and "American" and "America" and "citizen" are virtually synonymous). Rather African Americans are a distinct people whose early identity was forged in the chattel slave system of early modern capitalism in British North America and the refinement of that system in the cotton economy that helped fuel the industrial revolution in the United States. The continued development of United States' industrial capacity, making it the leading manufacturing nation in the world by the end of the nineteenth center, drew post-Reconstruction African Americans from the Jim Crow South into the Great Migration, which lasted much of the twentieth century with complex impacts on the character of this people, its class structure, and its culture. As Amy Abugo Ongiri points out, this transformation from, to use Baraka's formulation, "African captives" to "American captives" was closely linked to cultural production, which not only recorded and encoded this transformation but was part of the material process that enabled it.[5]

In fact, working-class African Americans are figured as involuntary nonconformists or dissenters from "big-time America" in cultural terms, as Baraka argues in the essay "City of Harlem," written a year before *Blues People*'s publication:

> Harlem for this reason is a community of nonconformists, since any black American, simply by virtue of his blackness, is weird, a nonconformist in this society. A community of nonconformists, not an artists' colony—though blind "ministers" still wander sometimes along 137th Street, whispering along the strings of their guitars—but a colony of old-line Americans, who can hold out, even if it is a great deal of the time in misery and ignorance, but still hold out, against the hypocrisy and sterility of big-time America, and still try to make their own lives, simply because of their color, but by now, not so simply, because that color now does serve to identify people in America whose feelings about it are not broadcast every day on television.[6]

Set against "Big-Time America," one can find here, and to some degree in *Blues People,* the sort of Popular Front platonic notion of "America" as expressed, for example, in Langston Hughes's "Let America Be America Again," that there was the real, truly democratic, egalitarian "America" out there, even if it never existed in practice. This vision of an ideal America is also accompanied by the argument that African Americans, especially working-class African Americans, are the truest "Americans" because of their exclusion from what Baraka saw as the "capitalist, anti-Communist, conformist United States of the 'American Century.'" This gives them a peculiar ideological and cultural vantage point from which to view the United States, much like the "second sight" that W. E. B. Du Bois claimed for the black folk in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Obviously, Baraka would abandon this idealist view of America during the Black Power/Black Arts era. Nevertheless, one sees here already the notion of African Americans as a people living in a "colony" in the sense of a colonialized people rather than as a voluntary community of dropouts, like the bohemian enclaves of lower Manhattan with which Baraka was very familiar and in which he still lived in 1962 and 1963.

Much like Baraka's play *Dutchman* (first performed a year after the publication of *Blues People*), *Blues People* is a text that in part documents Baraka's transition from a left black bohemianism to a radical black nationalism. Despite only a somewhat oblique reference to the Nation of Islam on the final page of the book, the

influence of Malcolm X pervades the final section of *Blues People,* particularly as it strikes a final note of a "ballot or the bullet" choice for the United States in the face of a new black militancy. This militancy presents a distinctly cultural face as it is linked to the black jazz avant-garde of free jazz as well as the more traditionally "political" challenges to the racial and political status quo of the "American Century" presented by the "Bandung World" (to use a term favored by black radicals after the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference of emerging formerly colonialized nations that met in Bandung, Indonesia):

> It is a curious balance, though one, as the West finds itself continuously redefining its position in the world and in need of radical reassessment of its relationships to the rest of the world, that will prove of the utmost importance. It is no secret that the West, and most particularly the American system, is in the position now of having to defend its values and ideas against totally hostile systems. The American Negro is being asked to defend the American system as energetically as the American white man. There is no doubt that the middle-class Negro is helping and will continue to help in that defense. But there is perhaps a question mark in the minds of the many poor blacks (which is one explanation for the attraction of such groups as the Black Muslims) and also now in the minds of many young Negro intellectuals. What is it that they are being asked to save? It is a good question, and America had better come up with an answer.[7]

Like Malcolm X, Baraka (and, according to him, the new black music) presents the United States and people who think of themselves as white (which is to say, citizens, "Americans," and the natural default for humanity with other humans, particularly black people as subhumans, either implicitly and explicitly) with a choice. That choice is accept the black claim on true political and cultural citizenship and essentially renounce the whiteness that is defined by blackness (a very different matter from renouncing or attempting to renounce blackness), or else the black masses would forge a citizenship of their own determining by any means necessary. Also, like Malcolm X (and James Baldwin in his essays and Lorraine Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun,* which were more or less contemporary with the writing of *Blues People*), Baraka

was not very sanguine that the current "citizens" of the United States would make the right choice.

Blues People remains impressive as a history, especially on the part of someone who was not a professional historian. There are, of course, some obvious errors and tendentious assertions without much empirical evidence. Baraka relied much on some scholars, such as Melville Herskovits, whose work, while conceptually powerful, was erratic in its presentation of accurate historical and anthropological detail. However, it is worth noting that Baraka wrote *Blues People* at a time when serious historical literature on jazz and blues, especially social histories of jazz and its cultural meaning, was very thin. Baraka would later credit Sterling Brown as an early mentor and inspiration for the project of *Blues People* while Baraka was a student at Howard University. Still, Brown's contributions to Baraka's understanding were primarily oral, consisting of informal lectures, stories, and jokes. Brown actually published relatively little scholarship on black music, especially as compared to his body of literary criticism.[8]

There were, of course, histories of jazz as a whole as well as of particular regional jazz styles, especially early New Orleans jazz, before *Blues People*. Some scholars, such as Charles Edward Smith and Rudi Blesh, drew on many of the same scholarly sources as Baraka, notably the work of Herskovits, to emphasize the connection of jazz and blues to African music and sensibilities.[9] However, these historians (many on the left, like Smith, a one-time employee of the Communist Party's newspaper the *Daily Worker*) often posed early jazz as the true expression of the black folk, in Raymond Williams's terminology a sort of "residual culture" in opposition to the "dominant culture," commercialization, cultural homogenization, and capitalism (but without Williams's notion of "emergent culture" that would encompass a new revolutionary culture).[10] These writers were generally quite hostile to newer forms of jazz, particularly bebop, as esoteric departures from the true folk spirit. They were, really, leftist "moldy figs." They were opposed to the sort of spiral development of what Baraka would term "the changing same," a class dialectic

of a working-class blues vanguard expression and self-assertion and a middle-class negotiation or even accommodation with capitalism and white supremacy that marked the development of African Americans as a people.

Other historians, such as Barry Ulanov, were much more enthusiastic about the newer developments in jazz, especially from bebop on, and set themselves in opposition to the first group, including a skepticism about the degree to which African music and culture influenced jazz.[11] Despite the interest of this second sort of jazz historian in the jazz avant-garde, or proto-avant-garde, these historians' works tended to see a straight-line progress in the music and derogated what might be seen as the cultural forms rooted in Africa, the slave era, Reconstruction, and early Jim Crow. This too was a very different endeavor from that of *Blues People* and Baraka's projection of a blues continuum. One of the few serious attempts to undertake a project like *Blues People* was the Communist cultural critic Sidney Finkelstein's *Jazz: A People's Music* (1948), a study that Baraka referenced in *Blues People* and for which Baraka retained a lifelong appreciation.[12] In addition to taking the question of class more seriously than did most jazz historians, even the leftists to that point, Finkelstein used the term "people" to cast jazz as both the music of the "Negro people" or nation, in keeping with what was still the official ideology of the Communist Party of the United States of America on the "National Question," as well as the music of the "American people" in the multicultural and multinational sense of the Popular Front. In this, Finkelstein tried to negotiate the difficult and contradictory position of a "nation within a nation" (or maybe more accurately, a "people within a people") in which African Americans both stood apart from and profoundly shaped U.S. culture, much as Baraka would similarly try to do in *Blues People*.[13]

Even the new scholarship of slavery, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era that would burgeon in the Black Power and post–Black Power eras was really only beginning in the "mainstream" history profession. After all, Kenneth Stampp's *That Peculiar*

Institution, an early landmark study in the shift away from U. B. Phillips and the "Bourbon School" of southern history and of slavery as a relatively benign, if in some ways regrettable, institution was only a half-dozen years old when Baraka began *Blues People*. Similarly, the swing away from William Dunning and what had been the dominant "Dunning School" view of Reconstruction as a corrupt era of white" carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" and their naive, if not actually bestial, black minions had begun not long before the writing of *Blues People*. This swing was still incomplete, especially in the popular white imagination, at the time of the book's publication. So, whatever the inaccuracies of Baraka's book as social history, like Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935) before it, it was actually open to a range of valuable scholarship and sources neglected or even studiously ignored by "mainstream" historians. For one thing, Baraka by upbringing and by education at Howard University, however conflicted he may have been about what he saw as the black "middle-class" orientation of Howard, took such black scholars as E. Franklin Frazier and Thomas Talley (long the chair of chemistry at Fisk University but who had a deep interest in black folk song) seriously. That was more than many leading white scholars did. This did not stop Baraka from using the work of white academics, such as Herskovits and Howard Odum, as well as nonprofessional white scholars like Finkelstein and younger jazz critics like Martin Williams, Larry Gushee, André Hodeir, Nat Hentoff, and Ross Russell, whom Baraka later characterized as "the most *advanced* critics of the music," taking jazz criticism beyond what he called its "gee whiz" dimensions.[14]

Of course, Baraka was not a professional academic historian of blues and jazz and their relation to African American culture in 1963. Such a position was more or less nonexistent, more or less impossible, in the early 1960s, especially for a black academic. Again, there were African American academics, notably Sterling Brown, who were deeply knowledgeable about the historical eras of blues and jazz, but they were not hired to teach or write about that music and were rarely offered the opportunity to do

so, except informally as Brown did with Baraka, Spellman, and those students at Howard University whom he saw as potentially receptive. Melville Herskovits did invite the black poet and journalist Frank Marshall Davis to lecture about jazz and the blues at some of his classes at Northwestern University, but again that was an unusual situation and not Davis's vocation.[15] While there were some white academics who studied African American folklore, they rarely did so in the context of its relationship to black music—and certainly not that of folklore to popular music forms. Black jazz and popular music critics such as Baraka, Spellman, and Larry Neal, and black jazz musicians such as Archie Shepp and Max Roach, would teach in Black Studies undergraduate departments and programs, but the earliest establishment of those departments was still several years off at the time Baraka was writing *Blues People*—and the first Ph.D. programs in African American/Africana Studies decades in the future.

However, what Baraka did have, beyond his knowledge as a fan of free jazz, bebop, and other forms of jazz as well as genres of blues, gospel, and r&b that circulated in Newark in his youth and from Sterling Brown at Howard, was his experience at the *Record Changer* magazine run by Dick Hadlock, a Dixieland musician and himself a nonacademic historian of early jazz. The Greenwich Village–based *Record Changer* was basically an early fanzine and medium of record sales and collecting for Dixieland enthusiasts. Baraka served as the shipping manager for the journal in his early years in New York. As he notes in his *Autobiography,* this job allowed him the opportunity to listen systematically to different eras of blues and jazz recording found in the journal's office. It also brought him into contact with the "advanced" younger white jazz critics mentioned above, with whom he discussed the antecedents, history, and contemporary scene of jazz. These contacts gave him the chance to develop his critical writing on music by providing entrée to such jazz journals as *DownBeat* and Martin Williams's *Metronome*. Baraka's new connections in the jazz and blues world through the *Record Changer* also led to a job as a writer of liner notes for Prestige Records, a jazz label that recorded many of the leading artists of

the 1950s and early 1960s. While Baraka's early liner notes are taken up in the third chapter of this study, suffice it to say here that this job not only provided him with much-needed income but also gave him access to and the occasion to write about a wide range of contemporary jazz and blues recordings. Baraka's role as a key younger figure in somewhat separate, if occasionally overlapping, downtown Manhattan literary and art circles created a space for him to write about jazz for an audience of artists and intellectuals beyond the circles of jazz magazines. The main vehicle for these articles was *Kulchur,* a journal that emerged from the New American Poetry scene of New York, especially the "New York School" associated with the poet and art critic Frank O'Hara (a member of the *Kulchur* editorial board and a close friend of Baraka, also a member of the board at the time). Thus, despite not being a professional scholar and having many other literary, cultural, and political projects as a central figure of both the radical black bohemian community of New York and the literary counterculture generally, Baraka was probably as well prepared, including in terms of what might be seen as archival research, to write such a cultural history of blues and jazz as anyone in the United States at that time.[16]

Blues People can be roughly divided into two parts. The first describes the journey from African to African American or "American Negro" (as a not fully resolved hybrid of "Africa" and "America") to "American," from slave to freedman (though not citizen), and from object to subject. Focusing substantially on black sacred music and other sorts of sacred performance, with some reference to secular folk song, particularly the work song, this section of *Blues People* lays out the creation of a black American sensibility and social spaces that black people were able to significantly control, and stages (primarily cultural) on which they were able to play great roles:

> And the point I want to make most evident here is that I cite the beginning of blues as one beginning of American Negroes. Or, let me say, the reaction and subsequent relation of the Negro's experience in this country in *his* English is one beginning of the Negro's *conscious* appearance on the American scene. If you are taken to

> Mongolia as a slave and work there seventy-five years and learn twenty words of Mongolian and live in a small house from which you leave only to work, I don't think we can call you a Mongolian. It is only when you begin to accept the idea that you *are* part of that country that you can be said to be a permanent resident. I mean, that until the time when you have sufficient ideas about this new country to begin making some lasting *moral* generalizations about it—relating your experience, in some lasting form, *in the language* of that country, with whatever subtleties and obliqueness you bring to it—you are merely a transient. There were no formal stories about the Negro's existence in America passed down in any pure African tongue. The stories, myths, moral examples, etc., given in African were *about* Africa. When America became important enough to the African to be passed on, in those *formal* renditions, to the young, those renditions were in some kind of Afro-American language. And finally, when a man looked up in some anonymous field and shouted, "Oh, Ahm tired a dis mess, / Oh, yes, Ahm so tired a dis mess," you can be sure he was an American.[17]

It is the "formal renditions," which is to say organized expressive culture, in the first place black music that both signal and historically record the appearance and national experience of a people that is neither "African" nor "American" (as understood by "middle-class" white people in the United States as a real citizen or capable of becoming a citizen), but both. As Baraka would later put it in a 1991 essay clearly descended from the thinking he displayed in *Blues People* (albeit with Newark as the epitome of black modernity, the black working class, and the new black nation), "The 'Blues Aesthetic' and the 'Black Aesthetic' as the Continuing Political History of a Culture": "The Blues Aesthetic must emotionally and historically carry the heart and soul of the African antiquity, but it is also a Western Aesthetic, i.e., expressing a western people, though an African-American one. (Finally, Europe is not the West, the Americas are! Head west from Europe you come to Jersey! West of the Americas is the East!)"[18]

The second part of *Blues People* begins with emancipation and the increasing class stratification of the black community. This stratification fundamentally divided black people into "freedmen," the great mass of working-class African Americans who had no belief in or expectation of American citizenship, and the middle

class, which aspired to citizenship largely through the denial of and distancing themselves from the culture of the freedmen:

> After slavery, the stratification of the social order among Negroes was rapid. At the bottom of the new social ladder were the tenant farmers and migrant laborers, and at the other end were the ministers, storekeepers, and professional men. It was the latter who naturally came to be regarded as the leaders of the many Negro communities; usually they set the stance the new society would take. The emulation of white society proved to be not only a pattern for the new leaders, but an end in itself. Negroes who were highest in the social and economic hierarchy also became the most fanatic imitators of white society, while the great masses of Negroes were much slower in their attempts at complete imitation. This phenomenon caused a split in the psychical disposition of the Negro's temperament which certainly affected all areas of his life. The developing middle class and the mainstream of black society found themselves headed two different ways. This disparity within the black community is of such importance that it cannot be overemphasized, and it became more and more pronounced as the Negro achieved more latitude and status in America. At its ugliest, this attitude was symbolized by the abandonment by a great many Negroes of the mores or customs they considered slave customs, or "too Negroid."[19]

The culture of the freedmen in *Blues People* is seen most clearly in the blues. The blues for Baraka is a form rooted in slavery but developed after emancipation, and the experience and worldview the blues expresses is simultaneously one of the individual black subject and one of a collective black people—or at least the collective black masses. Baraka asserts that the idea of middle-class blues singer is virtually unthinkable ("Such a thing as a *middle-class blues singer* is almost unheard of. It is, it seems to me, even a contradiction of terms.")[20] While in this account, the middle class is certainly assimilationist, the poor black masses are not so much nationalist or separatist, except during certain revolutionary or potentially revolutionary moments like the heyday of the Garvey Movement in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, as skeptical or fatalistic about truly becoming citizens.

This second section complicates the dialectic of the freedman/middle-class divide as it describes the rise of the modern

recording industry in the 1920s, promoting what Baraka sees as the more commercial genre of the "classic blues" as well as jazz as popular music. Both the classic blues and jazz issued from and yet are contemporary with the blues as a form and a sort of impulse or sensibility. That is to say, the blues predate and are the fount of the jazz and the classic blues but also continue to exist alongside them as a vital expression. One thing that happened with the emergence of jazz as popular music in the age of mechanical reproduction, to use Walter Benjamin's famous formulation, is that it made the form of the blues, if not the content and worldview, accessible to white musicians and listeners. This, in turn, drew black middle-class musicians (e.g., Duke Ellington) into jazz as a path toward a sort of citizenship in which it was neither possible nor desirable to leave the "blues people" entirely behind. While the blues (and, in Ellison's terms, "the blues impulse") in its deepest sense remain in Baraka's account as a sort of "secret" music of a subculture of involuntary nonconformists, a dialectic is set up in which jazz is pulled between the pole of the blues, especially the blues as an attitude as opposed to simply a musical form, and that of a basically white, commercialized notion of musical (and, by extension, political) citizenship in which this whitened music denies the music's black and blue origins, its early blues sensibilities, and approach to playing jazz. Baraka holds up swing, particularly the late institutionalization of a highly arranged swing as America's music ruled by the "king" Benny Goodman, as the epitome of the pull away from the blues toward what he sees as vapid commercialism.

Another complication related to the rise of the recording industry is the increasing urbanization and industrialization of the black community with the onset of the Great Migration and the advent of two world wars, producing enormous changes in the attitudes, expressive culture, and indeed economic power of this new black industrial working class, especially its younger members. This migration and urbanization also made possible, in fact virtually demand, a new level of enmeshment of the black working class and black culture with white workers (and Asian and Latinx workers), as well as with the white bourgeoisie and

middle class or petty bourgeoisie. These changes provided the impetus for the development of "Race Records" and other black-oriented commercial musical culture, as well as the possibility for "crossover" success for black musicians. The growth of recorded black popular music simultaneously pulled black musicians away from and back to the black community and potentially encompassed competing senses of citizenship and nationhood. This led to the creation of new sorts of blues and blues-inflected music, both in what might be thought of as more plebian and more avant-garde forms, both r&b and bebop—hence Baraka's notion of a blues continuum in which the basic blues worldview or attitude was given new forms and new emphases within the context of the hurried, crowded urban milieu of the ghetto, particularly during and after World War II. What we see here is an early articulation of the "changing same" that he would develop at more length four years later after the advent of the Black Arts Movement. He also lays out a vision of recurrent black musical avant-gardes, as exemplified by bebop and later free jazz, that seemingly paradoxically are formally radical and yet still rooted in tradition, returning jazz to the blues attitude and worldview of the black masses: "Bebop also re-established the blues as the most important Afro-American form in Negro music by its astonishingly contemporary re-statement of the basic blues impulse. The boppers returned to this basic form, reacting against the all but stifling advance artificial melody had made into jazz during the swing era."[21]

Similarly, Baraka argues that free jazz simultaneously rebelled against cool jazz and cool's movement away from black culture that served "to obscure the most precious advances Parker and the other boppers had made," and against what he saw as the clichés of hard bop and soul jazz, even if those clichés are ostensibly a return to the "black" sounds of the blues, gospel, and the sacred and secular cultural practices associated with those musical forms.[22] For Baraka, free jazz linked the black cultural past to an avant-garde future outside of the European art tradition: "What these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western forms. They

have used the music of the forties, with its jagged exciting rhythms as an initial reference and have restored the hegemony of the blues as the most important basic form in Afro-American music."[23] Like Ellison, one could question the notion of free jazz (and even bebop) as more fundamentally aligned with the blues than swing (especially the southwestern/Midwestern "Territory Bands," such as those of Count Basie, Benny Moten, and Jay McShann), soul jazz, and hard bop. As noted in chapter 1, Baraka himself would later declare, "The big bands were actually big blues bands."[24] Still, one sees here a notion of a music that embodies the forward press of the contemporary black working class in motion—and in at least indirect rebellion—while honoring the historical experience that produced African Americans as a people.

NATION, CLASS, AND CULTURE AS A WAY OF REREADING AND REMAKING *BLUES PEOPLE* AND *INVISIBLE MAN:* ELLISON ON *BLUES PEOPLE*

Ellison's review of *Blues People* also marks an intellect in ideological and aesthetic transition, appearing more than a decade after the publication of *Invisible Man,* a novel that, as Barbara Foley has shown, was itself a product of a long and incremental movement away from the Communist left toward a Cold War liberalism on the part of Ellison, a journey that was incomplete at the novel's publication.[25] *Invisible Man* could be read as much closer in spirit to *Blues People* than the review, later republished in the collection *Shadow and Act,* might suggest. In Ellison's novel, southern "folk" characters, whether still in the South like Jim Trueblood or transplanted to the North like the yam seller Peter Wheatstraw, are as "blues people" wiser and more resilient than is the narrator with his middle-class aspirations in the face of what Baraka called "big-time America." Both Trueblood and Wheatstraw are quite literally "blues people" in that they are both singers of the form, and in the case of Wheatstraw, named after the stage name of a major blues artist, Peetie Wheatstraw (William Bunch).

The novel pointedly critiques not only Garveyites (and black

nationalism generally) and the CPUSA but virtually every area of U.S. cultural, intellectual, and political life. Even Ellison's review shared a perhaps surprising kinship with Baraka's study for such a negative commentary, talking at one point of the blues as a key feature of a black way of life, albeit more in the vein of Northrup Frye's modes than Marx's historical materialism: "The blues speak to us simultaneously of the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined these modes."[26]

Given Ellison's well-known sense of rivalry with other black writers, perhaps it is not so peculiar that he would launch an attack on an up-and-coming black artistic and intellectual star who seemed to be working the same side of the street as himself. Of course, this was not unique to Ellison or to black writers. The literary culture of the United States at the time, especially among male writers, was ferociously competitive as successful novelists and poets obsessed about where they ranked among their peers and worried that some rising young artist would displace them from their perch. One sometimes wonders, for instance, whether the mental illness and substance abuse that plagued so many of the leading white "academic" poets of the 1940s and 1950s (e.g., John Berryman, Delmore Schwartz, Robert Lowell, and Randall Jarrell) were in part results of this intense competition.

Similarly, black writers, again especially male writers, displayed a strong tendency to critique their black forerunners (often their own mentors) and their contemporaries as insufficiently sophisticated literarily or in sync with the spirit of the black masses (generally as exemplified in black music), or both. This sort of patricidal "anxiety of influence," to quote Harold Bloom's Freudian notion of literary ancestry in poetry, only moderated somewhat with the maturing in the late 1960s of the Black Arts Movement, which generally saw and sought black artistic ancestry in a far more positive light.[27] Even Langston Hughes, a notably collegial writer supportive of younger black artists, was not immune to this early in his career, as evidenced by his 1926 "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" in which a not very

deeply disguised Countee Cullen receives some harsh criticism for his alleged attempt to separate himself from the black folk. Later, Richard Wright was similarly dismissive of his predecessors and indeed most of his peers, including Hughes. Baldwin treated his former mentor Wright in much the same way.[28] Ellison likewise derogated Wright and Hughes (who had both done much in advancing Ellison's career) and other black writers whom he famously (or infamously) described as artistic "relatives" but not "ancestors" in his classic reply to criticisms of *Invisible Man*'s politics or lack thereof by Irving Howe, "The World and the Jug."[29] Baraka himself did much the same thing in the 1962 *Saturday Review* essay "The Myth of Negro Literature," which opens, "The mediocrity of what has been called 'Negro Literature' is one of the most loosely held secrets of American culture." Baraka would go on to damn Ellison with the faintest of praise in that essay:

> Moreover, it is only recently that formal literature written by American Negroes has begun to approach the literary standards of its model, *i.e.,* the literature of the white middle class. And only Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin have managed to bring off examples of writing, in this genre, that could succeed in passing themselves off as "serious" writing, in the sense that, say, the work of Somerset Maugham is "serious" writing. That is, serious, if one has never read Herman Melville or James Joyce. And it is part of the tragic naïveté of the middle class (brow) writer, that he has not.[30]

There is a sense that Ellison's essay, which too gives *Blues People* some faint praise before eviscerating it (or as Baraka wrote to his close friend and fellow poet Ed Dorn, "he really reamed me"), is payback for the condescending criticism of Ellison in Baraka's essay.[31]

It is important to note the degree to which Ellison's review shaped the critical assessment of *Blues People* from that point on. Prior to the appearance of Ellison's piece, the reception of the book was generally positive, if somewhat slight. Despite the slimness of the reviews, for a book by a young black author whose only previous book to that point was the 1961 volume of poems *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* issued by Baraka's own Totem/Corinth Press, to be reviewed at all by the *New York Times*

was notable. The publisher of *Blues People,* William Morrow, was able to get positive advance reviews from the poet and Bay Area countercultural poetry doyen Kenneth Rexroth and Langston Hughes, who blurbed it as "a must for all who would more knowledgeably appreciate and better comprehend America's most popular music." The *Times* review, written by the folklorist Vance Randolph, was mostly devoted to Harold Courlander's *Negro Folk Music, USA.* Only one of the review's twelve paragraphs discussed *Blues People.* That paragraph offered very general comments where the previous eleven contained a long and technical discussion of Courlander's book. Interestingly, given the common critical assertion following Ellison's essay that Baraka's book was too freighted with social science jargon, Randolph lauded *Blues People,* perhaps a bit patronizingly, as engagingly intimate: "The book is filled with fascinating anecdotes, many of them concerned with social and economic matters. There is a personal warmth here that is lacking in Mr. Courlander's larger and more scholarly work and which many readers may find attractive."[32]

There was a decidedly different and more hostile tone by many, primarily white, reviewers after the publication of Ellison's piece on *Blues People.* The folklorist Roger D. Abrahams, then a faculty member at the University of Texas, savaged *Blues People* in a 1966 omnibus review in the *Journal of American Folklore* that also considered Ellison's *Shadow and Act,* basically calling Baraka an inauthentic black man imitating the stance of bohemian "white Negroes": "The volume by the noted Negro playwright and poet LeRoi Jones is but his most sober statement in his argument of Negro alienation, revolt, and esoteric rejection. Taking his cue from Mezzrow (and more recently, Mailer) and other 'white Negroes,' he sees the blues (and all Negro musical expression) as the progressive development of an arcane vocabulary and a totally in-group expression which the white world needs to feel but cannot ever understand."[33]

Abrahams's review appeared after *Dutchman, The Dead Lecturer,* and Baraka's move uptown to Harlem following the murder of Malcolm X and the founding of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School. In fact, by 1966, Baraka was back in the

Central Ward of Newark. Baraka's reputation as the leading contemporary black militant poet and playwright of the United States was already established. So, in part, Abrahams's critique was premised on the notion that the emerging Black Arts Movement, of which Baraka was the most prominent member, was actually an inauthentic and "esoteric" negative reflection of what Abrahams posed as the primitivist fantasies of Norman Mailer and "Mezz" Mezzrow (a.k.a. Milton Mesirow—a white jazz musician most famous as a hipster translator of black "hip" culture and language to a mass white audience as well as the provider of marijuana to many jazz musicians, including Louis Armstrong). This notion that Baraka's move toward a deeper and more militant blackness was actually a new manifestation of the faux black bohemian he had been all along became a common critique of Baraka, especially of his Black Arts period, from commentators as diverse as the black leftist academic Jerry Watts (who wrote books on both Baraka and Ellison) and Frank O'Hara's friend and roommate (and sometime lover) Joe Lesueur.[34]

Abrahams drew on Ellison's review of *Blues People* both to give a sort of authority to his own pronouncements on Baraka's book and to anchor his comments on *Shadow and Act,* which was also a subject of the review, though more as a club with which to beat Baraka: "Ralph Ellison's book is of importance here because it contains his magnificent essay-review of Jones' book, originally printed in the New York Review. Ellison is not only a polished writer but also a jazz performer who knows his music and musicians first hand. He is embarrassed by Jones' pronouncements, especially by the rejection of the blues as an art form in favor of a tepid and tendentious sociological argument in regard to the function of these songs." The folklorist went on to praise Ellison's review as making "some of the most pregnant remarks about the Negro as a creative musician that this reviewer has ever encountered."[35] Abrahams creatively combined fragmented quotes from a couple of pages of Ellison's review, attributing to Ellison a model of African American music that posits a negotiation among Europe, Africa, and America, a model that embodies the possibilities of

"American" democracy and culture at their best, even if, again as Langston Hughes suggested in "Let America Be America Again," those possibilities had never been actualized for African Americans. Oddly enough, this was not too far from Baraka's position in *Blues People* and "The City of Harlem," where black working-class culture, especially music and dance, is cast as a nonconformist, "old-time American" holdout against "big-time America." However, perhaps Abrahams was not so much reviewing *Blues People* as Baraka's politics and art at the beginning of the Black Power and Black Arts era, an era that was clearly underway in 1966. In turn, Baraka was a metonym for the larger movements. While it is questionable how much Abrahams's review in a scholarly journal influenced subsequent evaluations of *Blues People* in a direct sense, it is representative of a long line of reviews and commentary on *Blues People* that draw on Ellison's piece to make their critique. This line of commentary has the virtue of seeing Baraka's book as anticipating and helping shape Baraka's transition to black nationalism, Black Power, and Black Arts—though its connection to his later move to Marxism is less noted.[36]

The line of critique of *Blues People* that derived from, or at least referenced, Ellison's review had the perhaps unintended consequence of recommending Baraka's book to the growing number of people, especially radical African American artists, intellectuals, and activists, who were interested in the social meaning of black music and its relevance to revolutionary black politics. Black critics associated with Black Arts and Black Power read *Blues People* far differently and far more favorably, though again often for much the same reasons that other critics condemned the book. They generally appreciated Baraka's efforts to provide a deeper sociohistorical understanding of the meaning of black music and its evolution, in part so as to judge that music's usefulness in the struggle for black liberation. They too saw *Blues People* as an important marker of Baraka's development into the leading black nationalist poet, playwright, and intellectual in the United States, which was obviously a good thing in their estimation. Contrary to the truism that Black Arts participants uniformly disliked Ellison's

work, many, like Baraka, had a strong admiration for *Invisible Man,* though they were generally critical about Ellison's move toward a more pronounced cultural liberalism.

An interesting review of *Blues People* during the early Black Arts era is one by a very young William Harris in the *Antioch Review* in 1967. Harris himself, then an undergraduate who would become the foremost scholar of Baraka and his poetry, was in intellectual and political transition too, as any young black intellectual in that era almost inevitably would be. In the review he acknowledges the power of Baraka's work, both more abstractly as an intellectual study as well as more concretely in how it affected him personally. Harris criticizes that work for its move to black separatism while not dismissing the power and appeal of such a move. For the purposes here, though, what is significant is that he uses *Blues People* as a lens through which to read the more recent *Home,* a collection of "social essays" by Baraka arranged to demonstrate Baraka's arc from a radical bohemian integrationist to black nationalist. Not only is *Blues People* understood as sounding, so to speak, many of the key tenets of Baraka's aesthetics in the Black Arts era (and, as it would turn out, beyond), but it also highlights more generally the meaning and political import of the cultural, in other words an activist form of cultural studies.[37]

Much of the negative commentary on *Blues People,* particularly by white critics, focuses on what is seen as the tiresome and foreign (to the "true" core of black culture) sociohistorical analysis and social science language that Baraka employed—though, as noted previously, that was not in general the response of reviewers like Randolph in the *Times* before Ellison. This commentary is also defensive about the European art heritage (at its best) and the need for its conservation, to paraphrase W. E. B. Du Bois. However, it is on the question of a black avant-garde, both radical and popular in the sense of seeking a wide audience and of issuing from the people, that Ellison most sharply diverges with Baraka. For Ellison, the black musical avant-garde is inherently elitist, alienated from black folk, and more akin to similarly elitist and alienated white avant-gardists; again, Baraka sees the

black musical vanguard, particularly as embodied in bebop and free jazz, as that part of a recurring dialectic that seeks to return black arts to the blues impulse. (Ellison, of course, did not view literature in the same way, seeing black writers like Hughes as insufficiently advanced after the modernist revolution of the early twentieth century.)

In a number of important respects, the Ellison of the early 1960s and Baraka in the same period agreed about jazz. Ellison wrote in his essay on guitarist Charlie Christian, "Jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group," sounding much like Baraka on the blues.[38] Yet, as has been much noted, Ellison was deeply critical of bebop, seeing it not as a return to a blues sensibility but as helping provoke a rupture between jazz and a mass black audience, even if Ellison (like Baraka) had a great fondness for the Territory Bands out of which so many of the leading beboppers (and proto-beboppers) issued. In his review of *Blues People,* as in other essays contained in *Shadow and Act,* Ellison sets the black music of the swing era (and of innovators who bridged the early jazz and swing eras, most notably Louis Armstrong) as an elegant and achieved form that, rather than requiring an anarchic break with the West, placed African Americans at the heart of U.S. culture, whether white Americans were able to see or accept that location or not: "For as I see it, from the days of their introduction into the colonies, Negroes have taken, with the ruthlessness of those without articulate investments in cultural styles, what they could of European music, making of it that would, when blended with the cultural tendencies inherited from Africa, express their own sense of life—while rejecting the rest. Perhaps this is only another way of saying that whatever the degree of injustice sustained by the slaves, American culture was, even before the official founding of the nation, pluralistic."[39]

Ellison's conflicting notion of the power of the music and its model for the writing of black people into the heart of the United States, even as that music comments on the history of racism and the experience of African Americans in the nation, also would exert considerable influence over a long line of jazz and culture critics and some musicians. This is seen clearly, perhaps, in Ken

Burns's documentary film *Jazz* (2001), which both in presentation and comments by Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch, and others (sometimes actually quoting Ellison) praises jazz as expressing U.S. democracy (and placing black people near the center of that democracy), downplaying the role and value of the post–World War II black musical avant-gardes.

What Ellison did in his review, as well as in *Shadow and Act* generally, is provide an interpretive frame for reading or rereading his fiction, particularly *Invisible Man.* Given the ways that *Invisible Man* has been canonized, lionized, and demonized since the appearance of *Shadow and Act* in 1964 and the rise of Black Power and Black Arts circa 1965–66, it is important to recall the other ways it could be read besides as an affirmation and critique of U.S. democracy and democratic potential. In fact, there is no real reason to see *Invisible Man* as particularly affirming of the collective project of American democracy or as especially optimistic about the future of that project. Despite the manifest anticommunism that made *Invisible Man* a critical centerpiece of the cultural Cold War, one of things that drew Ellison and his former mentor Richard Wright to the CPUSA, besides as a space for literary apprenticeship, was its notion of African Americans as a people or nation. While this aspect of the "national question" and "Negro liberation" was official CPUSA policy throughout the period of Ellison's closest connection to the Communist left during the Popular Front, its genesis and period of greatest emphasis was in the pre–Popular Front era from 1928 to 1935. Ellison's sense of the retreat of the CPUSA from the "national question" and the concerns of African Americans during World War II and the Communist prioritization of the defense of the Soviet Union under the mantle of anti-Nazi democratic unity provided the prime motivation for his (and Wright's) move away from the party. In a sense, Ellison and Wright in the mid-1940s were to the left of a CPUSA that, during what might be seen as the late Popular Front against Nazism, in fact extolled what it saw as the best aspects and traditions of "American" democracy, not unlike the sort of vision that animated *Shadow and Act.*

Kenneth Warren is no doubt correct when he says, "What

Ellison had hoped to accomplish in *Invisible Man* was assertion of identity that could, through expressing the ideals of a democratic society, remain at once cultural and political."[40] But it does not follow that Ellison viewed "American" democracy, even at its best, as necessarily the model of an ideal democratic society, especially for African Americans.

There is considerable evidence—from the "Battle Royal" chapter to the narrator's underground hideaway from the white sleepwalkers at the end (and beginning) of the novel—that contemporary U.S. society might actually be the antithesis of genuine democracy—and the belief in an ideal "America" that never was one of the illusions painfully stripped away from the author in the hallucinatory penultimate scene of *Invisible Man.* One might just as easily read that "assertion of identity" as some lingering notion of a black democracy, a black nation without the distorting influence of malfunctioning white eyes (and, after Du Bois, black people who see themselves through white eyes, which is to say, the social eye of white "American" "democratic" culture) as the ideal democracy. When the narrator suggests that on some frequency he may speak for the reader at the conclusion of the novel, again one might read it as the black narrator, now allegedly free of illusions, proposing the germ not of the "true" "American" democracy but of a new democracy that would replace the United States. In the Leninist terms of Ellison's (and Wright's) youthful radicalism (and Baraka's later Marxism), if the subjugation, dehumanization, and invisibility of African Americans is at the foundation of "America" and its democracy, can that democracy be reformed or refined to its "true" self or must it be smashed and rebuilt on different lines with a different foundation?

Obviously, Ellison's politics had changed by the time of *Invisible Man*'s publication—and would change more by the time of his review of *Blues People,* when his take on the United States, its democracy, and its culture was much closer to that of the Popular Front. As was often the case with strains of Cold War liberalism, as Michael Denning persuasively argues in his classic *The Cultural Front,* it was the Popular Front without Communists.[41] However, this reading of *Invisible Man* as extolling the

possibilities of already existing "American" democracy, though retrospectively plausible, was promoted by the review of *Blues People* and the rest of *Shadow and Act* from the standpoint of Ellison's ideological stance of the mid-1960s and not necessarily the only possible take on the novel. Indeed, Baraka's invocation of it late in his Marxist phase in his work with musician William Parker and Parker's recasting of the songs of Curtis Mayfield proposes such an alternative reading. This stance of Ellison's was as much about black modernity within the United States and the need for African American artists to find a lexicon and a form to express that modernity as it was about democracy.

Neither is *Invisible Man*'s much-claimed kinship (by the Ellison of the 1960s as much as, if not more than, anyone else) to what might be thought of as classic and modernist (and all-male and all-white) "American" literature, to Emerson, Twain, Whitman, Melville, and so on, unproblematic—at least without the gloss that Ellison provided later in many of the essays of *Shadow and Act,* not the least the *Blues People* review. The almost obsessive invocation of these authors in *Invisible Man* could be read as a sort of intertextual homage. Conversely, these invocations could also be read as parodic critique of the racial and sexual politics of the "classic American literature" and "the American Renaissance," and the sort of cultural blindness in which classic American texts are screens on which white readers project their racial fantasies. Again, there is no obvious reason to read the "blackness of blackness" sermon in the prologue, riffing on the moment in chapter 2 of *Moby-Dick* when Ishmael stumbles into a black church where the preacher is giving a sermon on "the blackness of darkness," or the narrator's encounter with the younger Emerson in chapter 9, a sort of Carl Van Vechten–esque figure who attempts to project a sexual fantasy of Twain's Huck and Jim on his relation to the narrator (and who invites the narrator to go with him to "Club Calamus," referring to the most openly homoerotic section of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*), as other than parodying Melville, Whitman, and Twain and critiquing popular and scholarly new readings of *Moby-Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn,* such as Leslie Fiedler's 1948 essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!"

At the end of *Invisible Man,* the narrator has fallen out of history and society and is literally living underground, albeit in a very clean, well-lit underground. He proposes to come out and do something, but the reader does not really know what. The narrator rejects a certain sort of nationalism associated with Marcus Garvey and the post-Garveyite Harlem black nationalist Hamid Sufi, though that nationalism has a strange fascination for him, and the Brotherhood, which was certainly the CPUSA whatever else it might have been, though he feels lost and empty after leaving the Brotherhood. But one cannot say that the narrator embraces "America" and white "Americans," or even truly imagines that embrace at the novel's end.

Ultimately, there is not a single sympathetic white character in the novel. Some of the white characters, such as Brother Jack, are unsympathetic and actively malevolent, and others, such as Sybil and Norton, are unsympathetic and basically pathetic. All are blind with that "peculiar disposition" of their psychic eyes that prevents them from actually seeing black people. This of course is true of many of the black characters in various ways, but not all of them, particularly the folk "blues people" like Trueblood, Wheatstraw, and the narrator's grandfather. Ellison does suggest that black and white intertwine in intimate ways. In the Liberty Paints section of the novel, the narrator (and the reader) learns that a few drops of black (and it has to be just the right amount of black) are necessary to make "Optic White" paint, the whitest white. That process and knowledge of the precise portions is managed by Lucius Brockway, a black worker at the Liberty Paints factory who jealously guards his position against both black and white encroachment, real and imagined. Brockway would rather kill the narrator than allow him to learn his secrets. In short, it is a paranoid black man (but a paranoid with real enemies) who makes white "white" through a judicial use of black.

In a similarly complicated way, one more germane to the discussion of *Blues People,* the narrator descends into the history contained in Louis Armstrong's version of Andy Razaf and Fats Waller's "What Did I Do (to Get So Black and Blue)" under the influence of jazz, marijuana, sloe gin, and ice cream in the prologue.

Among the series of visual and auditory encounters in that descent is one with a black slave woman who has poisoned her master, also the father of her sons. She claims to have murdered him because she loves him after a fashion, and that her way of death is kinder than those of her (and the master's) sons who were going to cut him up with knives in a slave revolt. Obviously then, black and white are intimately related and dependent on each other in fundamental ways. But the idea that one has to read the parable of the black slave mother, white slave master father, and their revolutionary sons as one of the potentialities of "American" democracy rather than "America" or the "American Dream" as, after Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, a nightmare from which one is trying to escape seems dubious.

It is in the essays of the 1964 *Shadow and Act* (even in the pre–*Invisible Man* essays of the Popular Front era that were recontextualized by Ellison in the collection), especially in his review of *Blues People,* that Ellison reimagines the place and meaning of African Americans and African American culture, especially music, in U.S. culture and politics, offering also a new ideological vantage point from which to read *Invisible Man.* Presumably, it also provided an interpretive frame for Ellison's second novel, which was never completed in his lifetime, however finished one might consider the two versions of that work constructed from the mass of Ellison's manuscripts and notebooks, *Juneteenth* and *Three Days before the Shooting,* which have appeared since his death. This, of course, does not mean that the interpretation that Ellison retroactively offered is invalid in any way, only that it was not one that would obviously follow from the novel in the moment it was published. And again, *Blues People* became a sort of negative touchstone against which Ellison's explicit and implicit retrospective reading of his novel was set.

What one finds in *Blues People,* and its critique by Ellison, is the articulation of a number of extraordinarily important concepts that would greatly influence the production, reception, and interpretation of black expressive culture from the 1960s on and the framing of Baraka's *and* Ellison's work, especially *Invisible Man.* These concepts negatively and positively inform our understanding of

the contributions and meanings of that work. To give *Blues People* final say over its review, it is worth listing a few of its most lasting impacts. First, one sees in *Blues People* the connection of the black musical avant-garde to a popular blues sensibility or blues continuum. This notion of a black cultural movement that is both avant-garde (or vanguard), aesthetically and politically, and yet popular became a hallmark of the Black Arts Movement—and, indeed, Baraka's work for the rest of his life.

The notion that a work of art could be radical and popular, serious and popular, at the same time transformed not only black expressive culture but the understanding of what art is, what it should do, and who it is for. It proposed and attempted to realize with some considerable success the possibility of a mass audience for formally and politically radical art. The poetry of the Black Arts Movement circulated in journals and volumes largely produced by small black presses, such as Broadside Press and Third World Press, to an extent unseen by any radical U.S. cultural movement before.[42] Certainly, in the 1970s this proposition became a lasting sort of cultural common sense among many people of all demographics in the United States, with the understanding that art, such as hip hop, can be formally and political radical circulating throughout the general population of the United States (and far beyond). For example, Beyoncé's status as a music superstar significantly rests on the desire of her fan base, the "Bey Hive" (primarily younger black women), to seriously interpret and apply her work, which in Black Arts style is simultaneously multimedia and multi-generic, sonic, visual, and kinetic.

As noted before, *Blues People* is also a pioneering attempt to materially track an ethnogenesis, the birth of a people or nation, through a social history of black music. Such an enterprise was not a novel idea. In this regard, one thinks of Sterling Brown's introductory comments before the 1939 Popular Front "From Spirituals to Swing" concert at Carnegie Hall in which he dated the beginnings of a black culture of bifurcated meanings of accommodation and resistance, of mask and reality, from what went on above and below deck on the slave ships, perhaps anticipating the setting of

Invisible Man above and below ground.[43] Still, Baraka was really the first to seriously undertake such a book-length project on black music; Ellison never did despite his provocative essays on the meaning of black music and black folk culture. *Blues People* raises issues of culture and subculture in ways that anticipate the development of cultural studies and are contemporary with the new social history associated with the British New Left and historians like E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Christopher Hill (and certainly antedated the widespread influence of the new social history in the United States) that had such an impact on the rise of cultural studies and the field of history generally. It also drew on a Third International Marxist notion that the rise of a nation also meant the division of that nation into classes so that black people had national interests and a national consciousness as well as class interests and consciousnesses that inflected their national consciousness (and their relation to the United States in which they were located) in complicated ways. This vision informed Baraka's conception of black modernity in both his cultural nationalist and more strictly Marxist phases.

With respect to black literature, which Baraka takes up at some length and mostly as a negative example, *Blues People* suggests that it will only prosper when black authors take on the same formal daring and connection with the blues sensibility as had the beboppers and the free jazz artists. One might take issue, and Ellison did, with the reality of a mass black audience for free jazz or even bebop, and Baraka certainly moderated his critique of many earlier black writers (and black swing musicians). Nevertheless, Baraka's (and other Black Arts activists') model of the avant-garde jazz artist's relationship to her or his audience and the idea of an innovative form of expressive culture connected to a blues, which is to say a bedrock black, sensibility of a black nation (and a black world, a "Bandung World") that demanded and required self-determination, exerted much influence over African American literary production from the 1960s to the present.

The Baraka-Ellison debate continues in a different way today as Baraka, particularly late in his career, proposed a way of reading *Invisible Man* that was closer to his sensibility and perhaps

Ellison's original intention. Amiri Baraka declaimed in his role as a participant in William Parker's early twenty-first-century project "The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield" (the subject of chapter 5 of this study), "Before blue is black. After red is black. Our feeling is ultra-violet, invisible to the blind."[44] This is obviously a sort of invocation of Ellison's novel, particularly the famous sermon on the "Blackness of Blackness" that Ellison's narrator encounters after descending into Louis Armstrong's recording of "What Did I Do to Get So Black and Blue":

> "In the beginning . . ."
> "At the very start," they cried. ". . . there was blackness . . ." "Preach it . . ."
> ". . . and the sun . . ."
> "The sun, Lawd . . ."
> ". . . was bloody red . . ."
> "Red . . ."
> "Now black is . . ." the preacher shouted.
> "Bloody . . ."
> "I said black is . . ."
> "Preach it, brother . . ."[45]

In the end, the debate, as Baraka continued it (and perhaps as Ellison began it), was not only over the aesthetic and political meaning of black music but also over where *Invisible Man* fit into this debate, with Baraka adopting it for his vision of black music as an active history and sensibility of, among other things, national and class struggle, attempting to reclaim it from Ellison's own efforts to reinterpret and recontextualize his most famous work. In that way, in Ellisonian fashion, the continuing impact of *Blues People* owes much to Ellison's review even as Baraka's work provides alternative readings of *Invisible Man* that Ellison sought to foreclose, but nonetheless extends the reach of Ellison's novel as part of a black tradition of ancestors (like the narrator's grandfather) who are repressed but keep returning.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER THREE

"A MARCHING SONG FOR SOME STRANGE UNCHARTED COUNTRY"

The Black Future and Amiri Baraka's Liner Notes

It is hard to think of another major U.S. writer more committed to ephemeral or occasional writing than Amiri Baraka throughout his life. Ephemeral or occasional writing here means writing that is a kind of marginalia, secondary to some other text or cultural work, such as record album liner notes and back cover book copy, as well as types of writing with a limited shelf life, tied to a particular audience in a relatively discrete moment, such as journalism. In Baraka's case, the latter would include his actual journalistic efforts, notably on the newspaper *Unity and Struggle,* a radical black newspaper with its roots in the Committee for a Unified Newark (and its efforts to elect black officials in Newark, most famously in Kenneth Gibson's successful 1970 mayoral campaign) and the Congress of African People. Baraka's satiric, often scatological occasional poems about current political figures (such as New York mayor Rudy Giuliani in "A Modest Proposal for Giuliani's Disposal in Forty-One Verses Which Are Also Curses," after the murder of an unarmed African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, by New York City police during Giuliani's administration) and events (such as the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, in the hotly debated "Somebody Blew Up America") could also be seen in this light.

Baraka labored to change readers' (and listeners') ideas about the marginal and ephemeral, collecting and republishing in book

form his liner notes, reviews, and occasional pieces, blurring the lines among different modes of cultural transmission and reception. For the most part, these collected pieces were Baraka's liner notes for free jazz or "new thing" recordings on the Impulse! label that he included in the 1968 *Black Music* in which he charts his ideological development toward black nationalism through his music writing, a sort of analogue or companion work to the social essays of *Home,* which performed much the same function. Baraka left out the wider stylistic and generic range of black music featured in the Prestige Records LPs for which he wrote his first liner notes. Perhaps this was because he felt these earlier pieces to be relative journeyman efforts not worth reprinting, or perhaps he had developed the status to write more freely about music he thought of greatest importance in his later pieces in this genre. However, even his earliest liner notes reveal much about the evolution of his analysis of black music, its meaning, its cultural work, and its uses.

Baraka's ostensible hack work of writing liner notes and other music industry printed marginalia is a close kin to his more overtly serious music criticism in such jazz and arts periodicals as *Metronome, DownBeat,* and *Kulchur,* and the Black Arts music journal *The Cricket,* criticism that was in turn not clearly separated from his poetry, plays, fiction, and political and social writing. The concern here is not simply how for Baraka his liner notes and other music marginalia became a sort of literary subgenre, of a piece with his more obviously literary work, albeit more bound up with mass culture and commercial production than much of his other work. It is also how his liner notes evolved to express Baraka's sense of radical black nationhood (including the emergence of a black working class), internationalism, and black modernity in a way that called for social (and ultimately socialist) transformation. Once again, when seen through the lens of black self-determination, Baraka, a lifelong lover of science fiction, was concerned about black futurity and what might be seen as a black variation on the Marxist notion of the future expressed by Rosa Luxemburg as "socialism or regression into barbarism."[1] This sense of a radical black national and international

vanguard, though clearly more elaborated as time went on and Baraka moved emphatically into a Marxist stance, is suggested in embryo form in even his earliest notes.

Bohemia here and abroad has long had an association with mass culture and hack work, particularly before employment in academia became widely available to black and white radical writers.[2] Many contemporaries of Baraka, as in previous generations of U.S. bohemians, worked as journalists at one time or another, particularly before the proliferation of MFA programs and creative writing courses provided new avenues of gainful employment for belletristic writers. Not a few worked in advertising—Baraka's longtime friend Allen Ginsberg worked on Madison Avenue as a young adult and another poet associated with the Beats, Lew Welch, labored as an advertising copywriter and was legendarily said to be the inventor of the phrase "Raid Kills Bugs Dead."[3] In fact, one might say that the seemingly paradoxical dependency on ephemeral mass culture hack work conjoined with a pronounced antibourgeois, anticommercial stance was one of the defining features of artistic bohemia from its very inception, lasting through the long period between different forms of feudal patronage and what might be thought of as the patronage of public art and higher education that was opened up in no small part by the Black Arts and Black Studies movements in the 1960s and 1970s, which allowed many artists to escape the older forms of hack work. Walter Benjamin described this relationship between the bohemian artist and mass culture as "he goes to the marketplace as a *flaneur,* supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer."[4] However, it was rare that writers collected and republished this sort of work as "literature." While, for example, readers may now read some of Stephen Crane's sketches as a journalistic chronicler of New York's demimonde, he did not recontextualize and circulate those works in his lifetime in the way that Baraka did with some of his liner notes.

"A BLACK LANDSCAPE OF NEED": BARAKA'S PRESTIGE LINER NOTES

Baraka was no exception in this bohemian enmeshment with the new New Grub Street of mass culture. One frequent source of hack writing opportunities for him after moving to New York's downtown bohemia in the late 1950s was the writing of liner notes. Baraka wrote more than twenty sets of LP album liner notes between 1959 and 1986, the latter date being shortly before the first year (1988) when sales of compact discs topped those of LPs on vinyl.[5] The largest number of these notes was written in the 1950s and 1960s as part of a semiregular job for Prestige Records, a major jazz and blues label that operated between 1949 and 1971.[6] Significantly, Prestige Records, like many other new labels devoted to jazz, such as Clef, Riverside, and Fantasy, arose more or less simultaneously with the vinyl 33⅓ LPs. This size first appeared as a mass commercial format in 1948 and in its twelve-inch (as opposed to ten-inch) dimensions in the early 1950s.[7] One of the major impetuses for the appearance and growth of these new labels was the greatly increased ability to record and sell the new bebop music in the mid-1940s, several years after the emergence of that jazz genre. This lag was largely due to a hiatus in the recording industry following an American Federation of Musicians strike in the early 1940s and a wartime ban on the production of records in order to conserve shellac.

Prestige, despite its reputation for economically exploiting its artists (a reputation shared by other jazz labels, notably Savoy), was a pioneer in using the new microgroove sound technologies and the extended-play vinyl disc to record the new jazz of the bebop and post-bop eras.[8] Although Prestige lagged behind Blue Note in its approach to the visual aspects of LP packaging, soon it and other labels began to explore the visual as well as the audio potential of the new format. As Darren Mueller points out:

> The adoption and standardization of long-playing technology made recording labels rethink their overall presentation in other ways as well. Cover art became increasingly sophisticated, detailed, and creative. Record jackets began to feature liner notes that educated consumers about the music and new technologies or detailed the label's own history. Even the record sleeves, once simply a blank

> piece of paper, became an alternative place for advertising. The increased emphasis on the visual design accompanied a rethinking of production processes meant to take advantage of the "long-playing" aspect of the new technology. Such changes made records into audio-visual objects that accounted for the physical, visual, and aural elements in tandem.[9]

The earliest liner notes appeared in the 1930s and 1940s and predated the microgroove technology of the LP, accompanying multidisc reissues of older recorded jazz, generally organized around certain themes (e.g., *Hot Trombones*) or geographically and historically specific styles and moments of jazz (e.g., *New Orleans Jazz* and *Chicago Jazz*).[10] However, by the 1950s liner notes had become far more common and took on new roles. Prestige was among the first to develop the use of liner notes to both inform listeners (or potential listeners browsing in a record shop) and provide those listeners with a critical stance through which to interpret and evaluate the music:

> [Prestige owner Bob] Weinstock released Prestige no. 117 as Swingin' with Zoot Sims, featuring "Zoot Swings the Blues" on one side and "East of the Sun" on the other. The album was one of the first 10-inch LPs to feature extended solos. It was also one of the first 10-inch jazz LPs to include liner notes on the back of the album jacket. "Bob was so excited about what he had heard that afternoon," recalled Gitler, "that he said to me, 'Let's say something on the back. You're the writer and you know Zoot. Write something about the music and the musicians.' So I did. This was the first liner notes in the Prestige 100 series and the first notes I had written."[11]

This Zoot Sims session took place in 1951. The liner note writer Ira Gitler, a producer for Prestige, would go on to be a leading jazz critic, journalist, and historian—albeit one who became vehemently opposed to the new black political and cultural radicalism of the mid-1960s.[12]

Beyond giving background information about the particulars of the session and more generally about the artist and her or his music, the writers of liner notes in the 1950s projected a certain sort of hip style or attitude that drew in listeners and potential listeners with a sense of belonging to (or inviting potential

listers to join) an exclusive club. Jazz liner notes writers were often among the leading younger jazz critics whose commentary appeared in *Metronome, DownBeat,* the *Jazz Journal,* the *Record Changer* (though as a journal oriented toward record collectors it was more antimodern in its focus on older forms of jazz than most of the jazz magazines), and other journals of the jazz press. These writers included Gitler, Martin Williams, Nat Hentoff, Larry Gushee, Daniel Morgenstern, Orrin Keepnews (a one-time editor of the *Record Changer* who nevertheless appreciated more contemporary jazz artists, such as Sonny Rollins and Thelonious Monk, in the 1950s), and, of course, Baraka, the only black writer in this group besides, later, A. B. Spellman. These writers were allowed, encouraged really, to display a distinct personal voice in notes. As novelist and music critic Tom Piazza writes, "Of course, liner notes provide factual information and are in fact the main source of printed factual data for some artists. But the best liner notes, whether historical, musicological, narrative, or impressionistic, have always provided something beyond facts: they tell the listener, in many subtle ways, what it means to be a jazz fan. They embody styles of appreciating the music, a range of possible attitudes toward it. It is in this extra dimension that the liner notes as a form really distinguishes itself."[13]

Brent Edwards perceptively observes that one should not assume that "ancillary genres" of jazz writing (including liner notes in addition to reviews, interviews, and other writing immediately dependent on the actual recorded music, forming a sort of promotional superstructure of the music industry) are necessarily "subordinate afterthoughts, stray jottings that are inherently of secondary importance in relation to the music," since they "can emphatically frame the way a record is heard."[14] Still, what Piazza, music historian Marc Myers, Gitler, and Edwards describe here mirrors Walter Benjamin's famous statement about bohemian artists pretending to take a look around with the motive of exhibiting themselves to potential buyers, with the interested listening public being invited by the liner notes to take a look (or a listen or a look and listen) and become a buyer of the new sort of recorded jazz.

Part of the newness of the music was in fact in the adoption of technology that was able to begin to catch up to the practices of bebop and post-bop jazz, technological changes that radically challenged notions of the proper length of a popular song due significantly to fresh possibilities for presenting extended pieces provided by the advent of microgroove technology and the LP. The hip stance of a "jazz fan," then, was, among other things, one of an educated consumer whose sense of being knowledgeable about "the music" was in part the objective of music industry marketing. A considerable portion of what the fan derived from the framing of the music found in the liner notes and other elements of packaging was a feeling of being connected to some larger or different world of meaning, of value. Poet and novelist Renee Gladman describes this aspect of jazz fandom, "And to listen to jazz was to enter a space inside the space in which I was living, one that lifted the top off the day or stretched the day beyond itself. I wanted to know what was happening—*how* this was happening—so I often turned to the liner notes of my LPs for answers. I saw them as a sort of foyer to the music: preparatory time for listening, a way of sublimating."[15] In other words, this uncomfortable amalgamation of the commercial and the anti-bourgeois, if not actually anticapitalist, was the archetypal bohemian condition that Baraka was aware of and negotiated, even as he used liner notes to sound, so to speak, a black radical tradition and a critique of U.S. politics and culture. Similarly, despite the commonplace about Baraka that he passed through the bohemia of his early career to come to blackness, one also sees in his liner notes notions of both African American tradition and black internationalism from the very beginning, even in the context of participating in the enterprise of selling records to jazz fans.

Baraka's first Prestige liner notes, for Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis's 1959 album *Bacalao,* appeared only eight years after what might be thought of as the liner note revolution and just a decade after the introduction of the vinyl EP/LP as a mass commercial format—though admittedly, eight to ten years is not an insignificant amount of time in terms of U.S. popular culture.[16] For the most part, these notes serve the generic mode of informing the

audience (or potential audience) about the music and providing that audience a critical context for receiving the music. Yet Baraka's voice is immediately recognizable. While the personal voice was also part of the marketing strategy that the liner notes promoted, Baraka's flourishes and concerns in the Davis notes heralded those that characterized his work through much, if not all, of his career. The notes open, "Eddie Lockjaw Davis has for a long time now enjoyed a weird kind of fame and prestige among musicians." Baraka went on to discuss the prestige derived from Davis's comfort in a wide range of jazz styles, including the "modern," even though Davis's broader reputation was as a blues "honking" saxophonist who frequently played with the Count Basie Orchestra in the 1950s. Here the reader sees the deployment of one of Baraka's signature words in his early career: "weird." It is a word (repeated again about halfway through the notes) that Baraka frequently used in his writing in many genres to convey a variety of things but which was often a shorthand for the contradictions and depths of black modernity and a vanguard black sensibility as it comes into contact with a "mainstream" white sensibility. One also finds here an early expression of Baraka's notion of a blues continuum embodied in his description of Davis as comfortable with the blues in its older iterations as well as with the "modern."[17] As discussed in chapter 1, for Baraka the honking jazz saxophonists whose performances were a radical amalgam of theater and the blues within an urgent urban context were the epitome of the post–World War II black blues sensibility of Newark in his youth.

It is also telling that Baraka, a year before his life-changing trip to revolutionary Cuba in 1960, wrote, "It sounds like a political rally in Cuba. . . . I keep expecting someone to yell, 'Down with Batista!'" Here he used *Bacalao*'s engagement with Afro-Cuban music to sound a radical black internationalism through the connection of the blues, "modern jazz," and Afro-Cuban music with the Cuban Revolution that had triumphed at the beginning of 1959. Baraka made this observation at the height of his downtown countercultural phase, considerably before his more publicized turn toward blackness. He also declared Davis's version of

a James Moody tune, "Dobbin' with Redd Foxx," to sound like a "marching tune for some strange uncharted country," a wonderfully suggestive statement that anticipated Baraka's future artistic and political trajectory in which his trip to Cuba was a cathartic event in his journey toward black nationalism, Black Arts, Black Power, and dreams of a black socialist world.

In his second set of Prestige liner notes for the 1960 LP *South Side Soul* by the John Wright Trio, Baraka comments on the participation of the pianist Wright and his group, all younger black musicians, in the blues tradition of black Chicago that Baraka links to Harlem and, by extension, the other termini of the Great Migration to the urban North.[18] Again, what is seen is another early expression of the "changing same" that maintains a sense and sensibility of tradition even as it both articulates, helps produce, and chronicles the forging of a black industrial working class:

> I am certain that the very ugliness of the city was enough to frighten some people into turning around and going right back. But those people who did hang on, anywhere in the North, and came together in those huge "black capitals" of the world, invested their parts with something, some kind of strength, that enabled them and enabled their children to ward off unspeakable coldness, harshness, and unreality of the cities. The South Side is not Chicago, but it certainly is. Harlem is not New York, but it couldn't exist anywhere else in the world. And in almost the same fashion, the boogie woogie pianists and iterant blues singers of the early South Side (as well as Harlem) left a *soul music*, a musical legacy that is constantly being reinterpreted by the young.

Baraka here (as in his later writings, especially *Blues People*) does not posit history and sociology as just accountings of events as they occurred in the past and as they occur now. Neither was he only providing an analysis of deep structures of historical development, the motion of history, and of social relationships shaped by modes of material production, or even a "structure of feeling," to use Raymond Williams's term. Baraka was concerned with all of those things, but this writing is also about black music as a shaper, expression, and indicator of a black historical consciousness, particularly a working-class black historical consciousness. He posits black music as a self-awareness of where black people

are located both in history and in contemporary society. That is why Baraka here and in his other liner notes constantly mentions such words as "attitude" and "interpretation," and employs such phrases as "a black landscape of need," "the minds of the many poor blacks," and "the Negro's *conscious* appearance on the scene." Really, he is speaking of a revolutionary national consciousness, of a "nation within a nation" with the black working class in the lead, even in his earliest writing, even in such unabashedly commercial writing as album liner notes.

It may be, as Werner Sollors and other perceptive writers have noted, that a traditional antibourgeois, anti–middle class, and anti-"middlebrow" bohemian aesthetic attitude was the source of Baraka's earliest cultural criticism.[19] However, as John Gennari points out, this criticism was also often a class- as well as a race-conscious one.[20] After all, there is no inherent reason why in vilifying the pretensions and gaucheries of the black middle class, Baraka, like Langston Hughes before him, would need to lionize the black working class, its expressive culture, its psychology, and its social attitudes as among the most advanced, most revolutionary section of the U.S. population. In Baraka's estimation then, this was a sector that was at least as advanced, even in his early accounting, as the artistic counterculture of lower Manhattan and similar bohemian communities throughout the United States. In fact, according to Baraka, he (and his black peers in this bohemia) early on had the sense that the new black musical avant-garde of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, and so on was the most advanced, most hip artistic expression in the world, certainly the "First" world of capitalist Europe and North America, that it reflected a black tradition and experience encoded in the blues, and that it was theirs.[21]

Even Baraka's most perfunctory, least inspired liner notes, such as the mostly matter-of-fact notes to the 1963 *Sonny Is King* recording of "folk" blues singer and harmonica player Sonny Terry, reflect *Blues People*'s argument that the blues and the "blues impulse" is at the heart of any black music that legitimately and accurately reflects the African American people in the United States: "And no matter what wild 'bag' some young man might

get into, as far as the 'new' and the advanced in jazz, it really doesn't matter, if the blues feeling is lost. And Sonny and Brownie demonstrate consistently on these tunes what that feeling is. And that feeling, that 'blueness,' is the most consistently available emotional predilection in American Negro music, whether it comes from Sonny Terry or Sonny Rollins."[22]

As Baraka's liner notes evolved, he moved even farther from the strictly informational or even personalized contextualization toward what might be thought of as a sort of lyric liner notes that resembled his poetry and such essay-manifestos as "The Revolutionary Theater" (1965) and "The Changing Same" (1966). An early and frequently reprinted example of this lyric mode of Baraka's liner notes are those for the posthumous 1962 release of a Billie Holiday LP, *Ladylove,* on the United Artists Jazz label, one of the first sets he did for a label other than Prestige.[23] Most of the tracks on the album were drawn from a live recording of a 1954 concert in West Germany augmented by several studio tracks recorded earlier in New York and Los Angeles. Baraka opens by reprising an old debate about whether Billie Holiday was "really" a blues singer. That debate turns on what the blues really are formally and thematically, and, particularly for Baraka, what they mean, especially in the psyches of black people. Baraka's notes also indirectly raise questions of which sort of music truly engages the "blues impulse" or the "blues continuum": the "soul jazz" and various sorts of revivalist attempts to restage older forms of black music that Baraka sees as clichés or appropriation, or the free jazz that he views as more authentically and organically in the blues spirit. In the *Ladylove* notes, Baraka (sounding much like Ralph Ellison) proposed the proto–Black Arts idea of music as history and history in turn as myth, which is to say as some shape or form that makes sense of black experience and allows black people to survive in ways that maintained their human integrity in the world, especially in the former slave societies of the Western Hemisphere:

> The myth of blues is dragged from people. Though some others make categories no one understands. A man told me Billie Holiday wasn't singing the blues, and he knew. O.K., but what I ask myself

> is what had she seen to shape her singing so? What, in her life, proposed such tragedy, such final hopeless agony? Or flip the coin and she is singing, "Miss Brown To You." And none of you cats would dare cross her. One eye closed, and her arms held in such balance, as if all women were so aloof. Or could laugh so.[24]

Another way of restating Baraka's opening sentence of the *Ladylove* liner notes through a slight, but significant alteration would be, "The myth of blues is dragged from *a* people." Baraka's commentary on the unnamed person, some self-described, possibly white, jazz fan or critic who "knew" that Holiday was not a blues singer, reminds one of the title of a 1979 essay of James Baldwin in the *New York Times,* "If Black Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" In other words, okay, if Billie Holiday is not singing the blues, then what is she singing? And, if these are not the blues, then what is? Yes, frequently she sings in the thirty-two-bar mode and other forms of pop song, and in what might be thought of as the adapted art song of the European cabaret style (as she did in her performances of Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit"), rather than the twelve-bar form that many associated with the blues—though she sang the twelve-bar blues too (as she does on *Ladylove* in "Billie's Blues"). Leaving aside for a minute the question of how a singer who does include significant pieces that are formally blues by almost anyone's standards in her repertoire is not a blues singer, Baraka argues that her music, even her renditions of pop standards (the "Great American Songbook," as many now would say), is both a history of black oppression and black resistance as well as a myth that gives shape to black life. In short, she sang the blues. As Farah Jasmine Griffin observes, "Here again he links life and voice; the blues becomes an ethos, not a form. It influences her praxis and her performance."[25]

Interestingly, given Baraka's association with a certain sort of black masculinism during the Black Arts era, particularly during the period of the late 1960s when he was most influenced by Maulana Karenga and Karenga's Kawaida philosophy, which argued that black women should be "submissive" and were "complementary, not equal" to black men, Baraka suggests that Holiday's music renders "a black landscape of need, and perhaps,

suffocated desire" through a black woman's voice, which is to say, a black woman's sensibility: "And even in the laughter, something other than brightness, completed the sound. A voice that grew from a singer's instrument to a woman's. And from that (those last records critics say are weak) to a black landscape of need, and perhaps, suffocated desire."[26] Griffin also correctly contends that Baraka here, no doubt consciously, echoes Langston Hughes's notion of "a dream deferred" (and quite likely riffs on the opening of T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" with its invocation of a modernist white landscape of need and suffocated desire). But in addition, there is an interesting juxtaposition of "need" and "desire," of the impulse for self-determination (of a black woman, of a people) and repression, from a working-class as well as national perspective, raised here. As Griffin says of Baraka's notes, "Her voice embodies the condition of black people in this land: dispossession, suffocated desire. He especially hears this in the later records, which other critics dismiss."[27]

What the reader (and prospective listener) does not get in Baraka's *Ladylove* notes is any of the usual liner note information about personnel, recording dates, account of the actual performance, and so on. That is provided (balanced, perhaps, in the eyes of the record label) by an extremely bland account of the concert by jazz critic Leonard Feather, who introduced Holiday to the German audience at the actual performance. The concert was part of a Jazz Club U.S.A. tour in Europe, held under the auspices of the *Jazz Club U.S.A.* radio program that Feather hosted on the Voice of America radio in the 1950s. While he was a critic of Jim Crow and a supporter of black civil rights in the United States, both the show and the tour was intended by Feather, Voice of America, and the U.S. government to showcase the vibrancy and superiority of American culture and cultural democracy in opposition to the supposedly dull, gray totalitarian culture of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc in the late Jim Crow era immediately before and after *Brown v. the Board of Education.*[28]

However, Baraka's commentary proposes another dimension to the music that does not celebrate but rather provides a sharp critique of liberal U.S. democracy. Instead, he gives a different

sort of historical account, a poetically condensed emotional or psychological history. Baraka suggests that the real nature of the blues, which is far more than the popular notion of the blues as a feeling, is as a historically constituted expression of an oppressed people in which form and feeling are important but process, the motion of history as it were, more so. According to this take on the music as history and historical process, everyone does not get the blues any more than, say, anyone can experience Scottish history without being Scottish, leaving aside for the moment the problematic nature of defining what and who exactly is "Scottish" or any nationality. Of course, anyone can read, with sufficient time and effort understand, and be moved by Scottish history, but that is not the same thing. And there is always the danger that one is going to get caught up in the fantasy of a national culture and history (Highland romance, epic feuds, kilts, bagpipes, and William Wallace, to stay in the Scottish vein) with dubious, if not disastrous, results, as with white fantasies of black culture in the United States. This aspect of the notes is heightened when Baraka included them in *Black Music* (1967), a consciously radical, black nationalist collection of his shorter music writing. Without the "balance" of Feather's largely banal comments (e.g., "Billie was in superb shape throughout the tour"), what is left is Baraka's take on the national history-myth of a "black landscape of need" provided by Holiday's music.

"WE NEEDED A NEW SOUND": BARAKA'S IMPULSE LINER NOTES AND THE RISE OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Probably the most cited and republished of Baraka's liner notes is the set he wrote for the 1964 Impulse! recording *Coltrane Live at Birdland.* Those notes opened with what has to be one of the most pointed and direct assaults on the United States, its society, and its place in the world ever to be published in a set of liner notes on a record released for mass consumption: "ONE OF THE most baffling things about America is that despite its essentially vile profile, so much beauty continues to exist here. Perhaps it's

as so many thinkers have said, that it is because of the vileness, or call it adversity, that such beauty does exist. (As balance?)"[29]

On the face of it, Baraka would seem to be violating a basic purpose of the liner notes form—to draw in prospective listeners, both confirmed fans of Coltrane as well as possible fans, without alienating other potential buyers—to a degree that he had not done before, even in the Holiday notes. It is true that writers of jazz liner notes (and indeed the recording companies themselves) generally employed a marketing strategy of hipness, the suggestion that only the discerning or most "advanced" hipster would appreciate the music in question, with the implicit or explicit critique of the "corny" or backward tastes and cultural values of "average Americans." Here, however, Baraka does not begin with the sound that separated the sheep from the goats but with a declaration about the fundamental vileness of the profile of the United States. No doubt potential consumers of the album might be, and no doubt were, alienated by that declaration.

Nonetheless, if one accepts Tom Piazza's claim that, among other things, liner notes "tell the listener, in many subtle ways, what it means to be a jazz fan," then Baraka is advancing an argument about what it meant to be a "jazz fan" in 1964, which is to say, again, what jazz meant. To be a "jazz fan" in more than the "gee whiz" sense encompassed a certain radical stance that was deeply invested in black liberation and black self-determination. Of course, as we have seen, by 1964 Baraka had already clearly articulated his sense of what the music means, and the historical process of ethnogenesis and black class formation the music encodes and helps produce, in *Blues People,* his poetry, drama, fiction, and essays, and to some extent in his earlier liner notes.

In *John Coltrane Live at Birdland* he makes those claims in a clearer way than he had before in other liner notes. Baraka's declaration of the profile of the United States as vile referenced, perhaps, a couplet in one of Paul Laurence Dunbar's most famous poems, "We Wear the Mask," ("We sing, but oh the clay is vile / Beneath our feet, and long the mile").[30] Baraka almost certainly was familiar with Dunbar's poem. Baraka also attacked the jazz industry in a direct and extended fashion. He suggested

that the capitalist corruption of the jazz club was a metonym for the United States and its treatment of artists, and for the commodification of the creative impulse. Coltrane's revolutionary art, then, constituted a form of struggle against that corruption and commodification as well as a confirmation that another world is possible:

> Thinking along these lines, even the title of this album (A-50) can be rendered "symbolic" and more directly meaningful. *John Coltrane Live at Birdland.* To me Birdland is a place no man should wander into unarmed, especially not an artist, and that is what John Coltrane is. But, too, Birdland is only America in microcosm, and we know how high the mortality rate is for artists in this instant tomb. Yet, the title tells us that John Coltrane is there *live.* In this tiny America where the most delirious happiness can only be caused by the dollar, a man continues to make daring reference to some other kind of thought. Impossible? Listen to "I Want to Talk about You."[31]

One of the notable things here is not simply that Baraka wrote the notes in this way but that he felt free to do so in such an open fashion and that Impulse! Records included those notes on the album so that various scholars and anthologizers of jazz writing, including Baraka himself, were able to republish them as an exemplar of great jazz writing. In other words, something had changed by 1964 in the jazz audience, the musicians themselves, and the African American community that made such liner notes possible on a commercial album released by a label whose niche was the new jazz, with Coltrane as their star.

The usual demarcation of the beginning of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) has often been the creation of BARTS in Harlem in 1965, following Baraka's migration uptown to Harlem after the murder of Malcolm X at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City. This certainly is a plausible beginning, especially since any event marking the advent of a cultural movement (or any movement) is always an arbitrary marker. Even in terms of Baraka, one might cite a variety of possible beginnings for his rupture with the interracial bohemia of lower Manhattan, either symbolically and/or actually, and his entry into a new sort of black radicalism that was only embryonic before. Such markers include his involvement in

the proto–Black Power group On Guard for Freedom, his participation in the 1961 demonstration outside the United Nations building protesting the murder of Patrice Lumumba with the complicity of the Kennedy Administration that many African American radicals saw as marking a new stage of black militancy, the writing and performance of *Dutchman,* the publication of *The Dead Lecturer,* and so on. But certainly, the liner notes for *John Coltrane Live at Birdland* could be seen as moving beyond a transition into something new, even if, as noted before, there had been a long foreground. What if the beginning of the BAM was not the founding of BARTS in Harlem but the liner notes to *Coltrane Live at Birdland?* The historian John Bracey describes what he sees as the impact of John Coltrane on Bracey and his generation of black activists, artists, intellectuals, and indeed a mass constituency for Black Arts and Black Power:

> What Coltrane was doing in his music was indicating that we had to move beyond the whole system of western thought, cosmology and culture. We needed a new sound, a new aesthetic for new times. If you were not a witness to this process it is difficult to convey the emotional impact of the step by step stripping away of western conceptions of melody, harmony, rhythm, structure that had dominated definitions of music since the mid 19th century. Coltrane was a major subject of Black Arts poetry and figured in numerous discussions of cultural and political change. It was his increasing relevance as in these disparate arenas that validated my feeling that his musical accomplishments were vital to the political journey from civil rights and integration, to the politics of liberation and black nationalism.[32]

Bracey's statement here much resembles, and perhaps is directly influenced by, what Baraka says in the liner notes of *Coltrane Live at Birdland,* suggesting that Coltrane's mission was one of profound black destruction and reconstruction, demolishing old notions of aesthetic and critical sense and suggesting the lines of something new:

> There are three numbers on the album that were recorded *Live* at Birdland, "Afro-Blue," "I Want to Talk about You" and "The Promise." And while some of the nonmusical hysteria has vanished from the recording, that is, after riding a subway through New York's bowels, and that subway full of all the things any man should

> expect to find in something's bowels, and then coming up stairs to the street and walking slowly, head down, through the traffic and failure that does shape this place, and then entering "The Jazz Corner Of The World," a temple erected in praise of what God (?), and then finally amidst that noise and glare to hear a man destroy all of it, completely, like Sodom, with just the first few notes from his horn, your "critical" sense can be erased completely, and that experience can place you somewhere a long way off from anything ugly. Still, what was of musical value that I heard that night does remain, and the emotions . . . some of them completely new . . . that I experience at each "objective" rehearing of this music are as valuable as anything else I know about.[33]

Critics, including Baraka, had already written at length about Coltrane and his music. Still, the liner notes to *Coltrane Live at Birdland* are one of the first prominent expositions of Coltrane's music as both a sounding and a catalyst of the new black political and cultural radicalism that Larry Neal would eventually term the Black Arts Movement, even if Coltrane himself resisted making direct political statements about his music. The notes form a sort of companion piece to Askia Touré's 1965 *Liberator* essay "Keep on Pushin': Rhythm and Blues as a Weapon," which linked the new jazz and r&b/soul as part of the new black revolutionary spirit influencing the content, style, and tone of Baraka's "The Changing Same" in 1966: "Somewhere along the line, the 'Keep On Pushin" in song, in Rhythm and Blues is merging with the Revolutionary Dynamism of COLTRANE of ERIC DOLPHY of BROTHER MALCOLM of YOUNG BLACK GUERILLAS STRIKING DEEP INTO THE HEARTLAND OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE."[34]

Coltrane's own reluctance to tie his music to a particular political organization or ideology does not mean that he was not a socially engaged artist, which Black Arts artists and critics also recognized. The political implications of Coltrane's "Alabama," coming after the infamous 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, a civil rights movement headquarters in Birmingham, and the killing of four young girls at choir practice, were (and are) obvious—and much remarked on in the many BAM tribute poems to Coltrane. That Coltrane also performed at a benefit for the black left journal *Freedomways* (a journal with a significant connection to the remaining black political and cultural circles

of the Communist left) in 1964 and at a celebration for Paul Robeson, also sponsored by *Freedomways,* in 1965 indicate that Coltrane had a strong social consciousness and radical sympathies, even if he resisted spelling out the political implications of his music too directly himself. He was also willing to take part in a benefit for BARTS that was recorded and released in 1966 in the United States by Impulse! as *The New Wave in Jazz.* Consequently, Coltrane and quite a few other peers, such as Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor, were not opposed to younger militants associated with Black Arts, such as Baraka, Spellman, James Stewart (an old musical acquaintance of Coltrane from Philadelphia who became a leading Black Arts figure on the East Coast), Askia Touré, and Sonia Sanchez, positing the new jazz as part of a black nationalist (and internationalist) revolutionary movement. Even though Coltrane did not always see eye to eye ideologically with these emerging BAM artists, theorists, and critics in their assessments, they provided interpretations or sonic readings of his music that made that music more accessible to a mass of potential listeners, especially black listeners, in a manner that took the music as seriously as Coltrane intended it.

Interestingly, after the early part of the notes for *Coltrane Live at Birdland,* Baraka's piece subsequently does what liner notes often do, which is describe the tunes on the record and the performance of the band's personnel, the "classic" Coltrane band of Coltrane on tenor and soprano saxophones, Jimmy Garrison on bass, Elvin Jones on drums, and McCoy Tyner on piano:

> "Your Lady" is the sweetest song on the date. And it is pure song, say, as an accompaniment for some very elegant uptown song and dance man. Elvin Jones' heavy tingling parallel counterpoint sweeps the line along, and the way he is able to solo constantly beneath Trane's flights, commenting, extending or just going off on his own, is a very important part of the total sound and effect of this Coltrane group. Jimmy Garrison's constancy, and power, which must be fantastic to support, stimulate and push this group of powerful (and diverse) personalities, is already almost legendary. On tunes like "Lady" or "Afro-Blue," Garrison's bass booms so symmetrically and steadily and emotionally and, again, with such strength, that one would guess that he must be able to tear safes open with his fingers.

Even here, though, again employing a more lyrical manner than many sets of liner notes, Baraka's description returns to the notion of a revolutionary aesthetic politics of destruction as well as a translation of the rendering of historical events contained within Coltrane's. Such events include the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church and a range of state acts of violence against civil rights participants in Alabama, from the police attacks on peaceful demonstrators at the Pettis Bridge in Selma to the dogs and firehoses of Birmingham. He also references somewhat indirectly the mass response to this violence by working-class black Birmingham residents in 1963 in what some consider to be the first of the urban uprisings of the 1960s, even if it did not attract the same attention from the press as the later Harlem uprising of 1964 or the Watts rebellion of 1965:

> If you have heard "Slow Dance" or "After the Rain," then you might be prepared for the kind of feeling that "Alabama" carries. I didn't realize until now what a beautiful word *Alabama* is. That is one function of art, to reveal beauty, common or uncommon, uncommonly. And that's what Trane does. Bob Thiele asked Trane if the title, "had any significance to today's problems." I suppose he meant literally. Coltrane answered, "It represents, musically, something that I saw down there translated into music from inside me." Which is to say, "listen." And what we're given is a slow delicate introspective sadness, almost hopelessness, except for Elvin, rising in the background like something out of nature . . . a fattening thunder . . . storm clouds or jungle war clouds. The whole is a frightening emotional portrait of some place, in these musicians' feelings. If that "real" Alabama was the catalyst, more power to it, and may it be this beautiful, even in its destruction.[35]

If Baraka's notes for *Coltrane Live at Birdland* can be read as an inaugural event or declaration of independence of the BAM, which had not as yet been named, then his notes for *The New Wave in Jazz* (1966), again a live recording of a benefit concert for BARTS, can be seen as a report from the early days of the movement—released, perhaps ironically, in the United States after the demise of BARTS and Baraka's return to Newark.[36] The concert presented many of the leading new jazz figures and groups, including the classic Coltrane quartet; reed player Albert Ayler in a group with drummer Sunny Murray; Newark-born and

-raised trombonist Grachan Moncur III with drummer Bill Harris, bassist Cecil McBee, and vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson; tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp in a band with alto saxophonist Marion Brown; and trumpet player Charles Tolliver with Cecil McBee, Bobby Hutcherson, alto player James Spaulding, and drummer Billy Higgins. (Two other major artists and their groups, Sun Ra and his Arkestra and singer Betty Carter, a Newark resident for much of the 1950s and 1960s, and her group appeared at the concert but are not included on the record for unnamed reasons.)

Baraka declares that the album demonstrates that a movement is underway, in fact, has been underway but is now being documented in a more coherent and concrete manner:

> But the album is also heavy evidence that something is really happening. Now. Has been happening, though generally ignored and/or reviled by middle-brow critics (usually white) who have no understanding of the emotional context this music comes to life in.
>
> This is some of the music of contemporary black culture. The people who make this music are intellectuals or mystics or both. The black rhythm energy blues feeling (sensibility) is projected into the area of reflection. Intentionally. As expression . . . where each term is equally respondent.[37]

When Baraka avers that the record contains "some of the music of contemporary black culture," he insists that it is a piece of a larger black communal identity as well as a demonstration and theorization of what a new liberated black culture and society with roots in a blues tradition might be, especially when he claims that the musicians on the record (and those who played at the concert but were not included on the record) "are intellectuals or mystics or both." That is to say, the new revolutionary black music and the new black culture had both a spiritual dimension and a more materialist aspect. Here Baraka echoes Larry Neal's more explicit critique of the European Marxist tradition in his "The Black Writer's Role" series of articles in the journal *Liberator,* in which Neal argues, among other things, that European Marxism was essentially correct in its economic analysis of capitalism and capitalist exploitation of the working class and other oppressed people but lacks the spiritual dimension, which is an essential human sphere, especially for African-descended people.

Baraka too makes a similar argument as he puts forward the principles he sees underlying the new black music as the expression of the new black culture inspiring new art in all media and genres advanced by BARTS and the incipient BAM. Again, one finds another version of the connection of history and myth, in the sense of a pattern or archetype based in a certain vision of history that provides an interpretive frame for events. That history is encoded and recorded in art, if you have the informed ears to hear it, sharp eyes to see, and spirit to feel it. It is also a prophetic vision that looks forward as well as back, pointing the way into a liberated black future:

> *Projection over sustained periods* (more time given, and time proposes a history for expression, hence it becomes reflective projection.
>
> *Arbitrariness of form* (variety in nature).
>
> *Intention of performance as a learning experience.*
>
> These are categories which make reflection separate from expression; as Pure Expression/and Pure Reflection (if such categories are more than theoretically existent. Expression does not set out to instruct, but it does anyway . . . if the objects of this mind-energy are so placed that they do receive. Reflection intends to change, is a formal learning situation. But getting hit on the head with a stick can do you as much good as meditating.[38]

There is a certain sense in which Baraka's notes here might seem to assume a neo-primitivist stance in which the "reflection" of which he writes is instinctive. However, this version of overcoming the old Cartesian split of mind and body, reason and instinct, yokes feeling to intelligence, a black intelligence. This black intelligence is forged out of African sensibilities forcibly brought into and exploited by the world of capitalism, slavery, Jim Crow, industrial revolution, and colonialism but transcends or goes beyond that world in a vanguard consciousness rooted in black history and black lives.

> In order for the non-white world to assume control, it must transcend the technology that has enslaved it. But the expression and instinctive (natural) reflection that characterize black art and

> culture, listen to these players, transcends any emotional state (human realization) the white man knows. I said elsewhere, "Feeling predicts intelligence."
>
> That is, the spirit, the World Explanation, available in Black Lives, Culture, Art, speaks of a world more beautiful than the white man knows.
>
> All that is to make clear what we are speaking of. And that the music you hear (?) is an invention of Black Lives.
>
> It is a nation-consciousness rather than an individualistic one:
>
> You hear on this record poets of the Black Nation.
>
> New Black Music is this: Find the self, then kill it.[39]

After his work for Alice Coltrane's 1968 *Monastic Trio* album, it was more than a decade before Baraka would write another set of liner notes. Various reasons might have caused this. For one thing, this was the era of Baraka's deepest organizational commitments to such Black Power groups as CFUN and CAP and their associated groups and institutions. In his capacity as a political organizer, he was intensely involved in local Newark politics as well as in national Black Power events, such as the 1970 founding convention of CAP in Atlanta and the 1972 National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. He was one of the leading figures, if not the leading figure, behind the election of Kenneth Gibson as mayor of Newark in 1970, the first African American to become mayor of a large East Coast city. These demands on Baraka's time meant less time for writing in general. The writing that he did was primarily poetry, drama, and essays.

Additionally, his position as one of the most visible and most militant Black Power and Black Arts leaders limited his opportunities to write liner notes, should he have been inclined and had the time to do so. In general, the major culture industries and media became significantly closed to him—as witnessed by the lack of reviews of Baraka's work in the "mainstream" press, notably the *New York Times,* for decades, even though he had been one of the most critically acclaimed younger black writers before the advent of Black Arts and Black Power.

Of course, Baraka's notion of what could be considered "black" culturally and who could make use of black music, culture, and thought in the service of liberation changed with his move to

Marxism in the 1973–75 period. What he said about *Blues People* in a 1995 speech could also apply to his liner notes: "The mistake I made in *Blues People* was about Afrikan survivals as if they were the exclusive province of the Afro American people. But the whole of the western hemisphere, the real 'Western World,' is a composite of African, European and Asian (Native). If you of that people and that culture, you carry all three. The great majority of working people of any color or historic national character don't listen to European music, or deal regularly with European culture."[40]

However, even after his move to Marxism, as noted in chapter 1, he continued to see African Americans as a people or nation whose working-class component was shaped by the composite influences of different peoples in industrial cities like Newark. Similarly, other sectors of the working class were profoundly marked by their encounters with African American music, dance, speech, fashion, and other modes of expressive culture and thought, even if large portions of people in those sectors, especially white people, were not prepared to admit that impact. Still, despite this process of change, the blues for Baraka was at the core of the African American nation, even as the form the blues or the "blues impulse" took moved as the people moved.

The evolution of Baraka's liner notes from 1959 to 1965, thus, is not only a revealing indicator of his own ideological and aesthetic changes but also an important marker of and influence on the emergence of the BAM characterized by its sense of African Americans as a people with a revolutionary tradition and revolutionary future that would be determined by black people themselves. Despite the shifts in the tone, style, and stance of these notes as Baraka negotiated the rapid press of politics and culture in the 1950s and 1960s and his own ideological arc, one can view them as demonstrations of Baraka's personal "changing same" in which many core elements of his aesthetic and political concerns are retained. Like *Blues People* and Baraka's shorter essays, his liner notes also promoted the growth of a new radical black music criticism. Stanley Crouch, a Black Arts activist from Los Angeles

who moved sharply away from his former radicalism in the post–Black Arts era, nevertheless claimed that it was Baraka's liner notes for *John Coltrane Live at Birdland* which opened to him the possibility of a "poetic" jazz criticism that caught the spirit of the music and was a creative form in and of itself, not simply a sort of parasitic commercial genre.

Again, if, as Tom Piazza argues, one function of the liner notes that flowered with the release of jazz on 33⅓ LP albums in the 1950s was to instruct the listener or potential listener on what it meant to be a jazz fan, Baraka's liner notes from the very beginning through the Black Arts era were about the ways black music encoded black history, black international connections, and ultimately black nationalism and internationalism in ways both mundane and spiritual. In that way, to be a jazz fan in the deepest sense was to be black, and to be black was to be able to look back and look ahead along a continuum in which the new black music was a key expression of the new black culture, a culture that is truly "postmodern" in that it exceeds and ultimately transcends the technologies, or discourses, of power used by Europe and North America to dominate the world.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER FOUR

"SOUL AND MADNESS"

Baraka's Recorded Music and Poetry from Bohemia to Black Arts

As William Harris remarks, not only did Amiri Baraka's politics change over the first half of his career but so did his voice on the page and on the stage. Harris raises the questions, "Why does he move from one performance style to another? And what is the significance of black music, especially, free jazz, in this transformation? Why did he move from 'The Black Dada Nihilismus' sound to the 'Dope' sound? What does this change in sound mean?"[1] To which might one add, what is the significance of the process of transformation, of language into poetry, of sound (including language) into music, of motion into dance, of "Negro" into "black," of farmer into worker, to the development of Baraka's performance style and how he understood the meaning of that style?

One of the interesting things about Amiri Baraka is that when critics write about tracking the changes in his poetic voice, their approaches to these changes are very much shaped by Baraka's actual voice as transmitted through various LP records in the 1960s and 1970s—as well as in live performances. One could say the same about various Black Arts poets, but, with the possible exception of Sonia Sanchez, there is probably no other U.S. poet whose speaking voice was so clearly "heard" and tracked by readers as well as auditors. Even Baraka's friend Allen Ginsberg, also

a notably powerful performer of poetry, did not receive the same sort of attention to the implications of alterations in his actual performing voice (e.g., as a register of a changing sense of his Jewishness, his Jerseyness, his queerness, and so on) as Baraka did. So when scholars write that Baraka's poetic voice sounds blacker and that Baraka was consciously sounding a movement toward blackness, as he moved to and through the Black Arts era, they often quite literally refer to the actual sound of Baraka's speaking/performing voice, particularly heard on LP records and through other media of audio recording. These recordings, then, are extraordinarily important in making material the process of transformation that is dialectical in its interaction between sound and text but a process that developed unevenly in leaps forward, steps back, and stutters forward again in a sonic motion that is historical and vivifies the text.

This is not to say that the basic aesthetic impulse of Black Arts literature was simply performative. Despite some claims to the contrary, the Black Arts Movement, especially in its literary and visual arts components, was very much a textual movement in which books, journals, newspapers, broadsides, and the like circulated in ways and places that individual artists were unable to reach. If one lived in Des Moines or Wake Forest, one was unlikely to see Baraka or Sonia Sanchez or Haki Madhubuti or Nikki Giovanni perform very often, if ever, but one could read their work in journals and get a sense of the national movement, which in turn influenced the shape of local manifestations of Black Arts. However, Baraka (and others in BAM) used live and recorded performance to frame the readings of texts. While Baraka seems not to have had the deep interest in technology, particularly audio recording technology, that Ralph Ellison had, he did see the technology of sound recording in the era of the 33⅓ LP and of film (to the extent he was able to access it) as important avenues for reaching a mass audience beyond the printed page and live performance in the pre-video, pre-internet era.[2]

NATION BECOMING: FROM POETIC TO HISTORICAL PROCESS

In order to begin to answer the question about the meaning of Baraka's sonic transformations on record, it is necessary to take up Baraka's adoption and adaptation of various notions of process, of transformation or becoming that had their roots in his early career and marked his work for the rest of his life. His understanding of process in poetry was, as many critics have observed, modeled on the performance of black music, particularly jazz and r&b/soul. For Baraka such playing emblemized and enacted process through its shifting changes, often in a sort of spiraling repetition, in real time. One consequence of the adoption of this model, as has also been observed, was an emphasis on the theme of performance in Baraka's poetry, indeed Black Arts poetry generally. That is to say, the poems are often about performance in one fashion or another. The declaiming of poetry, often in multimedia, multigeneric forms, sometimes solo and sometimes in collaboration with other artists, became an even more important facet of Black Arts than it had been in the New American Poetry, anticipating hip hop, performance poetry, and the poetry slam. Sometimes this theme of performance has been put in terms of the printed poem being a sort of score for a performance that often includes music and visual elements rather than the primary literary artifact itself.

In some important respects, the idea of the poem on the page as a score is clearly an inadequate description, even when Baraka himself applied it. After all, he clearly intended people to read his printed poetry and receive substantial meanings and aesthetic experiences that few would expect to gain from reading a musical score. Rather, the trope of poem as score for performance emphasizes the idea of the permanently unfinished nature of the literary process in which the poem is constantly being recreated by readers.

Many scholars of Baraka's poetry, including Harris, Meta Du Ewa Jones, Nathaniel Mackey, and Kimberly Benston (and Baraka himself), remark on Baraka's valuation of process over artifact or finished object.[3] Baraka early on saw the fetishism of the artifact

as a hallmark of the "high" white aesthetic (here coded the "academic Western mind") in "Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall" (1964), published in the year before the founding of BARTS: "The academic Western mind is the best example of the substitution of artifact worship for the lightning awareness of the art process. Even the artist is more valuable than his artifact, because the art process goes on in his mind. But the process itself is the most important quality because it can transform and create, and its only form is possibility. The artifact, because it assumes one form, is only that particular quality or idea. It is, in this sense, after the fact, and is only important because it remarks on its source."[4]

This valuing of process over the finished product is at least in part drawn from one of the hallmark concepts of the Black Mountain School of poetry, particularly that of Charles Olson and Baraka's close friend and correspondent in his pre–Black Arts career Ed Dorn. As Nathaniel Mackey and Aldon Nielsen discuss at some length, Baraka was deeply influenced by Olson's poetry and his landmark 1950 essay "Projective Verse," which poses "open" against "closed" forms of poetry with the preferred open forms circulating a sort of energy in a way both modeled on history while simultaneously containing history, as well as geography, geology, economics, and anthropology:[5]

> Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. So: how is the poet to accomplish same energy, how is he, what is the process by which a poet gets in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is the third term, will take away?
>
> Now the *process* of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished. And I think it can be boiled down to one statement (first pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg): ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at *all* points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE

> USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, AND ANOTHER![6]

As Kimberly Benston argues, one can see here too in Baraka (and Olson, for that matter) the influence of Hegelian (and Marxist) dialectics in the understanding of the motion of both history and poetry.[7] Mackey's point that Baraka moved on and rejected Olson and his essentially New Deal/late Popular Front (without the Communists) politics ideologically is persuasive. Nevertheless, Baraka retained the model of poetry (and art generally) as a process that mirrors "History as Process" (the title of a 1964 Baraka poem) and that contains history as process through his Black Arts period and beyond. Such a model was extremely useful to Baraka as he tried to understand not only the production of "Black Art" but also the concomitant ethnogenesis of an African American people and the emergence of a conscious, liberated black nation. For example, Baraka, in one of his most influential poems of the Black Arts era, "It's Nation Time" (1970), mapped and urged such an emergence in language in a way that suggests a revised and repurposed version of Olson's admittedly more suggestive than concrete concept of "the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge":

> Time to get
> together
> to be one strong fast energy space
> one pulsating positive magnetism, rising
> time to get up and
> be
> come[8]

Here the poem is both a description of a historical process and an instrument of that process. It uneasily combines a Hegelian spirit of the age destiny and a Marxist materialist historical spiral within a black nationalist modality. It urges relatively unconscious African Americans to be, come, and become black people. This was especially true of the famous performance of the poem

at the 1970 inaugural conference of CAP, where Baraka used it to close his coordinator's report to the assembled crowd near the end of the conference.

One notable aspect of that performance, as was often the case in Baraka's performance of poetry in the Black Arts era and beyond, is that it significantly varied from the printed version of the poem that appeared in the 1970 chapbook from Third World Press, *It's Nation Time.* In the Third World iteration, the poem ends,

> It's nation time, get up santa claus
> it's nation time, build it
> get up muffet dragger
> get up Rastus for real be ras tafari
> ras jua
> get up got here bow
>
> It's Nation
> Time!
>
> it's nation time It's nation time, get up santa claus
> get up Roy Wilkins
> get up Diana Ross
> Get up Jimmy Brown
> It's nation time, build it
> get up muffet dragger
> get up rastus for real to be rasta farari
> ras jua, get up nigger, get up nigger
> come over here
> take a bow
> nigger
> It's Nation
> Time![9]

The version of "It's Nation Time" performed at the CAP convention was recorded on film and became generally accessible to those who did not attend that conference when it was included in the eleventh installment of the documentary film series *Eyes on the Prize,* first airing in 1990. As Meta Du Ewa Jones observes,

this version diverges from the printed version of the 1970 chapbook in the way he sang the word "time" in the Atlanta performance, drawing out the vowel into several syllables with a distinct vibrato after the manner of the melisma of black sacred music as well as of jazz saxophonists from Johnny Hodges and Ben Webster to John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders and of contemporary jazz singers like Leon Thomas or Betty Carter. As Jones reminds us, Baraka here demonstrates how he drew on and referenced jazz even when he did not have obvious links to black music in the form of collaborative musicians or direct allusions to jazz and black popular music.[10]

Baraka also names black political and cultural figures (the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, singer Diana Ross, and athlete and actor Jimmy Brown) whom he does not in the first printed version or his performance on the eponymous 1972 Black Forum LP, and changes the penultimate phrase from "get up got here bow" to "get up / nigger / come over here / take a bow / nigger." Here, again, Baraka uses performance to sound a sort of process that unfolds in real time. However, it is not directly the artistic or poetic process, or not only the poetic process in the sense of Olson's "Projectivist Verse," but the political and cultural process of the social transformation of "nigger"/"Negro" into "Black," of would-be but never-can-be "Americans" into "Africans." In the earlier portion of his CAP speech, Baraka articulates the process of *nation becoming* that he would shortly perform:

> This political party we want to set up, that is set up, should be a model for the *nation becoming.* The Black political party must be an example of what we want the nation to be *now,* not in the future. We should not live as if we believe what the white boy says: that we would never be liberated. We must live on the one hand as if we were liberated people of a high value system; then more Black people will be magnetized to it and the larger our *nation becoming* will be.[11]

This transformation, and the need for such a transformation, is a common trope of Black Arts poetry and art, not only in Baraka's work but also in such verse as Haki Madhubuti's "a poem to complement other poems" and Nikki Giovanni's "The True Import of

Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro." What makes this alteration of Baraka's poem unusual (at least to that point) is the context that the earlier part of Baraka's speech and the conference provides. The poem is not the first time Baraka references the NAACP's Roy Wilkins in his CAP speech:

> I would rather make a coalition with Roy Wilkins or Whitney Young—with any of the most backwards upside-down Negroes in the world, because even they must be, in they jivist moment, committed to change. There are more Black people involved with Roy Wilkins than are involved with the Congress of African People. There are more niggers who think like Whitney Young than think like we do. We have to co-opt these people because they exist in our communities. You cannot merely say, "You're corny, nigger." You got to get him and embrace him and make him be with you.[12]

What is interesting here is while Roy Wilkins was not in the audience, the National Urban League's Whitney Young was—or at least potentially could have been, since he had delivered an earlier speech at the conference. One thing that made the Atlanta conference stand out from earlier Black Power/Black Arts conferences, meetings, and conventions, as would be true of the National Black Political Conference in Gary two years later (another major national black meeting in which Baraka had a major organizational role and presence), was the number of more liberal/centrist black politicians, leaders, and organizations present at a meeting organized and led by radical black nationalists of various sorts but heavily influenced by Maulana Karenga and his Kawaida philosophy. (Karenga himself was absent due to the fallout of the shootout between members of his US organization and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense on the UCLA campus that killed two Panther leaders in January 1969 and a subsequent series of clashes that left two more Panthers dead. The Panthers too were not officially present at the CAP convention.) Young and the National Urban League and Ralph Abernathy and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference formally attended the meeting. Wilkins's NAACP was not there as such, but the NAACP Legal Defense Fund was. One can be sure, though, that detailed reports of the Atlanta conference got back to Wilkins and the NAACP leadership.

So Baraka's poem was not only performed to the faithful but also spoke directly to Young and Wilkins, and to Ross (and Motown) and Brown for that matter, in a moment when such a direct address was plausible. The call to those individually named in the performance of the poem was not simply rhetorical. There was a real chance that the addressees (and those black leaders like them and the rank and file they influenced) would actually hear (or hear about) the speech/poem and that they would be moved to act, to change themselves by their conscience or their constituents or both.

If the performance of "It's Nation Time" at the CAP conference that still survives on film and in text enacts, sounds, and advocates the process of "*nation becoming*" that Baraka calls for and describes in outline form in the earlier part of his speech through a transformation of speech into free jazz in real time, the version on the 1972 record *It's Nation Time (Pull the Covers Off)* similarly engages this process but with a more direct connection of free jazz, black poetry, and black politics to black popular music, particularly of James Brown, who is the musician most often and positively named in Baraka's "The Changing Same." In that essay, Baraka suggests that some r&b/soul music is already more radical sonically, which is to say, among other things, blacker, than much free jazz. Baraka proclaims that "James Brown's form and content identify an entire group of people in America," and "James Brown's screams, etc. are more 'radical' than most jazz musicians sound. . . . Certainly, his sound is 'further' out than Ornette's."[13]

Baraka's style of delivery on the 1972 recording of "It's Nation Time" might be thought of as bebop free jazz soul. While Baraka read solo at the CAP conference, using his own voice to link the poem (and the rest of his speech) to jazz, on the record he worked with an ensemble of jazz musicians. This band included reed players Gary Bartz and James Wheeler; pianist Lonnie Liston Smith; bassists Herbert Smith and Reggie Workman; and percussionists Idries Muhammad, Charles Jones, Joseph Armstrong, Pat Carrow, and Akbar Bey, most of them increasingly prominent figures of the younger generation of free jazz musicians following

in the wake of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, and Sun Ra.

While the tempo of Baraka's performance at the CAP conference was fast, his performance on the record moves at an even more rapid pace, after the manner of Charlie Parker's solos on the alto saxophone refracted through the plastic alto of Ornette Coleman. Here too Baraka stretches the length of the vowel in "time," much as he did at the CAP meeting. Similarly, the people addressed at the end are much the same with the addition of Dionne Warwick, notable not only for her "crossover" renditions of the music of white songwriter Burt Bacharach but also her deep connection with Baraka's hometown of Newark, where she and Baraka's sister, the actress, dancer, and stage manager Kimako Baraka (Sandra Elaine Jones), sang in a well-known gospel group, the Drinkards, based at New Hope Baptist Church on Sussex Avenue.[14] Warwick treaded, Baraka claims in "The Changing Same," a "center line" between black and white, her music epitomizing the "Negro" consciousness most ripe for transformation into "Black."

At first, the musical background is a stripped-down rhythm section of bass and percussion with Baraka's voice as the horn, slipping at times into the shouting/screaming mode of James Brown, much like Brown is backed by spare rhythmic sounds of the Famous Flames—at least until Brown is taken to the bridge/solo. As the piece proceeds, Gary Bartz's alto saxophone joins in, responds to Baraka's shouts, much in the manner of Coltrane's and Pharoah Sanders's Coltrane-esque tenor screams. Still, Baraka's screams and shouts and other nonverbal vocalizations more closely echo those of James Brown, answering Larry Neal's famous question in the afterword to the most important anthology of the early Black Arts era, *Black Fire* (1968), edited by Baraka and Neal: "Listen to James Brown scream. Ask yourself, then, have you heard a Negro poet sing like that, of course not, because we have been tied to the texts, like most white poets."[15]

Whether or not one believes that Baraka truly screams like James Brown, he certainly modeled those vocalizations on Brown's. In a way, one might say that he sonically tied the text

to Brown—and free jazz, attempting to create and make plain the "Unity Music" of the two that he foresees in "The Changing Same."

The connection between Baraka and Brown and free jazz is further emphasized by the anaphoric "get up" near the poem's end, recalling one of Brown's best known and most musically influential singles, the 1970 "Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine, Parts 1 and 2." Baraka might not have heard the single when he composed "It's Nation Time." Brown's single was released in July 1970. But he was certainly familiar with it by the time of the Atlanta CAP meeting in September, giving his performance there, and on the record, a new resonance. Of course, one might also say that Baraka's poem engages with another famous Brown recording, the 1970 three-part single "Super Bad" (originally titled "Call Me Super Bad"), where James Brown and his band answer a parallel, possibly unspoken, question to that of Neal: have you heard a soul/r&b reed player play like John Coltrane in the break? That question was answered when tenor saxophonist Robert "Chopper" McCullough played two free jazz solos, the second time in response to Brown's urging, "Go, Robert. Blow me some 'Trane, brother."[16] In short, "Super Bad" too is already sonically the sort of "Unity Music" that Baraka proposes in "The Changing Same," anticipating, among other things, the reimagining of the work of Curtis Mayfield by William Parker and his band (including, as is discussed in the next chapter, Baraka) in the twenty-first century.

The 1972 recording, even more than the reading at the CAP conference, sounded a process of nation becoming. It not only attempts to model a "Unity" black art breaking down the barriers between artistic genres and media, and between popular and vanguard black culture after the manner of the "Unity Music" of jazz and blues, sacred and secular that Baraka predicted in "The Changing Same" but also forced the listener to reevaluate black popular music, notably James Brown, as already and with increasing consciousness creating such a unity music.[17]

"YOUR OWN VOICE": SOUNDING BLACK/BLACK SOUNDS AND RACE, CLASS, AND REGION

The idea of voice was crucial to Baraka's sense of his poetry from early on in his career. In a statement he wrote for Donald Allen's 1960 *The New American Poetry,* he declares, "You have to start and finish there . . . your own voice . . . how you sound."[18] In thinking about the evolution of Baraka's recorded voice and its interface with black music, especially jazz, it is necessary to consider actual voices, of Baraka's family; of regional and ethnic speech groups, particularly in northern New Jersey; and of the early artistic circles in which Baraka moved. The first recordings of Baraka performing his poems that we have are, as far as I know, his readings of twenty-two poems at the Library of Congress on April 17, 1959. Many of these poems appeared in Baraka's first book, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* (1961); others remained unpublished. Baraka's voice in those readings is in an almost conversational rhythm. In this, he drew on William Carlos Williams's notion of making a distinctly "American" English in such a near-conversational, colloquial mode a central poetic concern. While Williams (another northern New Jersey poet) focused attention on various "American" syntaxes, dictions, and accents, he embedded this language in the materiality of northern New Jersey history, geography, and culture with different racial/ethnic particularities and accents, something that was not lost on Baraka. This region for Williams stretched from Newark in the south to the Ramapo Mountains on the border of New Jersey and New York in the north, with the city of Paterson in the middle.

It is worth emphasizing that Williams, a doctor born and raised in Rutherford, New Jersey (also in the center of this zone), was likewise a child of migration with a Puerto Rican mother who never really learned English and an English-born father who was long a resident of the Hispanophone Caribbean. Williams grew up in a multilingual household in which Spanish was a primary medium of conversation. When one hears Williams actually reading his poetry in recorded form, one is immediately struck by how his speech does not resemble anything like the popular culture notion of a "Jersey accent" (often a repackaged stage version of

certain old New York accents, e.g., "Joisey," that one never hears, and never heard, northern New Jersey natives actually speak). What one gets is a mid-Atlantic intonation somewhere between New York and Philadelphia with occasional traces of the migrations of his parents and the migrations of peoples to Rutherford and the surrounding cities and towns, particularly the polyglot and heteroglot, largely immigrant population of the neighboring textile manufacturing city of Passaic from which came a substantial number of Williams's patients. Sometimes Williams would ventriloquize Polish, black, Italian, Jewish, and other "ethnic" voices of life along the Passaic River in his poetry and short stories. Those voices would often inflect the diction of the author's/narrator's "I."[19]

As discussed in chapter 1, Baraka understood his own speaking voice in a similar manner, describing how Jewish and Italian accents mingled with southern (and northern) black idioms. This mixture is quite noticeable in Baraka's reading of his poems at the Library of Congress near the beginning of his literary career. Kimberly Benston perceptively notes, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, that even when Baraka moved toward a deeper (or at least more deeply and publicly conscious) sonic and rhetorical blackness, he retained and even heightened the mingling, and sometimes clashing, accents and social milieus they sounded in his performances of poetry: "Echoing and contesting one another in a polyrhythmic texture of overlapping accents, rhymes, and shifting emphases, such hallmarks of distinctive Barakan intonation conjure a vision of African American culture as a site of ceaseless personal and social conflict. In their nexus Baraka envisions a dynamic meeting ground of contrasting idioms and postures that vie for nothing less than the vital soulform of black historical consciousness while remaining subject to myriad contingencies of power, subjection, will, and desire."[20]

What Benston touches on here raises the complex question of race, class, and nation/ethnicity and Baraka's changing sense of those things and their intersection (as well as what does not change, with apologies to Charles Olson). Critics often speak of Baraka's "Beat" period before his move toward black nationalism.

But that label is not entirely accurate since Baraka did not simply identify as a Beat. Early on, he attempted to form what might be thought of as a sort of New American Poetry united front out of the sometimes overlapping but sometimes antagonistic countercultural literary groupings of the New York Poets (e.g., Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest), the Black Mountain School (e.g., Charles Olson and Robert Creeley), the San Francisco Renaissance (e.g., Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Lew Welch), and the Beats (e.g., Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Peter Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso), especially through the journals he coedited, *Yugen* and *Floating Bear,* and his Totem-Corinth book imprint.

However, one particular affinity Baraka had with the East Coast Beats is that they, with the exception of William Burroughs, were largely also the children of working-class migrants to the urban centers of the northeastern United States. The literary (and speaking) voices of the Beats bore significant traces of their Eastern European Jewish, French Canadian, Italian, and Russian parents and grandparents in Newark and Paterson, New Jersey; Lowell, Massachusetts; and New York City. Baraka's longtime friend Ginsberg in particular had a sonic bond with Baraka. Ginsberg's parents grew up in Newark and attended the same high school (Barringer) as did Baraka. Ginsberg was born in Newark in 1926, eight years before Baraka, and spent his youth up the Passaic River in the nearby city of Paterson. The early recordings of Ginsberg and Baraka reading poetry provide the sound of North Jersey in both of their voices, even if sometimes differently inflected. Like Baraka, Ginsberg's reading and speaking voice had the basic mid-Atlantic pronunciations and cadences of North Jersey, differing considerably from working-class Jewish accents across the Hudson River in New York City. It did carry intonations of Yiddish and Yinglish from his family and the working-class Jewish community east of downtown Paterson. However, as in Baraka's voice, along with an older mid-Atlantic intonation, one can hear in Ginsberg's voice other accents, stresses, and rhythms: black, Italian, and the other groups immigrant Eastern European Jews encountered in the cities of the Northeast, overlaid with

the sorts of English taught in the public schools and universities by people like Ginsberg's father, Louis, a longtime Paterson high school teacher.

In other words, the poetry and prose of the Beats, especially on the East Coast, is marked by the sounding of working-class ethnic voices in a way that is much less common in other countercultural schools of that moment. Olson, for example, does not really project a Worcester Swedish voice, even though Swedes (including his working-class, Swedish-born father) were during his childhood one of the largest ethnic groups of his Massachusetts native city, but rather a more Yankee New England voice that he associates with Gloucester, Massachusetts. Kerouac, on the other hand, almost obsessively associates people with their ethnic/racial backgrounds—Jewish, black, Italian, Irish, Greek, French Canadian, and so on—in his roman à clef fiction.

The Beats also distinguished themselves in that African American poets, including Bob Kaufman and Ted Joans, were part of their scene to a degree not found in the other circles of the New American Poetry. Black sounds, black accents, and black "hip" language were so meaningful to and closely associated with black and white Beats that they became a hallmark of almost all the caricatures of the Beat subculture in the mass media. Many Beats constantly referenced black music connected to this language, especially bebop, in their work, far more often than participants in the other New American Poetry schools, Frank O'Hara's 1959 "The Day Lady Died" notwithstanding. Even on the level of personnel, black writers and artists were far more commonly a part of Beat circles. Other than Baraka, it is hard to think of a black poet much connected to the first generation of the Black Mountain group, especially before the 1960s. Similarly, despite Frank O'Hara's close friendship with Baraka and, to a much lesser degree, A. B. Spellman, black writers did not figure much in the New York Poets of the 1950s either. Consequently, while Baraka was not precisely a Beat despite his frequent characterization as such, he was deeply influenced by the Beat approach to voice and prosody that drew so much on black speech and music, as well as on the other major ethnic groups of the urban milieus from which

most of the Beats came. Of course, among what might be thought of as the second generation of New York Poets in the 1960s, especially with the founding of the Poetry Project and its reading series at St. Marks in the Bowery, the growing black bohemia in the Lower Eastside (including Baraka, the Umbra Poets group, and other black writers, musicians, dancers, visual artists, and theater workers) mingled with their white counterparts at the downtown jazz clubs, poetry readings, bars, and theaters.[21]

As Daniel Kane observes, due in part to a relative scarcity of sympathetic print venues, poetry reading functioned as a sort of alternative form of publication for the emerging literary counterculture of the 1950s, establishing itself as the locus of New American Poetry activity. These readings not only presented the work of poets who had difficulty publishing in the various media of contemporary print culture. They also served as a mode of sociality and community building among the bohemians of lower Manhattan and other countercultural centers of the United States.[22]

These readings also made more palpable the racial, ethnic, and regional dimensions of the poets' voices. One only has to hear Jack Kerouac reading for about ten seconds to register his New England French Canadian sound colored by jazz hipster intonations and rhythms. Similarly, and somewhat unusually for the New York School (which tended not to register ethnicity and region so clearly in their readings), Frank O'Hara clearly sounds a central Massachusetts Irish American voice with some campy overtones in his recorded readings.[23]

However, it should be recalled that though Dylan Thomas began to popularize the poetry reading among a general public in a new way with his first reading tour in the United States in 1950, Langston Hughes had made the poetry reading a central part of his literary work two decades before, frequently touring the country by car, reading his poetry in black schools, churches, and other centers of the community, especially in the South, and selling his books out of the trunk of his rented car. In addition to providing a large portion of Hughes's livelihood, these readings too were community-building events for a black reading public as well as for developing and would-be writers—an aspect of

Hughes's performances that was augmented by his willingness to read, comment on, and encourage the drafts of poems given to him by aspiring black authors at stops on his reading tours. Baraka was one of many, many young writers that Hughes encouraged and supported.

At the core of Baraka's poetry, then, is a complicated, and often conflicting, performative sense of the ways race, nation, region, and class intersect and diverge as registered sonically in a manner analogous to black music influenced by both the Beats and a line of poetry descended from William Carlos Williams, as well as by black poets, particularly Hughes and Baraka's former teacher Sterling Brown. In Baraka's writing up through his early Marxist period, he frequently criticizes the black "middle class" as basically accommodationist, assimilationist, self-hating, and self-defeating. He often cites his family as exemplifying that black middle class and its stance and values, counterposing his countercultural opposition, first a black bohemian vision, then a black nationalist vision, and finally a Marxist one, all of which place the black working class and the black poor (not always the same thing in these analyses) at the center of value and the authentic expression of a black national culture. However, the question of class (and what is the sound of class) is quite a vexed one in the black community, and that community's adjudication of class is not always easily mapped on Marxist definitions of class. Yet the issues of how race, nation, class, and region intersect and interact and are sounded are vital to understanding Baraka's reading voice.

Commentators often take Baraka's early categorization of his family as middle class at face value and generally mention that Baraka's father was a supervisor at the U.S. Post Office and his mother a social worker and manager with the Newark Housing Authority. However, those positions came fairly late in their working lives. Jerry Watts, for example, reads Baraka's early biography as describing a child from a "lower middle-class" or "upper working-class" black family that often lived on the geographical periphery of black Newark, making a sort of past as prologue argument that this childhood on the edges of the ghetto predicted

Baraka's later estrangement from the mainstream of the black community, even in his most ostensibly "black" moments.[24]

However, another way of looking at the Jones family is that, though never attaining the sort of pro-union, working-class consciousness of Amina Baraka's childhood home, it was a pretty typical example of the striving black working class of the Great Migration, particularly on his father's side of the family, as Baraka somewhat obliquely recalls in different versions of his autobiography.[25] According to an interview that Baraka's father, Coyt Jones, gave in 1996, Jones arrived in Newark at about age seventeen in 1927 from a small town in South Carolina, joining his sister who already lived in the Third Ward. (According to his son his flight was due to an altercation, when, as an usher in a movie theater, he hit a white patron—though the elder Jones does not mention that in the interview.) Like many southern migrants, Jones cycled through quite a few jobs, including helping Jewish merchants unload fruit in the nearby Jewish shopping district (and the center of Jewish worship in Newark) on Prince Street, shining shoes and sweeping out a barbershop, pressing clothes in a dry cleaner, running an elevator, and finally working for the post office, where he stayed for thirty-five years, first as carrier, then as clerk, and finally as a supervisor.[26]

While Coyt Jones never lived anywhere else but Newark after "leaving home" in South Carolina, stubbornly staying in the city until the end of his long life in 2002, he still considered himself a southerner. The black South certainly remained in his voice—just as much of the rhythms, pronunciations, and diction of his speech surfaced in his son Amiri's voice, particularly when Baraka wanted to emphasize a sonic connection to the black South. William Harris perceptively cites a passage from Baraka's short fiction to demonstrate how a black protagonist's striving mother attempts to "whiten" his speech—though the white standard to which she holds him is not just any white speech, as she makes clear:

> In "Uncle Tom's Cabin: Alternate Ending," from the short story collection *Tales* (1967), Baraka explores the social and ethnic significance of middle-class pronunciation. Louise McGhee,

> the middle-class and college educated mother in this semi-autobiographical story, is on the one hand fighting racism, defending her son against racist teachers, but, on the other, enforcing the values of white-middle class society by insisting on white middle-class pronunciation and behavior. She asks her son, "Is Miss Orbach the woman who told you to say sangwich instead of sammich." Louise McGhee giggled.
>
> "No, that was Miss Columbe."
>
> "Sangwich, my Christ. That's worse than sammich. Though you better not let me hear you saying sammich either . . . like those Davises."
>
> "I don't say sammich, mamma."
>
> "What's the word then?"
>
> "Sandwich" (39).[27]

One interesting moment in the interview with Baraka's father is when Coyt Jones pronounces "sandwich" as "sammich," throwing, perhaps, a new light on the passage and the complicated relationship of the Jones family to race and class consciousness—and to the Italian and Jewish communities of Newark. "Sangwich" is a colloquial version of "sandwich" associated with Italian American vernacular. Again, recalling Baraka's comments about the mark of Jewish and Italian voices on his speech, one could read this passage, after Kimberly Benston's critical riff on the multitudes contained in Baraka's poetic voice, as the conflict and exchange between the southern black "sammich" of the Davises (and the protagonist's father), the Italian American "sangwich" of Miss Columbe, and the unrevealed Newark Jewish rendering of Miss Orbach all bumping against each other and against the idealized whiteness of "sandwich" as an externalization of the conflict that exists inside the author. This exemplifies the sort of tension that Baraka represents as being a key element of the transformation of black migrants into an urban working class. Notably, the mother does not simply urge her son to sound "white" but actually sees her pronunciation, and even the black "sammich" of the Davises (and of Coyt Jones), as superior to the "sangwich" of an Italian school teacher. In short, the complexities of the intersections and conflicts among racial, ethnic, and class identities as signaled by speech in "sammich," "sangwich," and "sandwich" are legion.

Baraka displays more of these complications of class and race

as he traces a bit of the family account of the history of his mother, Anna Lois Jones (née Russ). In some respects, his mother's family were more clearly in the black petty-bourgeois or middle class, especially as compared to his father's people. According to the story Baraka tells, his grandfather owned two stores in Alabama before being driven North with his family by racist violence. His grandfather also owned a store in Newark. His mother attended Tuskegee and Fisk Universities and was a college track star, but never finished. The store was lost in the Great Depression, and Anna Lois Jones worked as a stitcher in garment factories before she was able to get an office job where she could use some of her college training, working her way up to being a social worker and ultimately a manager with the Newark Housing Authority.[28] In other words, there is some truth to Baraka's categorization of his mother's family as "middle" or even "upper" class in terms of the black community of Newark, as indicated by even a partial college education for his mother and the owning of a small business. Yet one could understand this story as a demonstration of the precariousness of the black middle class, as his mother's family slipped into a clearly working-class status with his mother working in Newark's small garment district and his grandfather becoming a night watchman. In other words, the Russ family trajectory is a black working-class story too.

One marker of the Jones family's class status during Baraka's telling of his childhood is their frequent moves from one living space to another, always in the city of Newark, sometimes within the center of the black community, sometimes to the edges of the ghetto where African Americans interfaced with other groups, particularly Italians, Irish, Jews, and Poles, in conflict and coexistence. This movement was a hallmark of black urban life in the 1930s and 1940s as families were motivated by a sort of dialectic of affordability and a search for the best living conditions available within the confines of the northern variant of Jim Crow.

Baraka's parents also patronized the clubs and ballrooms of the Third Ward, dancing and listening to local stars, such as the Savoy Sultans, as well as more nationally known groups, such as Count Basie and his orchestra and Chick Webb and his band.

On Sundays, Baraka and his father would regularly attend games of the local Negro League team, the Newark Eagles, at Ruppert Stadium on the East Side (also known as "the Ironbound" and "Down Neck," a largely white section but with significant pockets of black people, including saxophonist Wayne Shorter's family).[29]

His family, especially his mother's side, was very religious, attending the Bethany Baptist Church, Newark's oldest black Baptist church, in the Third/Central Ward. Baraka characterizes the church as middle-class in its membership and worship style, eschewing "enthusiasm" (to use an old Protestant term), but also notes that his grandmother's approach to worship was sometimes quite different: "And now and again she'd get 'happy' in church and start fanning and weeping, rocking back and forth, but most times she'd just sing and listen and amen, under her little flat-top hat trying to see God from behind her rimless glasses."[30]

One might see in the Jones family, then, not so much a simple "middle-class" faith in upward mobility as a basic black working-class optimism. This optimism did not necessarily entail a naive belief in "American exceptionalism" or the basic decency of white people—the family stories on both parents' sides about the motives for the migration North as a result of actual or threatened racist white violence undermine that. While it is true that the Jones family often lived in relatively close proximity to various sorts of white people, a not-unusual experience in a midsized industrial city like Newark, they most often resided in the Third/Central Ward. Even when they lived on the edge of the black community in the West Ward, they were still largely among black people, if proximate also to white people—and by Baraka's high school days at the predominantly white Barringer High School, they were back in the African American heart of the Central Ward. The Jones's social life revolved around black churches, clubs, fraternal lodges, dance halls, sports teams, and music. Their optimism was one of perseverance and a faith that they would rise in the future in Newark, that the new world a-coming was not just in heaven.

The Baraka family also maintained a strong attitude of what can be seen as black working-class pride. Baraka's father, for

example, retained a positive belief in the city of Newark after it became a predominantly black city despite its grave problems, especially after the election of Kenneth Gibson as mayor, the first political candidate for whom Coyt Jones had actively worked, according to his testimony in the 1990s.[31] In this regard, it might be instructive to think about Baraka's change in his estimation of Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* during his long Third World Marxist period (the second half of his life, really) as a marker not simply of what he came to better understand as the aspirations of the black working class in general but of his own family in particular: "We missed the essence of the work: that Hansberry had created a family engaged in the same class and ideological struggles as existed in the movement—and within individuals. What is most telling about our ignorance is that Hansberry's play remains overwhelmingly popular and evocative of black and white reality; and the masses of black people saw it was true."[32] One way to think about this is not only to reevaluate the Younger family's striving, determination, pride, and basic optimism (not about the United States as such, since they have not much reason in their past experience and in their current dealing with the Clybourne Park Neighborhood Association to have a lot of hope about the good will of white people, but about themselves), but also that of the Jones family too. By extension, such a reconsideration of the Jones family would also encompass the generation of the Great Migration, its children and grandchildren, especially those who, like the Jones-Baraka family, remained in the city of Newark—and struggled for respect and self-determination. In that respect, the election of Ras Baraka as mayor of Newark might be seen as the logical continuation of his grandparents' and great-grandparents' efforts.

Some confirmation of this kind of rethinking can be found in "The Turnaround Y36" of Baraka's 1996 epic historical poetry sequence *Wise, Why's, Y's,* where he ends a commentary on the irony of Jack Johnson being convicted of "White Slavery" with "Coyt's son."[33] This acknowledgment of his father and of the southern connection of the black community of Newark, and the sense of revaluation as well as of irony, is further emphasized by

Baraka's referencing the tune "The Turnaround" (and the implications of its title), released by Newark/Elizabeth, New Jersey, hard bop tenor saxophonist Hank Mobley in 1965. So tracking the sonic changes in Baraka's performances, one hears how he engaged in an increasingly self-conscious heightening of the South that "always and yet still ring in our bones," of his family (especially of his father) as part of the Great Migration that provided the base for the black working class in the North, of himself as "Coyt's son." If one listens to the interview with Coyt Jones and to Baraka as he read the first three sections of *Wise, Why's, Y's* on the *Cross Cultural Poetics* radio show in 2007, one notices that father and son sound remarkably similar, even if one also hears some other accents, some other Jersey voices (Jewish and Italian, for example) in Baraka's speech that are missing in his father's more southern intonations. In a way, one might see this as part of the historical process that Baraka argued produced the urban black working class, as exemplified by the Baraka family, as found more generally in black Newark. That is to say, the folk from the South were changed by the encounter with the urban industrial North, but the continued migration from the South kept southern black culture, language, and so on, circulating and recirculating up North. In other words, if Baraka was really going to sound the black nation and working class of that nation, both in the locale of Newark (maybe especially in the locale of Newark) as well as on a larger stage, communicating this sort of spiral development of culture, of music, and of speech was necessary.

JAZZ DADA TO SOUL MESSAGE: BARAKA'S TRANSITION FROM BOHEMIA TO BLACK ARTS

Baraka's 1965 recording of "Black Dada Nihilismus" with the New York Art Quartet has often been cited as a pivotal event in his shift to Black Arts and Black Power—as well as a pivotal moment in the development of Black Arts.[34] (1965 was same year that he would leave lower Manhattan bohemia and found BARTS in Harlem with Larry Neal, Askia Touré, Sam Anderson, Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Ann Teer, and a cadre of uptown and downtown

black artists, intellectuals, and activists after the assassination of Malcolm X.) Oddly enough, Baraka's referencing of Dada and Nihilism here as he moved toward Black Arts and Black Power has attracted relatively little scholarly discussion, suggesting a critical view that Baraka had not thought deeply about these referents but used them more or less offhandedly. However, the usage of these terms deserves more scrutiny since they indicate Baraka's perception of a systemic crisis that registered personally, nationally, and internationally.

Often the Dadaist Movement is portrayed as an assault on the rational mind, which is true as far as it goes if one sees the "rational" mind of Europe as a ruling-class consciousness that regarded the millions killed, maimed, and psychologically damaged in World War I to be, as the early Dadaists often suggested, cogs in a great killing machine. However, one might also view Dadaism as the artistic expression of a collapse of bourgeois assurance, a collapse in which claims of the greatness of centuries of European culture, humanism, rationality, and so on, drowned in the mud of the Western Front. (On the Eastern Front a different dynamic prevailed as the crisis was answered not by Dada, relatively weak in Russia, but by the October Revolution and its associated avant-garde arts movements.) *Nihilismus* (German for "nihilism") too can be seen as Baraka's adaptation of Heidegger's use of "nihilism," which in turn was a reworking of Nietzsche, to describe an early twentieth-century crisis of social purpose and commitment that could only be answered on the individual level.[35] In both cases, ideological, ontological, political, and cultural crises of "the West" (or capitalism or imperialism) were seen as simultaneously produced and illustrated by the insane violence and destruction of World War I when the bourgeois empires of Europe and North America, even those led by monarchs with varying degrees of constitutional constraints, fought for dominance.

So what might be "Black Dada," "Black Nihilism," and "Black Dada Nihilism" in Baraka's poem? Again, these terms are linked to a moment of political, ideological, and cultural crisis but with a different valence from that of the Dada of early twentieth-century Europe and North America and the *Nihilismus* of Heidegger.

This moment was for Baraka and other black radicals promoting the notion of a Bandung World, one in which the system of European and North American domination was under siege and in fact dying—though very dangerous in its death throes. This was a system that had ruled the world undergirded with a white supremacist ideology or matrix of ideologies expressed through the hard power of brute force as well as the soft power of expressive culture, especially popular culture.

Like many of the poems in *The Dead Lecturer* and his play *Dutchman* that would be performed later in 1964, "Black Dada Nihilismus" is a work of transition, both in the trajectory of Baraka's career between downtown bohemia and Black Arts, and as a description and sounding of a process of transition, personally, nationally, and internationally. In these works Baraka links his individual situation (and that of his family) to that of black people generally in the United States. The domestic battle for black liberation is, in turn, connected to the struggles of the Bandung World and the emergence of a new order in which the formerly colonized people of the world, the vast majority of humanity on the planet, would be ascendant. Baraka's grandfather Tom Russ appears in a list of victims to be avenged along with W. E. B. Du Bois and Patrice Lumumba. As was the case with the Dada Movement (and unlike Surrealism, Expressionism, and other movements that flowed from Dada), there is not an organized ideology as such that motivates the black revolt described in the poem, only a violent rejection of what was. It is about a destruction of what was so that something new can take its place. In that way, there is not even the idea of a "Black world" and a "Black poem" following the destruction advanced in the way one sees in Baraka's later "Black Art"—though "Black Dada Nihilismus" clearly anticipates the litany of violent actions and the call to "clean out the world for love and virtue" in "Black Art."

Baraka's earliest known recorded reading of "Black Dada Nihilismus" is from the University of California Extension's "The *Negro* Writer in the United States" Conference, which took place on August 5–9, 1964, at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, California, a few months before the session with the New

York Art Quartet. The Berkeley Pacifica radio station KPFA broadcast Baraka's Asilomar performance in October of the same year.[36] The sense of the recording as one of a live reading of actual text is palpable in that the listener can hear Baraka turning pages. Despite the relatively bucolic oceanside setting of the conference center, the atmosphere of the conference held a tension and urgency as Baraka read the poem to a racially mixed crowd in the particularly charged moment following the end of the "Harlem Riot" of 1964 a couple of weeks before. The Harlem revolt, along with similar uprisings that year in Rochester, New York; Philadelphia; Jacksonville, Florida; and Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth, and other smaller New Jersey cities, marked a new political moment in the United States and anticipated the even larger rebellion in Watts the next year and the beginning of the "long, hot summers" of the later 1960s. While that chain of urban uprisings in the 1960s could not be seen as inevitable in 1964, there was certainly a sense at the conference that a line had been crossed as many speakers referenced the Harlem rebellion in their remarks.[37]

Baraka introduces the poem with some seemingly offhand humor: "I think you know what 'black' means. I think you know what 'dada' means, whether 'daddy' or a movement in France dedicated to restoring fresh looks at the world. And 'nihilismus' is simply a Latinization or making 'nihilism' into a Latinic phrase."[38] Of course, despite the knowing laughs of the audience, the question of what "black" meant at the time was very much in flux, even (or especially) for the black participants at Asilomar. And the meanings of the other two words were not self-evident either—that "nihilismus" was "simply" a "Latinic phrase" (when it was, in fact, German) does not reveal much of the genealogy of Baraka's use of it, especially in combination with the other two words. This offhandedness, luring the audience in, contrasts sharply with the violent intensity of the poem.

This reading (as well as the later recorded version with the New York Art Quartet to which the Asilomar performance has inevitably been compared) has registered very differently on some of our best scholars of Baraka's work. William Harris hears a substantially "white" Eliotic voice in both the Asilomar version and

the rendition with the New York Art Quartet, a voice that in tone and diction had not caught up with the "blackness" of the poem's stance and critique. Harris suggests that Baraka's performance is even less of a "black scream and chant" on the New York Art Quartet LP than in the Asilomar performance.[39] Aldon Nielsen judges Baraka's voice in the performance to be more effectively linked to the poem's stance than does Harris. Nielsen locates the power of Baraka's performance of the poem at Asilomar and on the New York Art Quartet record in a "deep and terrifying tension between the calm restraint of Baraka's voice and the violence of the words."[40] Kimberly Benston basically agrees with Harris that Baraka's solo Asilomar performance formally inhibited the sort of black chant toward which he sees Baraka aspiring. However, he differs with both Harris and Nielsen in his sense that in the collaboration with the New York Art Quartet Baraka in "presentational manner" became "a voice of revolutionary 'black magic.'"[41]

However, there are some other ways one might understand the arc of the recorded versions of "Black Dada Nihilismus" in terms of black music, black speech, and the meaning of the evolution of Baraka's voice. There are three recordings (at least three that are generally accessible to the public): the Asilomar reading that was broadcast by KPFA, the New York Art Quartet LP, and a remix with DJ Spooky in 1993. (Strictly speaking, the DJ Spooky piece is not exactly a remix since Baraka recorded a new version in his post–Black Arts voice. I am not discussing it here since it appears after the time period covered by this chapter.) Baraka's reading of "Black Dada Nihilismus" at Asilomar does not seem to me to be particularly calm, except perhaps as compared to the shouts, screams, and vocalizations of his readings in the high Black Arts era and beyond. Words are also not exactly "songified" (to use the term that Baraka himself employs in his autobiography to describe Askia Touré's performance style derived from Touré's experience as an r&b singer that is discussed at more length later in this chapter). Nor, to paraphrase Kimberly Benston, does Baraka scream beyond the text.[42] He pretty much sticks to the charts, as it were, as can be heard in the turning pages.

Yet his reading style is quite different from his early mode. It

is not really conversational as was his early work. As Benston notes, the poem is characterized by full rest followed by enjambment.[43] But if one compares the page to Baraka's reading, one notices that Baraka changes up tempo and emphasis or accent as he goes on in his performance, recalling Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* remark about Louis Armstrong sometimes moving ahead and at others lingering behind the beat. Baraka at times moves fast through what on the page are stops, holding up or dragging where there is no punctuation, careening quickly around enjambed lines, hanging back at the end of other lines, softly pronouncing certain consonants and more often emphasizing, tonguing others after the manner of a reed player. His reading style becomes more hornlike, in sort of a jazz manner. Of course, other poets had used jazz saxophone solos as a model for phrasing, for example, Langston Hughes in *Montage of Dream Deferred,* Bob Kaufman in "Walking Parker Home," Allen Ginsberg in "Howl," and Jack Kerouac in *Mexico City Blues.* But Baraka's sense of rhythm, of rhythmic emphasis, of stops and starts, seems very much influenced by the new jazz, particularly Coltrane's as it emerged from hard bop on "Giant Steps," more than in Ginsberg and Kerouac, both in their ways excellent readers, and Langston Hughes—though Hughes would try to come to grips with free jazz in the 1961 *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz.* (So little sound recording of Kaufman reading exists that it would be hard to make a judgment about the influences on his performing style in his prime with the testimonies of those who heard him read in his heyday really the only primary evidence accessible to us now.)

Also, listening to Baraka read "Black Dada Nihilismus" reminds the reader that the diction of the poem often has a kind of doubleness where what on the page might be read as not particularly "black" might register differently aloud, depending on the rhythm, stops, and intonation, about how it is played, so to speak. It may be true, as William Harris notes, that "got it, *Baby*" is the one moment where there is a clear invocation of black vernacular speech on the page. Still, "why you carry knives," "Why you stay, where they can / reach? Why you sit, or stand, or walk / in this place" could also be read in black vernacular mode, as,

in fact, Baraka did on record and at Asilomar.[44] This intentionality of the double-character of this speech, two-voiced speech with a message beneath the surface, is registered by Baraka's invocation of "Trismegistus," an ancient syncretic combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth (Europe and Africa, according to some modern sensibilities, though almost certainly not to ancient Hellenic/Egyptian ones), both messengers and patrons of speech and writing, with "Hermes Trismegistus" allegedly a master and author of texts of secret wisdom.

What give the poem and its performance their particular charge is the worldwide rising of the formerly colonialized world and the emergence of both the Non-Aligned Movement and a pushback against that movement by the United States and the colonial powers (or former colonial powers) of Europe. Where the forces behind the original Dada Movement were the negative energy of World War I and a revulsion against its carnage and the more positive force of the Bolshevik Revolution and other attempted revolutions in Germany and Hungary, with their centers in Europe, "Black Dada" has its center in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—and, potentially, the urban ghettos of the United States. The plastique of the Front de Libération Nationale in Algeria, which had won its independence from France through bitter guerilla warfare only a couple of years before the Asilomar Conference, is paralleled with black knives of the ghetto in the United States. Again, that Baraka read this poem in the immediate aftermath of a mass uprising in Harlem made the performance (and the conference itself) even more concrete and gave the shocking and cleansing rage of the poem a documentary element—though I suppose it should recalled that the violence of the uprisings focused on property, not the murder and rape of white people.

Of course, neither Baraka himself nor any radical black organization of which he was a member at the time, such as the Organization of Young Men, On Guard for Freedom, and the Monroe Defense Committee, ever murdered or raped any white people.[45] (Baraka and all of those organizations did admire and support Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP leader Robert William's advocacy and practice of armed self-defense against the Klan and

other racist vigilantes, but that was clearly something quite different.) Rather, it was a rhetorical move advocating the destruction of "the West," of "whiteness," that, as he reminds the reader and auditor, verbally mirrors what the West actually did to the nonwhite societies of the world, from the conquest of Mexico by Spain to the murder of Patrice Lumumba, basically by the CIA and its client Congolese politicians.

One sees (and hears) this somewhat more obliquely in "A Contract. (for the Destruction and Rebuilding of Paterson," also in *The Dead Lecturer*. As Lytle Shaw observes, Baraka's picture of the long-declining Paterson, New Jersey, obviously has an intertextual relationship with William Carlos Williams's epic poem *Paterson* but does not make plain a deep historical frame in the way that Williams does.[46] Rather, Baraka's poem is a sort of observation of Paterson from the perspective of someone who might have arrived at the Broadway Bus Terminal in Paterson not far from what was then the center of black Paterson in the Fourth Ward east of downtown. By the 1960s, Paterson, like Newark, had been much changed demographically by two great post–World War II migrations, African Americans from the South and Puerto Ricans from the island as older Jewish, Polish, and Italian residents fled to the suburbs. (For example, virtually the entire Jewish community in which Allen Ginsberg grew up decamped across the Passaic River to Bergen County, especially Fair Lawn, during the 1950s and 1960s.) Unlike Newark, Paterson was not an old city with a history reaching back to the Puritans. Instead, Paterson was almost entirely a product of the industrial age, most famous for its silk industry, which had almost entirely departed too by the 1960s. What industry was left was mostly small enterprises, often sharing space in the old mill buildings.

Paterson, even more than Newark, had long had the image of a city where class and ethnic divisions, exploitation, and conflict were raw and stark, particularly as revealed by the famous 1913 Industrial Workers of the World–led silk strike there. In addition to relative proximity to Williams's hometown of East Rutherford and a sense that a portrait of a small city like Paterson was more manageable than one of the larger city of Newark, this already

widely circulated image of Paterson as a modern proletarian city made it attractive as a subject to Williams. He began his epic with a portrait of Paterson as a sleeping giant composed of proletarians themselves sleepwalking as they went about their daily tasks. Baraka took this vision of Paterson and transformed it into a snapshot of black and Latinx sleepers, among whom he included himself temporarily, whom he imagined would wake up and make a space or "new world." As in "Black Dada Nihilismus" and "Black Art," this space would be cleared by the murder of the "white fedora hats," the remaining Italians, Poles, and Jews, the corrupt politicians and gangsters who still ran the city in 1964, people who had been silent about the treatment of black people (including the speaker's ancestors) by the "code" (a word that also appears in "Black Dada Nihilismus") of the "whiter" ("whiter" than those who would become known as so-called white ethnics) fathers of the nation. One might object that few of the ancestors of the white residents of Paterson in 1964 (primarily Italian, Jewish, Irish, Syrian and Lebanese Christian, and Polish) had (with the possible exception of the Irish) been living in the United States during the slave era. However, as James Baldwin often argued, these people were complicit by their aspiration toward the sterile, deathly whiteness of the worship of the "code of gain." In short, in Baraka's estimation, if you accepted that you were white (and were accepted, if sometimes grudgingly, as white), then you could not escape responsibility for what white people did before the arrival of your ancestors, particularly in a city notorious for the brutal behavior of the police in the Fourth Ward, emblemized by the frequent raids or "bar checks" of black clubs in which patrons were frisked at gun point and sometimes beaten or arrested.[47] What is striking in Baraka's recorded performance of "A Contract" at Asilomar, a couple of days before the start of an uprising in the Fourth Ward, is that before he gives the title of the piece and starts reading it, he utters a tense, pained sigh as if overcome by emotion at the moment, and performs the poem with a more noticeably angry tone than he did with "Black Dada Nihilismus," though again with a sort of new jazz phrasing and shifting rhythms.

The horn-like aspect of Baraka's voice is also a central feature of his performance with the New York Art Quartet on "Black Dada Nihilismus."[48] It is true that, as William Harris observes, in some ways he does not press as much with his voice as he did in the Asilomar performance. However, with the rhythm section of bassist Lewis Worrell and drummer Milford Graves playing with him, there was less need for Baraka to do the sort of work he did at Asilomar. His voice does not have to be an entire band. The horn players, John Tchiai on alto saxophone and trombonist Roswell Rudd (whose composition "Sweet V" underlies and follows Baraka's performance), only enter after Baraka finishes speaking. This arrangement reinforces the notion that Baraka's voice is a horn (and perhaps that the horns are voices), vocalizing and verbalizing the lines that are taken up by Tchiai and Rudd after the words finish. However, if Baraka enunciates slightly less vehemently, his tempo and shifts of accents before and after the beat are not less pronounced than at Asilomar. As Aldon Nielsen, among other commentators on "jazz poetry," observes, too often before this recording the collaboration between poets and jazz artists consisted essentially of musicians playing behind a poet with the musicians doing the heavy sonic lifting of having to follow the poet, who pays minimal attention to her or his accompanists.[49] In this case, though Baraka's actual words do not vary from his written text as published in *The Dead Lecturer,* there is the sense that Baraka, Worrell, and Graves are familiar with the others' work and are listening carefully to each other, to the timbre and tempo of their particular contribution, as the piece moves forward, as was often the case with free jazz players whose music necessitated such close attention to their collaborators' work. Given Baraka's argument in his prose criticism that free jazz is actually a return to the blues impulse, as well as his double-voiced diction and syntax uttered from a stance as a contemporary Trismegistus, his reading, then, is already straining toward a black voice located somewhere on the double-helix of the black radical continuum as encoded in African American music.

BLACK LOVE, BLACK WORLD: BARAKA READS "BLACK ART"

This sort of collaborative attention is even more evident in Baraka's work with an amazing band led by drummer Sunny Murray and including tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler, trumpeter (and frequent colleague of Ornette Coleman) Don Cherry, and bassists Lewis Worrell and Henry Grimes on *Sonny's Time Now,* which was recorded in November 1965 about a month before Baraka left Harlem for Newark as BARTS unraveled. The LP was later released by Baraka's Jihad Productions.[50] As Carter Mathes reflects, the performance of Baraka's "Black Art," and indeed even the textual version of the poem, displays the deep influence of Ayler's post-Coltrane foregrounding of rupture and unity in his music. In some respects, the poem is sermonic in that it draws the listener in and describes an apocalyptic landscape of the destruction of the existing order, a sort of breaking of the seven seals of the ghetto rendered through an ethnic imaginary of Newark (and Harlem): Irish police, Italian mobsters, Jewish "owners," and "Negro" misleaders. The violent (and troublingly misogynist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic) rupture clears a space for a new world a-coming, for black art, black love, and a black world. One can see in this an analogue to Ayler's demolition of Western music from Gershwin to "Greensleeves" to "La Marseillaise," clearing the musical landscape for a new unity, both musical and spiritual. According to Baraka, Ayler's music was a sort of marching music for a new crusade, a unity in which "notes" were replaced by "sound"—recalling, as taken up in chapter 3, a similar comment he made earlier in a set of liner notes for a 1959 Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis album but with a more revolutionary cast.[51]

If one was pressed to say what makes the performance on the recording more "black" than earlier recordings, it is this sense of rupture and synthesis that is sounded with even more volume and urgency that in "Black Dada Nihilismus." It is true that Baraka's diction draws on black vernacular speech, using in moments of exhortation a sort of street apostrophe (e.g., "Put it on him, poem"). However, that use of the vernacular, both in diction and intonation (e.g., the emphatic spondee of "bullshit"), is not a

simple recreation of black English on the street but is cast in surrealistic, Césairist sentences that are hard to imagine occurring in everyday speech.

At the same time, Baraka interpolates vocalized noises (sirens and machine guns) and shrieks that echo Ayler's imitation of voices and noises. It is Ayler who first makes his saxophone imitate a siren and Baraka who follows him rather than the reverse. In other words, the dialogue here between poet and musician, a kind of "trading fours," truly goes both ways rather than separate ways and is not simply the musicians following behind the words as had too often been the case in jazz and poetry performances. Ayler frequently plays figures that sound like distorted Gershwin riffs in the moment that apocalypse modulates into the call for a black poem, a black art, a black love, black virtue, and a black world. Don Cherry counterpoints the rhetorical violence of Baraka's words and sound with bright sounding riffs that resembles Miles Davis in the more boppish performances of his "cool" period.

According to Baraka, it was Ayler's sound that was at the center of his music and its meaning: "The overwhelming sound was, I felt, the principal focus of Albert's *musical intentions.*"[52] Ayler's sound, in Baraka's estimation, was key to the representation or embodying of black rupture and unity, history as traumatic process, the sounding of the rationally indigestible and impossible to ignore. Fred Moten provocatively associates Ayler's music with the scream of Aunt Hester/Esther as she is stripped naked and beaten in Frederick Douglass's autobiographies.[53] It is worth noting that Aunt Hester's scream as such is not hard to understand. One would expect such a response from someone who is being brutally beaten. The question is what does that sound signify in Douglass's narratives when he describes passing the bloody gates to the hell of slavery as a boy? What does the sound of a very similar moment do in Booker T. Washington's first autobiography, *The Story of My Life and Work:* "The thing in connection with slavery that has left the deepest impression on me was the instance of seeing a grown man, my uncle, tied to a tree early one morning, stripped naked, and someone whipping him with

a cowhide. As each blow touched his back the cry, 'Pray, master! Pray, master!' came from his lips, and made an impression upon my boyish heart that I shall carry with me to my grave."[54] Again, the pleading screams of a man being whipped would seem transparently logical on one level if one were to witness such an event. It is the invocation of that sound to stand in for the irreducible trauma of slavery, not as an event but as a centuries-long process that is impossible to truly render or narrate rationally in the text and so needs the sound as an equivalent marker. If one accepts Baraka's premise that Ayler's fundamental musical project is his sound, and Moten's argument that Ayler's sound is connected to that which, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, cannot be passed on, which is to say the sheer horror of a traumatic process that must be represented and cannot be represented, then it is the sheer noise of "Black Art" in collaboration with and modeled after Ayler that makes Baraka's performance "blacker" than his earlier recordings. As Baraka recalled in his later poetic sequence *Wise, Why's, Y's:*

> I still hear that
> song.
> that cry
> cries
> screams
> life exploded
>
> our world exploding us
> transformed to niggers[55]

"SOCIAL REEVALUATION AND RISE": BARAKA READS ON *BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL SOUL AND MADNESS*

When thinking about the antecedents of hip hop in the Black Arts Movement, many commentators cite the work of the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron. While one can see those obvious connections, even if Scott-Heron vociferously resisted that attribution, another important forerunner is Baraka's performance of "Beautiful Black Women" on the 1968 LP *Black and Beautiful Soul and*

Madness.[56] This performance differed from earlier recorded collaborations between Baraka and musicians in that it was almost completely in an r&b/soul modality as opposed to jazz. Baraka performs the poem over a nearly acapella (with only a bass accompanying the vocalists) sampling of the refrain of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' "Ooh, Baby, Baby" sung by the Jihad Singers, a group that included BARTS veteran and actor Yusef Iman and young performers from Baraka's Newark-based Spirit House.

Baraka credited a number of poets—Yusef Rahman, Amus Mor of Chicago, Larry Neal, and Askia Touré—as major influences in the new ways he incorporated black music into both his poetic composition and performance style. Baraka found Rahman, Mor, and Neal especially helpful in further developing an already present approach to bebop and free jazz in his work.[57] While these poets also drew on r&b/soul and gospel, it was Askia Touré who was most influential in Baraka's increased integration of the formal resources of black popular music into his poetry and performance style: "Askia had the songlike cast to his words, as if the poetry actually was meant to be sung. I heard him once up at the Baby Grand when we first got into Harlem and that singing sound influenced what I was to do with poetry from then on. To me, Larry and Askia were the state of the art, where it was, at that moment."[58] For those who have heard Touré, Baraka's performance of "Beautiful Black Women" on *Black and Beautiful Soul and Madness* clearly shows the impact of Touré's "singing sound."[59] The cadences, the more consistently southern black diction and accent (Touré was born in North Carolina and lived most of his first six years in Georgia before he moved to Dayton, Ohio, with his family), the emotive emphases, the phrase "black queens," the timbre of Baraka's voice, and the direct connection to r&b vocal music as registered by the Jihad Singers' sampling of Smokey Robinson all distinctly recall Touré. In fact, at first hearing, one might think that one were listening to Touré. Of course, the poem is marked by certain turns that characterized Baraka's work throughout his life, such as the verbal still or clip of Ruby Dee weeping at the window (as if it were a newly

discovered clip of the film version of *A Raisin in the Sun* that was cut from the final version) that reminds the reader/listener of Baraka's engagement with and repurposing of a wide range of popular culture beyond music, especially film and science fiction literature.

In "The Changing Same," he similarly posits r&b as doing much of what the jazz avant-garde was attempting to do in a more self-consciously radical way: "The songs of R&B, for instance, what are they about? What are the people, for the most part, singing about? Their lives. That's what the New Musicians are playing about, and the projection of forms for those lives."[60]

Baraka further declares r&b to be an essential part of revolutionary black culture, of a liberated black nation in the making: "That what will come will be a *Unity Music*. The Black Music which is jazz and blues, religious and secular. Which is New Thing and Rhythm and Blues. The consciousness of social reevaluation and rise, a social spiritualism. A mystical walk up the street to a new neighborhood where all the risen will live."[61] Other leading Black Arts activists made much the same point, often anticipating and helping inspire what Baraka would articulate in "The Changing Same." As noted in the previous chapter, Askia Touré argued that it was necessary for any serious black radical to see the rebellious impulses and revolutionary potential in r&b and other forms of black popular culture. Larry Neal further suggested that Black Arts writers look to the soul performers for a model of the relationship of the revolutionary black artist to the people in "And Shine Swam On," the afterword to *Black Fire*. The relationship, in Neal's view, encompasses the poetics of performance, style, voice, embodiment, and text:

> What this has all been leading us to say is that the poet must become a performer, the way James Brown is a performer—loud, gaudy and racy. He must take his work where his people are: Harlem, Watts, Philadelphia, Chicago and the rural South. He must learn to embellish the context in which the work is executed; and, where possible, link the work to all usable aspects of the music. For the context of the work is as important as the work itself. Poets must learn to sing, dance and chant their works, tearing into the substance of their individual and collective experiences. We must

> make literature move people to a deeper understanding of what this thing is all about, be a kind of priest, a black magician, working juju with the word on the world.[62]

Black Arts critics and cultural theorists not only noted the appearance of a new strain of socially conscious r&b/soul as a marker of the radicalization of the black masses that was expressed most dramatically in the urban uprisings of the 1960s, but also provided interpretations of r&b/soul as sounding the new spirit, sacred and profane, and social basis of the emerging black nation. The relationship between the new consciousness and the music was a reciprocal one. The music gave voice to and inspired this consciousness and its political expression, which in turn helped open spaces for soul artists to release even more radical and far less figurative (or less in the mode of "curses in code," to use the formulation of Clay in *Dutchman*) records of social protest and black affirmation. There was perhaps some irony in this theorization of r&b/soul since, as Craig Werner argues, soul, at least in its early incarnation, was significantly an interracial affair, with black and white producers, arrangers, songwriters, and studio bands at Motown, Stax, and Atlantic. Of course, these white musicians and music industry workers clearly understood that they were working with black artists in a black idiom for a largely black audience—even at Motown, which has been often misrepresented as somehow less "black" in its offerings than the r&b/soul of Stax and Atlantic.[63]

Certainly, black audience members themselves understood the music as theirs, reinterpreting and repurposing the sounds, words, and tropes of r&b/soul in moments of sharp rebellion and racial conflict. The cry of "Burn, Baby, Burn" on the streets of Watts in 1965 was drawn from the trademark call of the Magnificent Montague, a leading r&b DJ in Los Angeles, without prompting, as far as is known, by any organized black radical group. Similarly, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas' 1964 "Dancing in the Street" was widely taken or appropriated by activists and black people generally to refer to the uprisings that broke out that year, as well as to African American protest generally.

"THE WORLD IS HEAVIER THAN THEY KNOW": MARXISM AND BARAKA'S "DOPE SOUND"

The synthesis of free jazz and r&b/soul (often in collaboration with jazz and popular black musicians) in the late Black Arts era shortly before and as Baraka moved toward Third World Marxism distinguished Baraka's mature performance style. William Harris perceptively delineates this synthesis:

> Baraka's later poem, "Dope" (the version we are examining was recited in 1978 at Columbia University) is both written and delivered in a black style. In this poem Baraka renders his Marxist message in the sermonic style of the black Baptist preacher, drawing on a black performance style. Unlike the 1981 rendition of "Dope," with David Murray and Steve McCall, there is no musical accompaniment. Baraka says, "You can be the music yourself. You don't have to have a band." . . . Even though the David Murray version enhanced the poem with musical nuance, by underscoring musical themes, Baraka's reading without music embodied the black musical style; that is, at this point, he has internalized it.[64]

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that in his reading of "Dope," Baraka adopts the tone and style of a working-class black Baptist worshipper who has been hypnotized by both an accommodationist version of black religion and the mass media—really a mass media degeneration of black religion as rendered through various sorts of televangelists, both secular and sacred. Or even more reconditely, Baraka takes on the voice of a class-conscious, nation-conscious black revolutionary who then ventriloquizes a bamboozled black worker in a city like Newark, which is rendered as an archetypal landscape of the black working class. In a recording of a 1978 performance of "Dope" in Buffalo, Baraka briefly introduces the poem, saying it is about living in Newark, amended to the ghetto generally.[65] While one might see the poem as holding the black working class in a sort of contempt for its naiveté and almost willful self-delusion, the speaker in a sort of moan places himself among his people, "our people," as well as among "most people" and "every people," class, and nation. That is to say, working people everywhere understandably keep asking, what is this pain and when will it stop?

uuuuuuuuuu
uuuuuuuuuu
uuuuuuuuuu uuu ray light morning fire lynch yet
uuuuuuu, yester-pain in dreams
comes again. race-pain, people our people
our people
everywhere . . . yeh . . . uuuuu, yeh
uuuuu. yeh
our people
yes people
every people
most people
uuuuuu, yeh uuuuu, most people
in pain
yester-pain, and pain today[66]

It is crucial to remember this deep sympathy and identification with the cry of the oppressed, especially the working, in order to understand Baraka's stance in the rest of the poem. His performance modulates into the humorous satiric voice of a black working-class Newarker (and by extension, every ghetto dweller—and ultimately all working-class people) bamboozled by mass culture, especially the televangelist opium that both explains and palliates the pain of national and class oppression as the work of the devil, not of the system of capitalist exploitation:

mus is be the devil, cain be rockefeller
(eyes roll
up batting, and jumping all the way around
to face the
other direction) caint be him, no lawd
aint be dupont, no lawd, cain be, no lawd,
no way
noway, naw saw, no way jose—cain be
them rich folks theys good to us theys good to us
theys
good to us theys

> good to us theys good to us, i know, the
> massa tolt me
> so, i seed it on channel 7, i seed it on
> channel 9 i seed
> it on channel 4 and 2 and 5.[67]

One notable thing about this performance is that if one accepts William Harris's argument that "Dope" is among the first examples of Baraka's mature "black" voice in which different genres of black music are fully integrated with urban and rural, northern and southern, popular and vanguard modes of black speech, then it forces the reader/listener to reevaluate the importance of Baraka's Marxist period to his work. While Baraka was long an effective and powerful performer of his work, it was really in his move to Marxism that he fully came into the voice that would characterize the second half of his life. As Aldon Nielsen reminds us, while Baraka frequently invoked the phrase "socialist realism" during this portion of his career, his work is closer to the Marxist avant-gardism of Brecht with his predilection for revealing the machinery behind his (and bourgeois) takes on the social world than the Marxist realism of Lukács, who preferred the work of Balzac, Tolstoy, and later Thomas Mann.[68] It is also not really in the vein of the Soviet school of socialist realism that was not much practiced outside of the USSR, certainly not in the United States, though it does share some of the mythic, iconic qualities of the Soviet school. What Baraka referenced by "socialist realism" is actually closer to what the U.S. left called "social realism" in the 1930s and 1940s. Social realism was not so much a genre or body of literature with reasonably clear formal and thematic features in the way of nineteenth-century realism, naturalism, gothic literature, surrealism, or indeed Soviet socialist realism, but an ideological stance or set of related stances connected to the left, especially the communist left originally. That is to say, social realism was literature and art that, like Baraka's Marxist work, sought to uncover the social forces and deep structures that shaped reality and sought to give a sense of the felt experience of that reality, rather than simply presenting "realistic"

surface details, not a coherent style or aesthetic approach. For Baraka, black music was essentially African American social realism, making audible, as Frederick Douglass suggested long ago in his comments on slave music in his autobiographies, their oppressive reality, their consciousness about this reality, and their attempts to change it.

The long foreground of Baraka's development as a performer, a development that was crucial to the formal evolution of his poetry and other writing, is also one of his evolution as a Marxist artist whose work sounded an analysis of class and nation, attempting to reveal the process of the formation of both. Black music was key for Baraka's models of the relationship of the black artist to the black audience, of the expression and understanding of the intertwining of class and national identity and oppression (including the ways in which that identity and oppression can be misunderstood and obscured), of how national and racial feeling (or affect, if one prefers) is structured in ways that are apprehensible by, of, and for a mass audience, of ways that black speech in all its registers can be integrated into poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I SEE HIM SOMETIMES"

William Parker Reimagines and Amiri Baraka Glosses Curtis Mayfield

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, jazz bassist and composer William Parker put together an all-star band that toured widely, playing what he called "The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield," basically reimaginings of Mayfield's songs from his days with the Impressions in the 1960s to his solo career in the 1970s. These tours are documented by the 2010 recording *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,* as well as by an imported recording of live performances in Rome, *The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,* and various videos available on YouTube and elsewhere on the internet.[1] Among the stellar players in the band were percussionist (and frequent Parker collaborator) Hamid Drake, pianist Dave Burrell, reed players Sabir Mateen and Darryl Foster, trumpet player Lewis Barnes, and vocalist Leena Conquest. Joining this assemblage of musicians was Amiri Baraka on voice. This chapter focuses on some of the ways that Parker and his band, including Baraka, reimagined Mayfield's songs to reveal an inner or inside song that expresses both the Black Arts era and the present moment of the performance.

Baraka's glosses on Mayfield and his songs are an essential part of that reimagining, expressing Baraka's vision of a black ethnogenesis out of oppression that is based on a racial caste system

which in turn produces a black working class and the capacity for national liberation in alliance with other social groups. Baraka's glosses trace and reimagine a black past, present, and future through the arc of black music and black speech and in cooperation with black musicians reimagining works of a preeminent socially engaged r&b/soul artist of the 1960s and 1970s. These glosses are of a piece with Baraka's other work in his Marxist period, such as *Wise, Why's, Y's* (1995) and *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems* (2003). These Marxist works update *Blues People* and the notion of black popular music, especially jazz and blues, as containing a people's and nation's history and revolutionary aspirations for freedom and self-determination:

> And the fundamental reason for this is that this music is dangerous! Dangerous because it carries the memory and tradition of a struggling people. Dangerous because in its traditions and even the timbre of its expression are contained the beautiful, the strong, the revolutionary, the democratic, the innovative, the collective. Because the music bears with it all the elements of its historical creators' lives. It is a music of Americans who have never been allowed entrance into America. It is the classical music of a society that has always made its creators chattel while they used the word freedom for a new variety of sanitary napkin.[2]

This chapter focuses primarily on the 2010 CD, with some reference to the 2007 recording mostly as a point of comparison. This is not only because *I Plan to Stay a Believer* is the most accessible document of the tour but also because that recording, as one Parker (perhaps with some input from Baraka and the rest of the band) assembled from a range of performances, represents Parker's sense of what best reveals the "inside" of Mayfield's songs. In this project, Baraka was essentially improvising his part in each performance so that the words, like the instrumental and sung parts, varied considerably each time Parker and his band played, as attested by the 2007 Italian live recording. For example, Baraka's contribution to "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue" on the Italian recording is almost completely different from that on *I Plan to Stay a Believer*.[3] Parker and Baraka, then, proposed that there are multiple songs "inside" those of Mayfield—much as jazz has always found almost endless

possibilities in a song. For that matter, as Casey Hale points out, Mayfield himself recorded and released three versions of "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue," a live performance and a studio recording in the Black Arts era and another studio rendition late in his career in 1996 with somewhat different arrangements and emphases, already suggesting manifold "inside songs."[4]

In the case of Parker and Baraka, Baraka's words in the 2007 Italian live recording echo the portion of Clay's final soliloquy in Baraka's *Dutchman,* where he speaks about black violence being sublimated in black music. The difference here is that Baraka suggests such sublimation is not, as proposed in *Dutchman,* an avoidance of the difficult task of revolution but rather has do with black survival in what he calls in the 2010 performance of "Move On Up" by Parker and his band "a protracted struggle." However, as in *Dutchman,* Baraka also indicates that "all hell gon' break out" when the music stops and black people are able to deal with their oppression directly. Again, as in *Dutchman,* "all hell" here is revolution. Baraka invokes, among other things, the rider on a black horse with a pair of scales in the book of Revelation, who is posited as a sign of black revolution, the dividing point between now and the new world a-coming. This black rider of revolutionary destruction and renewal is posed against the "pale horse, pale rider" of Katherine Anne Porter and the version of modernism that is one of regret, of a sort of nostalgia for a lost life, of a false history of slavery and Jim Crow, and, especially, of a deceitful (delusional) account of black character and of the black response to oppression encoded in black music: "Black rider of the black horse, seeking like the sun, beyond what will come, leaving a trail of fire and the last thing we dig, the horse fades. That's what's in the marrow of your grandmama's humming."[5]

Baraka's glosses on other songs shared between the two records have more in common with each other than was the case of "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue." For example, Baraka's vocalizations on the 2010 recording of "Freddie's Dead" contain themes and verbal riffs also found on the 2007 version of the song. However, even so, there are considerable variations of tone, word choice and order, and what might be thought of

as the narrative of his comments. These changes remind us that Baraka is not, as poets have often done when reading with music, performing set pieces but improvising like the other members of the band.

What is intended by "reimaginings" here is not any deep critical term that will be deployed in other contexts beyond this study but simply an awareness that *The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield* is not a tribute project (or only a tribute project) or some sort of repertory set of performances. Parker and his band do not recreate Mayfield's work with historical accuracy as some "early music" ensemble might do with the compositions of Guillaume de Machaut but recast the songs in which their interpretation, or the measurement of what Baraka called the psychic "weight" in *Blues People,* of that music is pushed to the fore. As Parker says in the liner notes to the CD version of the recording, "It was never the goal to do a cover; we can never play Curtis Mayfield better than Curtis Mayfield did." Rather, it was to reveal "an inside song which lives in the shadows, in-between the sounds and silences and behind the words, waiting to be reborn as a new song."

What is inside the song, according to Parker, is essentially the radical black art and politics of the 1960s and 1970s. This radical political and cultural moment links to, revisits, and revises, after the manner of Baraka's notion of the blues continuum, the blues impulse and the "changing same," a long line of black efforts toward political and cultural liberation and self-determination:

> In the 1960s during the civil rights movement there was a musical soundtrack in the background: Max Roach, Charles Mingus, Archie Shepp, Jackie McLean, John Coltrane. Curtis Mayfield was right in the middle directing his music to the cry of freedom. Ritual into Field Holler > Field Holler into Spiritual > Spiritual into Blues > Blues into Swing > Swing into Bebop > Bebop into Post Bop > Post Bop into Avant Garde > Avant Garde back to Ritual. A Circle, and all part of the bigger tune called Peoples' Music. Reclamation of land, self-determination, and right to change existing structure rather than assimilation into a quagmire misnamed progress, Inside Songs are time into rhythm, rhythm into pulse into chant. Heartbeats, Stairsteps, Temptations, Supremes, Miracles, Impressions, Contours, Crusaders, Clouds of Joy, The Messengers and The Arkestra. Rahsaan, Hasan, Hannibal Yusef Waliyaya, Yusef Iman.

> The unrecognized old days, Lowell Davidson, Alan Shorter, Larry Neal, Bob Kaufman, Ed Bullins, Ben Caldwell, who are they. They are also inside Curtis Mayfield songs as well as Robert Thompson, Romare Bearden, Ted Joans, Nikki Giovanni: to love one is to love them all. To the left of melody is harmony conceived out of homage and inspiration, the need is to give birth to the Now! Long live all the revolutionary poets and musicians of past and present, who continue to protest through their art until all things are like they should be.

As Casey Hale argues, Baraka's glosses are key to Parker's project, both in terms of what Baraka's vocalizations provide in the present and of the meaning of Baraka himself and his body of political and cultural work (referencing "unity music," as we have seen a key term from "The Changing Same") as tropes of the Black Arts era: "Parker's collaboration with Amiri Baraka is essential to Parker's historico-political project, for in choosing to self-identify with the spirit of Mayfield as he does, Parker gestures toward another 'inside song': the vision of a unified, self-aware, and politically active African-American culture, aspiring to what Baraka, writing in 1966, called 'Unity Music.'"[6]

"Gloss" in this chapter is used both in the sense that the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as "a word inserted between the lines or in the margin as an explanatory equivalent of a foreign or otherwise difficult word in the text" and in the somewhat archaic sense that the same dictionary renders as "a poetical composition in which a stanza of some well-known poem is treated as a text for amplification, each of the successive stanzas of the 'gloss' being made to end with one of the lines or couplets of the text."[7] Given that Parker sees the "inside" of Curtis Mayfield's songs as containing the poetry, plays, visual art, and music of the Black Arts era, it makes sense that he would ask the leading Black Arts figure, a revolutionary poet of past and present, Amiri Baraka, to be a part of the group, to provide a verbal gloss on Mayfield and the reimagining of Mayfield's music during the second Bush presidency. As Parker himself said of Baraka's role, "Amiri Baraka is extending the message, writing off the words of Curtis Mayfield. It adds another layer of text. You have the music, the lyrics, the arrangement of the music, the improvisation, the

unanswered questions that the music poses—the unanswered questions that are being posed spontaneously—then you try to provide responses with what Amiri Baraka's doing. We're doing 'Think' and 'Pusherman' as instrumentals, without a singer, just Amiri Baraka's poetry."[8]

Of course, Baraka collaborated many, many times with musicians during his career. There is probably no other U.S. poet who so often worked with as wide a range and as great a number of musicians, sometimes accompanying them, sometimes being accompanied by them, and sometimes working as an equal and integral part of a collective. Even when Baraka performed without musicians, he would sing, drum on the microphone or lectern, vocalize instruments, and so on. His poetry also frequently pays homage to and comments on music and musicians. Consequently, one is reluctant to assert that his performances with Parker and his band were absolutely unlike anything he had ever done before. The lyric style of Parker's liner notes, the assertion that the project is in many respects to reveal the history "inside" black music so as to be as profoundly present as possible ("the need is to give birth to the Now") while looking toward a liberated future ("until all things are like they should be"), is clearly in the spirit of and deeply influenced by Baraka's own work, not the least his liner notes, providing a sort of template for Parker here.

A HISTORICAL PAGEANT: BLACK MUSIC AND BARAKA'S MARXIST POETRY OF HISTORY

From early on in his career, Baraka probed the mythic dimensions of history, the uses to which history was put in interpreting, framing, justifying, and/or critiquing society, particularly the arrangement of social power in the present. He considered history as myth, either as Marx's nightmare weighing on the present or as empowering efforts toward black liberation. As noted in chapter 2, Baraka was not simply interested in considering black music as social history in *Blues People*. He was also concerned with black musical performances as sonic processes that sound black feeling and black moral judgments (to paraphrase Nikki Giovanni) in

ways that allowed and continued to allow black people to make sense, to feel and apprehend the "weight" of their lives in the United States and the world. Such apprehension in Baraka's view occurred on both intellectual and affective levels, contesting the racial (or national) and class hierarchies and oppression encoded in the myths of "mainstream" history and culture. By "myth," what is meant here is not so much "ideology" in the more pejorative "false consciousness" sense of the term in some variants of Marxism (e.g., Roland Barthes's use of "myth" during his more explicitly Marxist phase), but rather myth as a "true" national and class consciousness and way of interpreting reality that could be posed against various false consciousnesses. In other words, what is seen is the notion that the subject is always under the influence of some myth or ideology framing consciousness and self-identification; the question is, whose myth or ideology deployed to what end?

Interestingly, as Baraka moved into his Black Arts phase, particularly that portion of his Black Arts career most influenced by Maulana Karenga and his Kawaida philosophy, myth in many respects superseded history as it has been generally understood (e.g., an account of what "really" happened) or stood in for history. Perhaps another way to put it is that, anticipating much later black speculative fiction/science fiction/fantasy, Baraka posited that history is always myth, always about power, and that black interests and black self-determination require myths that are about the understanding of basic social relations and social identity, about black self-determination and development, rather than a record of true events as such. In this view, decisions about what events and causes of events are significant and what are not are always subjective, partial, and closely correlated with social interests, be they national, racial, class, or gender. For example, Baraka staged *Black Mass* (1966), a version of the Nation of Islam's sacred history of Yacub and the emergence of white people in a sort of black mad scientist story, at Proctor's Palace Theater, an old movie theater that began as a vaudeville hall, in Downtown Newark. It was not important to Baraka whether that story was literally true but that on a mythic level it provided an

interpretive vision of society and its origins which made more sense and posed actual social relations more clearly than "mainstream" history.

Larry Neal cast Baraka's 1967 play *Slave Ship, a Historical Pageant* (first performed at Baraka's Spirit House in Newark's Central Ward) in much the same light: "One of the prime motivations behind the work is to suck the audience into a unique and very precise universe. The episodes of this 'pageant' do not appear as strict interpretations of history. Rather, what we are digging is ritualized history. That is, history that allows emotional and religious participation on the part of the audience."[9]

On the face of it, a representation of the Middle Passage, a clearly verifiable historical event or complex of centuries-long events, would seem to be a quite different thing from the religious myth of the Yacub story. However, Neal argues that in *Slave Ship,* Baraka uses a ritualized version of a historical experience to replace, in fact actively combat, the white framing, presentation, and interpretation of history, which is really another sort of myth designed to imprison black people rather than some objective presentation of fact. The use of the words "historical pageant" in the play's title also ties *Slave Ship* to the historical pageants performed by African Americans throughout the twentieth century, often under the auspices of black churches. This reference to pageants is not only an homage with a long black tradition but also suggests that these events were always about creating a ritual that bonded performers and audience. Given that the performers in such pageants were generally drawn from church members, the idea of creating a performance in which the artists and audience were one was, in fact, a reality—a reality that Baraka tried to recreate. The projection of black art as a sort of religious or quasi-religious ritual that erased the boundary between performers and audience, taking them to a common space outside European culture and European notions of history, exerted enormous influence on many of the best-known Black Arts theaters, especially the New Lafayette Theater and the National Black Theater, in the creation of the non-mimetic, non-narrative "Black Ritual Theater" strand of Black Arts performance.[10]

With Baraka's turn to Marxism-Leninism (or Third Word Marxism or Maoism, if one prefers) after his passage through "Revolutionary Kawaidaism" (a combination of Marxism and Kawaidaist cultural nationalism) in the early to mid-1970s, he returned to a notion of history in both the sense of what actually happened in the material world and the sense of an account of what actually happened framed by class and national perspectives. In some ways it is obvious why this would be. If Marx and Engels saw their philosophical approach as "dialectical," their general method was "historical materialism" (to use the phrase apparently invented and certainly popularized by Engels that later Marxists took up) or "practical materialism" (to use Marx's term). Marx and Engels, though cautioning against the misuse or stunting potential of history as a frame for understanding the present, nevertheless saw some sense of historical development as essential for understanding human development and possible liberation.

One might boil this historical materialist approach down to the notion that the material world determines consciousness (or spirit), and that human consciousness (and culture) changes with the development of the material base of society, particularly the means and organization of the production of goods in human society, which in turn provides the intellectual and physical capacity to further alter the base with concomitant impacts on consciousness. Traditionally, most Marxists before roughly the first half of the twentieth century greatly prioritized the material/technical/economic base over the "superstructure" of culture. However, Marx and Engels were extremely concerned with the mythic dimensions of history as narrative, even narratives of liberation created by oppressed people, and the ability of such narratives to encourage or inhibit revolutionary political and economic change. They famously warned against the dangers of using historical narratives of the past to make sense of the working-class struggles of the present. Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living," with revolutionaries anxiously conjuring "up the spirits

of the past to their service" in moments of revolutionary crisis, conjuring that is inevitably an inadequate lens through which to accurately read the present crisis.[11] Yet the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is a historicist critique of the uses of history, reminding us of the limitations and dangers of these uses, of the imprisoning aspects, both as a means of hegemonic control and as an insufficient guide to interpretation, of history's mythic dimensions. In other words, according to Marx and Engels (and Baraka), it is crucial to discover and remember the concrete details and specific alignment of social forces of a historical moment if one is going to create a revolutionary movement capable of meeting the demands of the present. And one needs to remember that Marx and Engels were extremely focused on the present and the near future, and as is well-known, did not spend much time considering what the precise details of socialism and communism might look like, at least in their writings.

Marx and Engels, especially Engels, did expend considerable effort in studying and recounting what they saw as the historical development of human society despite their caveats about the dangers of history as narratives and templates for revolutionary movements. This raises the ideological dialectic of objectivity and partisanship that is a hallmark of Marxist thinking and marks Baraka's later work. That is to say, there is an objective reality, of concrete details and larger natural and social processes, that can be and must be known if a revolutionary movement is going to be successful but the study of which is only useful if in service of human liberation, of the working class and other oppressed peoples. To paraphrase one of Marx's and Engels's best-known observations, for most of human existence, scholars only studied the world; the real problem, however, was to change it.

Much of Baraka's Marxist writing, then, examines the uses and abuses of history as revealing the objective conditions and historical motion of society for the partisan purposes of changing it, of human liberation, and of myth, in both a liberatory sense and one of control and containment. Baraka was cognizant of Marx's and Engels's (and Lenin's and Mao's) warnings about the dangers of bourgeois myth and even the myths of past struggles of the

oppressed that are inadequate for the present moment or the full needs of the black nation and workings class. Still, he was also aware that humans are animals that like to tell stories, giving their lives a shape and meaning that go beyond certain utilitarian firsthand cautionary tales along the lines of "I ate some of those berries last week and got sick; so don't eat those berries."

One of Baraka's primary concerns in his early Marxist writings and new engagement with history was, in fact, to critique and even demolish the ahistorical use of myth for a sort of black nationalism that sought to raise and empower a black bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie, as in "History on Wheels" from his first Marxist collection, *Hard Facts* (1972), as he was making the transition away from Revolutionary Kawaidaism, itself a transitional hybrid of cultural nationalism and Marxism:

> But see, then later
> you talkin afrika, and its unity
> like *a* giant fist of iron, smashing
> "racialism," around the world. But see
> that fist, any fist, reared back to
> strike an enemy, shd strike the real
> enemy. Not a colorless shadow for
> black militants in residence, to
> bloat the pockets and consolidate
> the power of an international
> bourgeoisie.[12]

Baraka set out this post-Kawaida Marxist idea of a black revolutionary history that certainly has a mythic dimension, framing the interpretation of events. However, the poem is even more about the demystification of capitalist and cultural nationalist ideological fantasies. It argues for the necessity of a frame or interpretive stance that provides a true historical account which furnishes the black nation and working class with accurate information; a simultaneously class, nationalist, and internationalist consciousness; and the spirit necessary to build a revolutionary movement aimed at their true enemy (and the enemy's collaborators). As Kathy Lou Schultz argues in her discussion of Baraka's

epic history poetry sequence *Wise, Why's, Y's* (begun by Baraka in the 1980s but not published in full until 1995): "When comparing Baraka's epic with that of Pound, it is important to note the difference between 'making' and 'containing' history. Pound's notion of a poem *containing* history is markedly different than Baraka's focus on *making* history. To contain history in a poem preserves it, yet holds it inert. History is not active in this sense; it may even be neutral. Baraka, in contrast, actively makes a history that may otherwise remain untold out of fragments, detritus and silences. Baraka's history thus fulfils a need for the African American collective."[13]

Baraka, then, is talking about the sort of "hard facts" needed to strip away the various sorts of illusions, whether white bourgeois or black cultural nationalist, that prevent the black masses (and their allies) from seeing their actual condition and the possibilities for building winning coalitions of forces. One place where those hard facts are articulated is black music. As Ben Hickman says of Baraka's take on black music in *Hard Facts,* it is a space in which "the osmotic relation of expressed desire and mimesis gives rise to projective representation, a species of art that can call for action at the same time it describes."[14] While in some respects Baraka departs from his more strictly mythic Black Arts stance in this return to hard facts in "Dope," he still retains many of his earlier strategies in approaching that history. (It is a mark of Baraka's ideological transformation and continuity that much of his self-published Black Arts–era work appeared under the imprint of "Jihad Productions," a name that translates into the later "People's War" imprint, albeit in a Marxist-Maoist register.) He continues and even deepens his engagement with the sort of shock drawn from Antonin Artaud's "theater of cruelty" that was so influential on Baraka's early Black Arts and proto–Black Arts theater and poetry, even if rendered in a bitterly humorous tone, to move the reader/listener into seeing (and hearing) things anew—or perhaps, more accurately, as they are. The horror of the Middle Passage and the rupture with Africa, for example, is actually heightened by the painful sarcasm pointing out the betrayal of Africans by their rulers collaborating with slave

traders, especially for black radicals like the Barakas who were or had been cultural nationalists:

> lazy niggers chained theyselves and threw
> they own black asses in the bottom
> of the boats, [(well now that you mention it King
> Assblackuwasi helped throw yr ass in
> the bottom of the boat, yo mamma, wife, and
> you never seed em no more)][15]

While an ethos of performance in tandem with and/or modeled on musical performance is often considered to be a hallmark of Black Arts poetry, Baraka's early Marxist period, which admittedly overlapped with the Black Arts era, saw an even more intense engagement with black music than in his previous verse. Such poems now widely circulated in printed texts as "Against Bourgeois Art" and "Dope" were far more familiar in the recorded form of a 1982 LP with reed player David Murray (whose World Saxophone Quartet recorded Baraka's "In the Tradition") and drummer Steve McCall (whose important avant-garde jazz group Air toured with Baraka in the early 1980s) than in print.[16] Almost certainly the most widely read printed versions of these poems in the 1980s were in the liner notes accompanying the record rather than in a volume of poems. More than at any previous point in Baraka's writing life, musicians (e.g., John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Lester Young, and Bob Marley) and black music became the direct subject of his poetry. Of course, black music permeated his poetry throughout his career, but previously his more discursive treatments of that music and its relationship to black history and national identity were primarily found in his prose work. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Baraka increasingly offered interpretations of the historical meaning of jazz, blues, r&b, and soul through his poetry rather than just in essay or prose book form.

In Baraka's poetry of the 1980s, there is frequently a triangulation among verbal text, history, and music. This poetry displays his long-held sense that black music provides a truer account of the felt experience and the black processing of that experience into a usable form than any written history. At the same time,

Baraka's words are designed to make plainer the meaning and interpretive context of that music, articulating the history and myth contained within the music. In short, they gloss the music. At the same time, as Kathy Lou Schultz observes about *Wise, Why's, Y's,* that music is central to the "overall method and meaning" of the poetry.[17] In other words, if the poetry glosses the music, the music in important ways glosses the words, providing the words with an augmented meaning unavailable in the verbal text. The process of sonic nonverbal augmentation of language completes the expression of that which cannot be adequately encompassed in words. Likewise, the workings of this process are displayed in the avant-garde reimaginings, one might even say the futurist elements, of Baraka's Marxist poetry. For example, Baraka frames the verbal text of *Wise, Why's, Y's* as words spoken by a modern African American griot (or *djeli*) that would be part of a visual and sonic montage. The other elements of this montage were the visual art of Vincent Smith (a painter whose career began in the Black Arts Movement and whose method includes the mixture of sand and stone in his paint to give his work a certain texture and depth) and of Tom Feelings (a black left cartoonist and illustrator who was known for his illustrations of black history, including those of the Middle Passage, which appeared in the 1995 children's book *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*) and the various pieces of music assigned to the different sections of the poem.

In our moment it would probably be possible with the resources of animation, editing of images and sound, and the like available through development of home computer technologies to actually create some sort of work that combined the visual (both the figure of the griot and the images of Smith and Feelings) and sonic elements (the music and the words). But it is hard to believe that Baraka thought the project would be fully realizable with the resources available to him as he began work on the poem-sequence in the 1980s or even in its book-length publication in 1995. If it is a score, as he discussed in an interview with Kalamu ya Salaam, it is a score for a work that was likely to exist only as a score, or only as a partially performed score, until technology

caught up with Baraka's imagination.[18] In other words, it was a poetic sequence that encoded a black futurist vision, and how that vision might eventually be presented, in its form even as it looked back on African American history.

More than was the case in his pre-Marxist Black Arts poetry, Baraka contraposed the details of material historical experience (e.g., the African slave trade, New World slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, civil rights, and Black Power) to various black nationalist myths as well as to white bourgeois racist mythology. This insistence on materialism, on motion, on continuity and development reversed his earlier Black Arts prioritizing of spirit or myth over matter, standing the spiral development of his "changing same" on its head, much as Marx did with Hegelian dialectics. Baraka insisted that myth was a prison, a form of control, misdirection, or misunderstanding without a grounding in the material and the historical movement of the material. It was this understanding of an active history (and the telling of history), and its liberatory and oppressive functions, depending on who deploys it, that informed his glosses on the songs of Curtis Mayfield and, indeed, his commentary on the playing of Parker and his band, including Baraka himself.

"BELIEVE IN WHAT'S REAL": GLOSSING BARAKA AS PROLOGUE IN *I PLAN TO STAY A BELIEVER*

Baraka's work with Parker on the "Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield" project was unusual in many respects. For one thing, unlike most poets who recorded with jazz ensembles, including Langston Hughes, Jayne Cortez, Gil Scott-Heron, and Baraka himself previously, he was truly a part of the group, not simply supported by it. While Baraka does perform some older, written set pieces or riffs reconfigured, perhaps for musical accompaniment or interaction, on the "Inside Songs" recordings, for the most part he essentially improvises or freestyles along with the band. This was not absolutely unprecedented among poets from the Black Arts era: Sonia Sanchez has spoken of her work touring with a band that included the drummer Max Roach and the reed

player Archie Shepp and described how they essentially forced her to improvise as they did.[19] Still, such performances are rare in recorded form. Perhaps it was Baraka's participation as a member of a touring band of which he was not the leader or the main focus of attention that in some ways inspired and freed him to improvise and create verbal riffs in new ways.

One interesting aspect of his participation was his heightened used of rhyme, something that Baraka tended to do most often in his popular, occasional poetry (again, occasional in the sense of commenting on a recent event or contemporary issue, such as "Somebody Blew Up America" and "A Modest Proposal for Giuliani's Disposal"). While in part this might have had to do with the impact of hip hop on Baraka's work with music, inspiring a sort of jazz freestyle rhyming as it were, it also resembled Langston Hughes's frequent use of a shifting, irregular rhyme, particularly in such jazz poetry as the sequences in the 1951 *Montage of a Dream Deferred* and the 1961 *Ask Your Mama*.

The one moment in which Baraka's words are fixed or read from a score on the *I Plan to Stay a Believer* CD is the title track in which the vocalist Leena Conquest speaks-sings Baraka's words, punctuated by the sung chorus "I plan to stay a believer" generally repeated twice and a sort of bridge comprising the first verse of Mayfield's song. Interestingly, Baraka's words are only heard through Conquest, not from Baraka himself. Here Baraka is essentially introduced or reintroduced to the audience as the words speak to what Baraka believes at the beginning of the twenty-first century:

> "In the words of Amiri Baraka":
> Believe. Believe is to express. Existence split is a lie. Victory is real. Believe in what's real. Science is real. We have been black, but now we're blue. When we red and the monster be dead. To believe, to live. (I plan to stay a believer.) To be above and below, to understand, believe in ourselves, what we must do, what we must do. I believe in human life and the meaning and sanctity of love. I believe in Du Bois, Douglass, and Malcolm. I believe one is two; I believe in me and you; I believe in me and you. (I plan to stay a believer.) I believe in our struggle. I believe we will win. I believe we need allies—the whole working class. I believe. (I plan to stay a believer). I believe

> in the Afro-American nation. We have a right to self-determination. I believe in revolutionary democracy. I believe. (I plan to stay a believer.)[20]

Conquest then sings the first verse of Mayfield's song, which concludes by casting millenarian Christianity in terms of a new world order for black and white based on faith, but a faith bolstered by actual observation of the material world.[21]

Conquest returns to Baraka's concluding words about halfway between Parker and his band's instrumental recasting of Mayfield's song: "I believe in Du Bois; I believe in Malcolm; I believe in Fannie Lou Hamer; I believe in our people." Again, Baraka's words are spoken-sung from what might be seen as his then-present persona, a persona that is explicitly "Amiri Baraka," a representation and expression of his ideological and ethical stance as of the moment of vocalization, a black Marxist position, one that he had maintained with some relatively minor alterations for decades after his move from cultural nationalism to Third World Marxism in the mid-1970s. What Conquest intones also differs from the rest of Baraka's participation on the other performances on the recording in that it is a set piece rather than an improvisation. Again, one might think of Baraka's words in jazz terms as a sort of "head" (the melody of a tune that precedes and follows the improvisational portion of a piece), an ideological melody against or with which Baraka improvises when he speaks directly on the rest of the record. What follows after Baraka's final words is not a return to the words and tune of Mayfield's song as such, but a long, introspective duet between William Parker on bowed bass and Darryl Foster on soprano saxophone, concluding with a short, slow, equally introspective bass solo without ever returning to Mayfield's original tune, the "head," as it were, speaking perhaps to the openness and unresolved nature of the revolutionary process.

As Parker said in liner notes, this is not simply a restaging or cover of Mayfield's version of "I Plan to Stay a Believer" but quite literally an interpretation, including a direct statement of what Amiri Baraka believed, which turns out to be an "inside song" of Mayfield's piece. It is noteworthy that in Parker's list of

musicians, artists, playwrights, and poets who "are also inside Curtis Mayfield songs," he does not mention Baraka, unquestionably the key figure of the Black Arts Movement, even if he and his career are not the metonyms for the entire movement that some commentators have taken them to be. It seems likely that this is because Baraka's participation in the project put him literally inside the reimaginings of Parker and his band so as to make name-checking him unnecessary. After all, Conquest *does* give his name prominence in "I Plan to Stay a Believer." In that way, the long quoting of Baraka in the album's title and introductory track is in part the reference to arguably the premiere living example of "revolutionary poets and musicians of past and present, who continue to protest through their art until all things are like they should be." Parker's apparently strange sense of time in his liner notes, in which the past, present, and future merge, is embodied in Baraka, who was, again, arguably the most important literary figure of the post–World War II era and was very much alive in the present of the tour and the recording, as demonstrated by his performance. Baraka was for the vast majority of his career an artist looking not only at past and present but also a revolutionary future. In a way, his role in the band and on the recording was to make plain, to interpret, Mayfield's spiral of the "changing same," much as Baraka had always done in his poetry, fiction, criticism, liner notes, and performance.

"DO YOU KNOW WHO WE IS?": BARAKA'S AFRO-FUTURIST FAR PAST IN *I PLAN TO STAY A BELIEVER*

In the first piece on the 2010 CD in which Baraka speaks in his own voice, "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue," his words and the music mirror each other. Both the words and music cite a line of artistic ancestors through quotation, allusion, and paraphrase. After Leena Conquest and the band open with the head, a fairly straightforward rendition of Mayfield's song, Baraka launches a long verbal solo that differs almost entirely from his work in the 2007 recording of the song. The one commonalty is the starting point of black people as an ancient, really the most ancient, people:

"Just being the old people, old old old people, slow to anger after a million or so years. Do you know us? Do you know who we is? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know who you is?"

Baraka then proceeds with a vision of blackness, of the black past that predates the "blue" present and is reclaimed in the revolutionary "red" future. Interestingly, given Ralph Ellison's devasting attack on the CPUSA in *Invisible Man,* Baraka invokes the prologue of Ellison's novel, especially its opening where the narrator speaks of "the invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact." Baraka says, "Before blue is black. After red is black. Our feeling is ultra-violet, invisible to the blind. . . . All they see they think is we. But we is bookends of the invisible. We is three hundred and fifty-three shades of darkness, three hundred and fifty-three flavors of invisible, inside out. three hundred and fifty-three shades of darkness, three hundred and fifty-three flavors of invisible, inside out."[22]

As noted in chapter 2, the continued reference to Ellison's novel reminds the listener of the long kinship of *Invisible Man* to the arc of Baraka's works from his early liner notes and *Blues People* to his late poetry, despite Ellison's sharp criticism of *Blues People* and post–*Invisible Man* posing of jazz as emblematic of U.S. democracy in a positive sense. While as a Marxist and communist (with a small "c"), Baraka clearly rejected the anti-communist, Cold War aspects (as well as the pro-individualistic, antinationalist cast) of *Invisible Man,* in part he reclaimed what he saw as the revolutionary aspects of the novel, particularly the way *Invisible Man* proposes a relationship between black music and black history (and historiography) and suggests that history reaching back to the slave era is held within the music. At the end of what amounts to an entire poem glossing the "inside" of Mayfield's song, Baraka returns to *Invisible Man* and the moment in that novel's prologue where the narrator descends into the history contained in Louis Armstrong's version of Andy Razaf's and Fats Waller's "What Did I Do (to Get So Black and Blue)" and the sermon on the nature of "blackness." This debate between Baraka and Ellison, then, remained as much about the

interpretation and work of *Invisible Man* as it was about *Blues People* and the nature of black music, especially the blues. While Baraka rejected much of how Ellison repositioned himself as a liberal anticommunist, a process that continued after *Invisible Man,* he respected Ellison's earlier stances, even the transitional *Invisible Man* as Ellison moved from Marxism to liberalism.

Almost immediately after the invocation of *Invisible Man,* Baraka modulates to W. E. B. Du Bois's list of the "three gifts" that African Americans gave (or were forced to give) the United States in "Of the Sorrow Songs" in *The Souls of Black Folk:* "What did I do to be so black and blue? What did I do, what did I do to be so black and blue? Hey, we brought the gift of labor, the gift of song and story, the gift of spirit. The gift of labor, the gift of song and story, the gift of spirit. Because we all we, we be old, old old people we real old we we we we really old we is we is we is." Baraka reminds the listener that Africa was not only "the inventor of the human being," as Baraka said in a version of his poem "Evidence" that he recorded with David Murray (a theme to which he returns on the "Inside Songs" project), but also, as Du Bois says in the same paragraph that Baraka samples here, "there before the Pilgrims." African Americans were essential to the building of "America" through their labor, culture, and spirit (which infused U.S. Second Great Awakening Protestantism, especially in the South). Baraka then indirectly leads us to the questions that Du Bois asks at the beginning of the paragraph of the gifts, "Your country? How came it yours?" as a riff with which Baraka plays and worries in his contributions to "This Is My Country."

Baraka plays too with the history and implicit (and sometimes explicit) critique of scholarly and popular "mainstream" historical writing encoded in black music, essentially improvising on the spiritual that became a civil rights anthem, "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned": "How we got turned down and dis(sed). Dis is still the capital of hell. Ask us why we here, playing our selves. Ask us why we here playing ourselves. Like we can't understand."

He also references his early novel *The System of Dante's Hell* (1963), which might be described as a first-person discussion

of the question "why we here, playing ourselves" in America in autobiographical fiction that loosely uses the infernal schema of Dante. The City of Dis is made up of the last three circles of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. Dante's circles were adopted and adapted by Baraka, who supplied a diagram and an explanation of why he placed heretics deeper in Hell in his novel than Dante did in the *Inferno* due to the heretics' denial of true feeling or "identity" as we might understand it now. More than half of Baraka's novel takes place in Dis. However, the Dis Baraka imagines in the twenty-first century gloss on "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue" is not simply a landscape of the alienation of the individual black subject/artist from both "mainstream America" and the African American community in *System* but also a linguistic, cultural, political, and economic prison house of the black nation as seen through Baraka's Third World Marxist lens. As he said in a 1996 speech at the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta:

> The language of the Afro-American people carries our history and the information we need to understand this Hell's capital we are enslaved in. For instance, even the word "Dis" which might disremember as the Rapper's innovation is old pre Biblical. Dis is the capital of Hades. And Hades, dig it, those who are bereft, who have lost. All our language speaks as resistance since, again, Cabral, as we are where we are, oppressed nation, super exploited, suffering the added torture of racism (persecution because of physical characteristics) and for Black working women and working women of color, a triple oppression, by means of nationality, class and gender.[23]

In his verbal solo on "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue," Baraka articulates the Du Boisian problem of *Souls,* that playing oneself with varying degrees of self-consciousness and self-knowledge means seeing oneself through what might be thought of as the social eyes of others (through the white-controlled media, popular culture, laws, or what Larry Neal, among others, termed "white ways of looking at the world" and the "white thing").[24] A problem is that one cannot help being affected by the distorting funhouse self-images presented by these roles and their projections. "If you would see yourself, you would dig yourself. And then, be yourself," Baraka speaks/sings, with the suggestion that the

black subject, the black nation, is currently not able to see, dig, or truly be itself—or at least not with any consistency, except in some forms of black music and in the black church.

Baraka, as he had many times in his career, returns to the notion of music as indirect conversation about the black past, present, and future, much like he does in *Dutchman,* suggesting something more direct, plainer would be necessary: "If we could just agree on a plan. We could clarify the mystery of funk. We could talk to each other plainly again. Syncopation return is conversation."[25] In other words, African Americans could clarify the "inside songs" of black music generally, one of Baraka's lifelong projects, with the black Marxist addendum that such a clarification would not be for the purpose of simply understanding the world, and black people's place in it, but for the purpose of changing it.

Most of Baraka's vocalizing comes as a series of lines or utterances backed by a spare, repeated five-note instrumental riff and various sung interjections from Conquest that differ from the relatively lush orchestral backing that characterizes most of Mayfield's version. (The exception in Mayfield's version is a segment of African conga drumming preceding a spoken section in the second half of the tune where he speaks directly to black people, calling for unity and attacking colorism.) In Parker's version, Baraka's words are immediately followed by an abbreviated version of Mayfield's spoken part sung rather than declaimed by Conquest. After Conquest's abridgement of Mayfield's speech is a long instrumental that, as in "I Plan to Stay a Believer," basically takes up the second half of the piece.

The bulk of that instrumental is a lengthy interchange between wildly energetic saxophone playing that (to my ears) resembles that of Albert Ayler (albeit on what sounds to me to be an alto saxophone rather than a tenor) and piano eventually modulating into a kind of blues supported by a two-note reduction of the longer five-note riff by the rest of the band with driving percussion by Hamid Drake. This in turn edges into bop and swing before ending with a big rave-up closed by a Coltrane modal style. This sort of musical acknowledgment of stylistic forebears, of the

history "inside" music and black musical history, can be heard also in the 2007 live Rome recording where the band quotes Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" in the middle of a long instrumental section of "Freddie's Dead." In short, there is a mirroring in this instrumental section of what Baraka does with his words, that is to say, an invocation and reframing of ancestors, musical ancestors complementing the literary ancestors raised by Baraka. These literary ancestors, in turn, were themselves thinking about history and black music (and history in black music).

In another extended verbal solo building on Parker's reimagining of "I'm So Proud," Baraka places this version of the spiral development of the black nation and its culture within a black Marxist framework, which is to say a historical materialism in which material reality can be studied and explained with the purpose of changing the world, of liberation:

> We proud. I'm so proud. For you be what you see. Embrace what it is, our shadow lives. You can study; you can be. You can think; you can do. What is meaning? What is wise?
> We are deeper than the surface (sung). We are broader than the sky (sung). We are deeper than the surface (sung). We are broader than the sky (sung). What is it but loving your wholeness? What is it but loving your wholeness? We are deeper than the surface, broader than the sky (sung). What is it but loving your wholeness? Let your beauty be a snapshot of your mind (sung). Let your beauty be a snapshot of your mind (sung). Seek inside and outside. Only when it's true, what is beautiful be your guide. You can study; you can think; you can do. What is true, what is wise. We are deeper than the surface (sung). We are broader than the sky (sung). What is it but loving your wholeness? Let your beauty be a snapshot of your mind (sung). Let your beauty be a snapshot of your mind (sung). See inside; see outside. What is true, what is beautiful. A homeland to find.

"YOU COULDN'T HAVE BUILT IT YOURSELF": BLACK HISTORY, AMERICAN HISTORY, AND REPARATIONS

Parker includes two versions of "This Is My Country" on the CD, the first without Baraka and the second with him. The politics of the song's lyrics (black pride, black self-determination, black

jeremiad, Black Power) are perhaps the most pointed and direct of any in Mayfield's career. Like Malcolm X, and like Walter Lee Younger in his soliloquy directed to Carl Lindner and the Clybourne Park Improvement Association near the end of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun,* the singer (and Mayfield's words) gives white people a choice, essentially the ballot or the bullet, real citizenship for black people or death of the nation-state of the United States, declaring that black people have "survived a hard blow" and that as white people now face black people, they will have to decide whether to "perish unjust or live equal as a nation."

An unresolved question raised in the Mayfield song is which country is "this." Is it the United States or is it a black nation that will arise out of the failure and death of the United States? This first version of the song by Parker's band concludes disc 1 and features a French youth choir singing the song, again without Baraka's spoken contribution, at the 2001 Banlieues Bleues Festival in Paris. The members of the choir were youth, primarily of North and West African descent, from the French ghettos (the *banlieues*) of the industrial (or formerly industrial) suburbs of Paris. These young people had worked with Parker in a workshop where he taught what he called the tradition of "the Black Music Revolutionary Spirit School." Obviously, "This Is My Country" takes on a new black internationalist valence within the context of the choir of African immigrant families (or families thought of as immigrant even if the youths themselves, and perhaps their parents, were born in metropolitan France) from the former colonies of the French Empire, linking notions of citizenship and reparations to the inheritances of colonization in the metropole as well as to the legacies of New World slavery in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

"This Is My Country" appears again on *I Plan to Stay a Believer* as the second number of disc 2, this time with Baraka, recorded in 2008 at the Clemente Soto Véalez Center, a Puerto Rican cultural center on the Lower East Side of New York City. The location of the concert emphasized a different sort of diasporic consciousness from that of the *banlieues,* where the connection was

primarily through colonialism and its effects rather than through the legacy of New World slavery. Unlike Baraka's extended solos on other songs, here his contribution is primarily a series of short comments, statements, or riffs, particularly the repeated "You couldn't have built it yourself," "Tell the truth," "Stop lying," and, of course, "It's our country." If the United States and its system of chattel slavery were the crucible that created African Americans as a nation and the urban industrial centers where the black working class was forged, Baraka reminds the listener that black people in turn built the country and its economy from slavery through the industrial era.

The pronouns in the lyrics of the original Mayfield song primarily oscillate among the first person plural (e.g., "Some people think *we* don't have the right to say it's my country"), the first person singular (e.g., "*I*'ve paid three hundred years or more of slave driving, sweat, and welts on *my* back"), and the second person plural (e.g., "We've survived a hard blow and I want *you* to know that *you* must face us at last"). The addressees of the song switch also from black people (as in the "we" posed against the rare third person plural or "they" of "some people," meaning, basically, white people) to white people (the pointed "you" who will face "us") to the entire population of the United States (the "we" who will live in equality and justice or "perish as a nation"). In many respects, the song has the tone and form of the black jeremiad in which a prophetic speaker proclaims the injustice or sins of the United States and essentially offers a choice: a correction of unjust or sinful behavior as a society or a just and divinely sanctioned destruction of that society rendered in the sort of King James diction of "shall we perish unjust or live equal as a nation." At the same time, there is obviously a more secular and open call to black pride and black rebellion against manifest oppression and injustice that does not depend on outside intervention.

Baraka's use of pronouns is far more straightforwardly binary in his commentary than that of the singer in Mayfield's lyrics. Basically, there is only the "we" of black people (to which Baraka's "I" belongs) and the plural "you" of white people (to which the individual "white" listener belongs): "Yes, it's our country.

You couldn't have built it yourself, couldn't have built it yourself. You couldn't have built it yourself. Tell the truth. Tell the truth. Yeah, tell the truth. Tell the truth, now. You couldn't have built it yourself; now tell the truth. Stop your lying; confess you're a human and not divine. Stop lying. It's our country. I don't care if you claim it, too. But you better stop lying; it's our country, too. Tell the truth; tell the truth. Tell the truth."

In part, Baraka's commentary is an argument for reparations as a material acknowledgment of black citizenship, especially for black workers, and a necessary precondition for black and white (and Latinx and Asian American) being able to "live equal as a nation" and avoid perishing unjust, glossing Mayfield's lyrics. It is telling that the Marxist Baraka, unlike Mayfield, does not use the word "nation" but rather only "country." Here Baraka implicitly distinguishes "nation" in a certain Marxist sense, descended from the old Communist International treatment of the "national question," to mean a "people" who have a right to self-determination up to the creation of a nation-state, if they wish, from the "country" of the United States. What Baraka glosses (in the sense of creating something within an already existing text, inserting it between the lines in a way that amplifies the original text while having a semi-independent existence) is the notion of a multinational state or "country" in which there is the possibility of collaboration between peoples or "nations" on the basis of self-determination or, failing true collaboration, separation: "You know the truth. You know it's our country, too. We built it all of that. We built it for nothing. Yeah built this from our backs, our backs. Our country as well as yours. Two hundred years we worked here for nothing. Time to get some of that back."

Here Baraka echoes a sentiment that he developed at more length in the poem from roughly the same period, "Why Is We American?":

> What i want is me. for
> real. i want me and my self.
> and what that is is what i be
> and what i see and feel and

> who is me in the. What it is, is
> who it is, and when it me its
> what it be. . . . i'm gon' be here,
> if I want, like I said, self-
> determination, but I ain't come
> from a foolish tribe, we wants
> the mule the land, you can
> make it three hundred years of
> blue chip stock in the entire
> operation. We want to be paid,
> in a central bank the average
> worker farmer wage for all
> those years we gave it free.[26]

In short, African Americans are a nation with the right to self-determination and are owed the material means to make that self-determination viable, up to and including the formation of an independent nation-state. Again, Baraka draws heavily on Leninist and post-Leninist Third World Marxist notions of the "national question" and the rights of nations to determine their own destiny. It needs to be noted that, according to Baraka, the identity of African Americans as a nation is not in question here. It is not that the African American nation needs to be or might possibly be created; that has already happened in the crucible of slavery, Jim Crow, and industrial labor. What then is at stake is the United States as truly a federation in which peoples, and not simply individuals, coexist on the basis of true equality and working-class democracy, in a sense reprising Langston Hughes's revolutionary poem, "Put One More 'S' in the USA"—with Hughes arguing for, in short, the "United Soviet States of America."

Baraka's gloss also echoes in a jeremiadic manner the choice that Mayfield offers in the line "Shall we perish unjust or live equal as a nation" in "This Is My Country." Here, again, Baraka clarifies, it is not a question of "civil rights" in the sense of individual citizenship in a republic where all people are one in equal citizenship, something that he sees as never having been true and never to be true, but of a political and economic guarantee of

black sovereignty that is a necessary precondition to discussions about whether black people will be "Americans" as a people who voluntarily join in a nation-state while retaining autonomous integrity with white Americans. Baraka's notion here is akin to Malcolm X's rejection of the idea of "civil rights" in favor of a notion of "human rights," again including the notion of self-determination for black people. The only other option, ultimately, is "war," or as in Mayfield's lyrics, "you'll face us at last":

> Then we can talk
> about bein american. Then we
> can listen without the . . . the
> undercurrent of desire to first
> set your ass on fire.
> We will only talk of voluntary
> unity, of autonomy, as vective
> arms of self-determination. If
> there is democracy in you that
> is where it will be shown. this
> is the only way we is
> Americans. This is the only
> truth that can be told.
> otherwise there is no future
> between us but war.[27]

So read against "Why Is We Americans," a crucial part of Baraka's take on "inside song" of "This Is My Country" is this national assertion of black self-determination, not simply one of "civil rights" or equality of the individual but of peoples, which would include material reparations for past damages. Additionally, it is an account of the theft not simply of unskilled, gang labor, as consequential as it that is, but also black expertise, including the theft of black art and style, which is the product of black skilled labor. James Brown, for example, was not simply "the hardest working man in show business" but a skilled worker. In other words, one reason why Mick Jagger was allegedly so upset about going on after James Brown on the famous T.A.M.I. television show was that, competent as Jagger was in his own way at

singing and dancing, he was not as proficient as Brown.[28] Similarly, in "Apple Cores #5—The Burton Greene Affair" in *Black Music,* Baraka describes the superiority of black reed players Marion Brown and Pharoah Sanders to white pianist Burton Greene at a 1966 concert at The Cellar in Newark. Brown and Sanders are cast as better musicians because of their greater "understanding," defined as an active quality of investigation, of conscious, trained effort, rather than an intuitive one.[29] In "Why Is We American?" Baraka's calls for reparations not only reference slavery (which, of course, included the work of highly proficient artisans and agricultural workers) but also the theft of black aesthetic skill and taste: "For all the music and / dances you stole. The styles. / The language. The hip clothes / you copped. the careers you stopped."[30] This is a reminder that this art and culture was the product of the exploitation of workers, that artists too are workers, as we are reminded by the phrase "the careers you stopped." In other words, it is a reminder, as black music and other sorts of popular music often provides, that art is labor too, that you need to work to produce "a work." So if, as argued earlier in this book, Baraka is valuing process over product, it is a labor process in which artists are workers laboring in the culture industries, which need to be socialized like any other industry. Again, this resonates with Baraka's invocation of Du Bois's *Souls* in the conjunction of labor, culture/song ("art"), and spirit, again reminding us that the creation of art is labor and that the artist is a worker. Not only do black musical artists sound the black nation and the black working class but they also enact the effort and contribution of that class (and are never, in Marxist terms, paid what their efforts are worth and, in fact, are even more notoriously exploited than their white counterparts).

One question is how does this work on the ground in the practical political context of the twenty-first-century United States. In this iteration of his performance with Parker and his band in 2008, Baraka poses Barack Obama's presidential campaign and Obama's call for "change" as the major vehicle toward black self-determination. In part, this is in keeping with the sort of realpolitik radicalism that had led Baraka to support Al Gore in

2000 and John Kerry in 2004 since Baraka saw the Republican Party as already displaying characteristics of rightwing "white nationalism" that would appear more clearly after his death in 2014. However, beyond that sort of practical politics, he also used Obama as a metonym for black political power, or at least the idea of black political power. According to this way of thinking, if white people as a group were not willing to accept the notion of a black president, then they would not accept the notion of black self-determination—even though Obama himself would never make such an argument. Once again, the election and Obama's call for change is presented as a jeremiadic choice: "It's our country. You can claim it; you can claim it; but it's our country, too. So when Obama say 'change,' don't act strange. When he say 'change,' don't act strange. When he say 'change, it's your last chance,' don't act weird; don't act like you lost your mind. Quit lying, it's our country, too. Tell the truth! Tell the truth! It's our country, too; you know that's true. We built this sucker for nothing. Two hundred years and the hard work and tears."[31]

As in "Why Is We Americans," Baraka poses the choice not as whether there will be "change," or even as what kind of "change," but how the "change" is going to come, to paraphrase Sam Cooke. Again, this "change" is not simply a pronouncement of equality or a verbal apology for slavery but material support for black self-determination by white Americans. This support entails acknowledgment of the black claim on the United States as a nation-state and financial compensation for the black nation (as a nation) and the black working class (as part of the working class) for slavery, Jim Crow, lynch terror, and so on. Such a willing change also means that the black nation freely chooses the basis of how they participate in "our country." Without such willing change, there is no future but war: "This is our country, together. Got to get some change. Got to get some change. Got to get some change! Got to get some change! Got to get some chaaaange! Got to get some chaaaange! chaaaange! chaaaange!"

This call for change yet again echoes Baraka's formulation of the "changing same," the notion of rupture and continuity, of continuing national self-assertion once the black nation was forged

in resistance to national and class oppression. It sounds national transformation, of nationalism and internationalism, of past, present, and future, of history and essence. Doubtless, Baraka's wholehearted embrace of Marxism in the 1970s, a "phase" that occupied the second half of Baraka's life, deeply inflected his stance on black nation and internationalism in his work with Parker and his band. Nevertheless, despite various claims that have been made about Baraka's sudden shifts in ideology and aesthetics, one can find its antecedents in his work at least as early as 1962:

> It is time we built our own. America is as much a black country as a white one. The lives and destinies of the white American are bound up inextricably with those of the black American, even though the latter has been forced for hundreds of years to inhabit the lonely country of black. It is time we impressed the white man with the nature of his ills, as well as the nature of our own. The Negro's struggle in America is only a microcosm of the struggle of the new countries all over the world.[32]

If we think of Baraka as an improvising soloist as well as operating in the trading phrases and choruses mode of jazz as he and the musicians go back and forth, then one way of looking at his work here is as the proposing of possible histories and possible futures encoded in the music, of verbalizing what is normally unspoken since his horn speaks words as well as other forms of vocalizations. Or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that he proposes that history is both an account of events, which as a materialist he sees as objective reality ("believe in what's real"), and an interpretation of events, which are multiple but anchored by material reality. This multiplicity does not mean, as in a jazz solo, that anything is allowable or possible, even in free jazz, but there is a capacious, finite universe of viable or plausible interpretations or restatements of meanings "in the tradition" (to cite another Baraka poem). That's why Baraka's words vary and why each tune contains "inside songs" rather than "an inside song." As Parker wrote, Baraka responds to the "unanswered questions" with questions of his own, questions and commentary that point toward provisional answers that are multiple because the music, like the history encoded, contains multitudes. What

one sees and hears is the idea of a sort of constrained freedom or freedom within a particular context with historically determined laws and affinities. One receives the sound of what it might mean to be free right here, right now, as constrained by the arc of past and future. In this, the motion of the music and the words is the motion of history or histories: "Before blue is black. After red is black. Our feeling is ultra-violet, invisible to the blind." Revolution, after all, is a process of becoming, not an end in itself.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE AND HOW TO KEEP DOING IT: THE GLOSSING OF A MESSAGE TO THE GRASSROOTS

Not surprisingly in the next track on the recording, Baraka glosses Mayfield's "Move On Up" as a sort of verbal letter to a young activist-artist. His tone is by turns tender, reflective, humorous, exhortative, regretful, meditative, and one of endurance. The predominant note is, as in Mayfield's lyrics, exhortative:

> Run up the mountain! Run up the mountain! Don't be 'fraid. The beast is not as strong as he say. Charge into your future and destiny to come. Don't hesitate, submit, or succumb. We are the world that is coming into being, to do like you feel and be seeing. Don't doubt your strength or the wisdom of your heart. Resist triple-six in his multiple faces. Don't believe in the trick of the slick of the racists. We are the people who invented civilization. Our highest art is to make the world one nation. Don't be afraid, run up the mountain. Charge into your future. Go on, fly if you need. Climb! Walk! Run! Fight! . . . Stomp! Jump! Do what is just! Swing! Sing! Do what we must! There is nothing more noble than humanity's being. Go higher on fire sky past desire. Move fast! Sail! Wail! Stay up! Outlast! Educate! Mobilize!

The pronouns here all refer to black people: the speaker, the addressee, and the collective "we" that includes not simply the speaker and the addressee but all black people in Africa and its diaspora, "the people who invented civilization." Again, one might think of this as nationalist, internationalist, and postnationalist in the sense of a Marxist vision of when the state has withered away. The destiny (or "destination," to use Mayfield's word) of black people is to move past nationalism, to "make the

world one nation." However, this is a black postnationalist Marxist internationalism, recalling Richard Wright's and the South Side Writers Group's "Blueprint for Negro Writing": "Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. They must accept the concept of nationalism because in order to transcend it they must possess and understand it. And a nationalist spirit in Negro writing means a nationalism carrying the highest possible pitch of social consciousness."[33]

It is worth noting that while Baraka can imagine a postnationalist internationalism where that nationalist state has withered through the leadership of black people, it is, to draw again on Margo Crawford's notion of "black post-blackness," a black Marxist nationalist postnationalism. That is to say, this unity of all peoples flows from the river of black radicalism that recognizes an African American nation and the political and cultural links of that nation with Africa and people of African descent throughout the world. It is also, like Baraka's comments themselves that end in the same place they start, a revolutionary spiral in which humanity, born in Africa, is reunified by Africa and Africa's black children. One can see here a sort of black version of the Marxist notion of the spiral development of history as the human race moves from primitive communism through various stages to a new communist world. The stance of Baraka's gloss as it circles to an end morphs a bit from an older black revolutionary advising a younger black radical to one where he is essentially advising himself—or rather where he becomes one with the younger radical and, really, the entire black nation. The speaker ends on a note that is simultaneously one of self-assertion and national assertion, identifying with radical black political leaders of the past, athletes, but especially musicians:

> Still be we, any of them names, still be we. Call me Smokey or Louis Armstrong or Aretha Franklin, or Duke Ellington, Trane, still me, bad, blue black, outside in under soul bebop funky rap stuff Bronx dread irae uhuru Ahmad Aboujoumad digging serious and heavy hip. Invisible red suit cockhead decorated with religious singing dancing shit-talking praying staying paying smart ass slick ass strong ass big ass colored . . . still me still me still me still me move

> on up move on up Dr. King Stokely Lumumba . . . Malik Tupac Mau Mau . . . Ray Robinson Muhammad Ali still me the Supremes the Temptations Orioles Son House Little Richard Tiger Woods Williams Sisters Willie Mays . . . Satchel Paige still me still me oldest Communist in the world first in light walking language talking first singing first poet first dramatist first city builder first human first scientist first doctor first artist first thief still be me first thief first liar first killer first astronomer still be me. Time to rise to higher ground. Fly and start yourself again.

"DID HE FINALLY GET FREE AND WAS HE STILL A SLAVE?": GLOSSING YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW IN THE PRESENT HISTORICAL MOMENT

If Baraka's gloss on "Move On Up" takes the stance of an experienced revolutionary counseling a younger one before merging into a collective address to the entire black nation (including the speaker), his participation on "Freddie's Dead," the last piece on the recording in which Baraka makes a major vocal contribution, riffs on the movie *Superfly,* taking in part the persona of an imagined minor character in the film, an extra on the streets who knew Freddie. As does the film, the speaker presents Freddie as a gentle, loving, and somewhat goofy man despite being a criminal. This speaker references events from the 1972 film while making anachronistic allusions to the political events and personalities of the second Bush administration: the war in Iraq and current popular culture of the early twenty-first century ("But Freddie wasn't evil as George Bush. He's dead now. Freddie wasn't bad as Cheney"). The gloss opens with a sort of apostrophe ("Freddie's dead!"), which recurs through Baraka's performance, followed by street musing on the nature of death: "Freddie's dead! Death is the worst shit we know. Yeah, death is the worst shit we know. Freddie's dead! Death is the worst shit we know. Like, Death is the worst shit we know, ain't it. Death is the worst shit we know. And we don't even know what it's for."

Quickly, however, the gloss turns from this general musing to the particulars of Freddie's life and the attempt to understand his death: "Freddie like we was ready to go and he didn't know it. Did he reap what he sow? He died selling scag and selling blow. I don't

know. There's all kinds of evil motherfuckers in the world that's still left. Freddie. Got a list of those who won't be missed. Freddie wasn't all that bad. Makes you a little sad because what else could he do? Black and poor, had no education. Freddie's dead!"

Baraka's gloss through most of the piece is essentially a repetition of the above passage with some variation or "worrying," to use a blues term applied to the relatively small alterations to the repeated second line of the common aab (line, repeated line, rhyming line) blues stanza. That worrying by Baraka is the increasingly concrete references to people who are worse than Freddie (e.g., "maniacs in blue" [the police who killed him], George Bush, Dick Cheney, John McCain) and the crimes they committed (Freddie's murder, the Vietnam War, the war in Iraq). Here Baraka oscillates chronologically between the action of the film *Superfly* and its era (e.g., the killing of Freddie by police whose commissioner turns out to be the biggest drug lord in New York and the war in Indochina) and the contemporary moment of Baraka's performance with Parker and his band (Bush, Cheney, and the invasion of Iraq). Listening to these repetitions with a difference, it is hard not to think of similar practices in jazz solos as well as, yet again, Baraka's "the changing same."

In the midst of these repetitions with a difference, there is a sudden shift from a reflective musing about the life and death of Freddie to a more active mode on the part of the speaker ("I see him, but he's dead. I see him sometimes"). The variants of the phrase "I see him" also become part of the repetition. At this point, Baraka's performance takes on an increasing urgency propelled along by a funk bottom and a free jazz saxophone: "I see him I see him! Think about Freddie. Freddie's dead! Death is the worst shit we know, ain't it? We don't even know what it's for. Where did Freddie go after the grave? Did he finally get free and was he still a slave? Yeah, Freddie's dead, yeah, got took off the scene. I try to figure out what that mean."

In this heightened emotion and urgency, Baraka echoes, no doubt deliberately, Marvin Gaye's 1971 hit single "What's Going On," where the singer notes the death of black people in the war in the streets of the ghetto and the war in Vietnam and asks in

the chorus, "What's going on?": "A whole lot of brothers out here be dead. You dead. Want to know why you had to die. Freddie's deeeead!" The piece ends with a cacophonous rave up of insistent reeds and brass along with Baraka: "Whole world made of dope dealers. White house, City Hall, dope dealers. Dope, dope, sell, Channel 2, dope, Channel Four, dope, Channel Five, dope, Channel Seven, dope, Bush, dope, Cheney, dope, dope, dope, dope, Nicky Minaj, dope, Fox, they dope dealers, they dope dealers Freddie Freddie Freddie yo Freddie Freddie Hey, Freddie!" Baraka here obviously recalls "Dope," where a cultural opioid crisis exists alongside the actual drug trade ("i seed it on channel 7, i seed it on / channel 9 i seed / it on channel 4 and 2 and 5").[34]

So the three questions the persona that Baraka assumes asks are, What is the meaning of Freddie's death? What else could Freddie have done? and Why are some people who are clearly greater criminals still alive, still committing crimes against humanity, while Freddie is dead? These questions germane to the killing of Freddie and the death of "a whole lot of brothers" are of pressing concern to the speaker because he sees his fate bound with Freddie as a resident or inmate, perhaps, of the postindustrial ghetto where, to paraphrase William Julius Wilson, work has disappeared.

Both Baraka and Parker see the answer to those questions as being in the music, both Mayfield's in particular and black music in general. Parker wrote of Mayfield's music in explaining the *Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield* project: "He took the music to its most essential level in the America of his day. If you had ears to hear, you knew that Curtis was a man with a positive message—a message that was going to help you to survive. He was in the foreground, always in the breach, both soft and powerful at the same time. For these reasons, his music still resounds in my heart."[35]

Baraka says much the same thing, though his primary musical touchstone is John Coltrane:

> And yet last night I played *Meditations*
> & it told me what to do
> Live, you crazy mother
> fucker!

Live!
& organize
yr shit
as rightly
burning![36]

Of course, Coltrane is a key touchstone, part of the blues continuum that also includes Mayfield's music, for Parker and his band too. That can be heard on the 2007 Rome recording where Parker and his band quote Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" in the middle of "Freddie's Dead."

There is a way in which Baraka's participation in this project gave him the chance to verbalize the history and historical motion of the black nation, the psychic weight that he saw encoded in black music, at considerable length. In many respects, the *Inside Songs* project allowed him to make material and audible *Blues People* in a new way. While Baraka had often worked with music in the past and almost always made it an element of his readings in one fashion or another, even if it was only him singing or drumming on a microphone or podium, it is hard to think of another instance in his career where he performed and recorded with a large band in which he was not clearly the leader but improvising his glosses as part of a collective. His contribution is key to Parker's project because it provides an interpretation of the project even as it participates in the project. Baraka's vocals are a self-reflexive contribution that Parker sees as an essential part of the project, to illuminate, complicate, and explicate the meaning of Parker's goal as well as Mayfield's music. At the same time, it was an important moment in Baraka's career, even if it came relatively near the end of it, because it allowed him to make audible and answer in a new way the question he posed in his statement in the 1960 *New American Poetry:* "How you sound?" as well as who, what, and when you sound.[37] That is to say, it allowed him to make audible a sort of historical materialist gloss on the black nation, its origins, its struggles, and its future.

This page intentionally left blank

CONCLUSION

BLUES PEOPLE AT SYMPHONY HALL

Looking around Symphony Hall at Amiri Baraka's funeral, one could see many of the different strands and moments of his life on stage and off: family, Muslims, Baptists, poets, actors, directors, playwrights, academics, community activists, dancers, politicians, of course the musicians, and thousands of the people of Newark and its surrounding cities and towns (Irvington, Orange, East Orange, Bloomfield, Hillside, Montclair, etc.) where black people have come to settle in large numbers. There were black nationalists of various stripes, communists (and Communists), socialists, and liberals. While few political organizations made themselves known, the typographically distinct signs of Larry Hamm's People's Organization for Progress, a radical black community group that has been a fixture in Newark since the early 1980s, proclaimed "Long Live the Spirit of Amiri Baraka" outside Symphony Hall as local people milled in Broad Street, talking seriously to each other in a large city that still can seem at times like a small southern town in its networks of family and friends. As blogger Dwayne Rodgers recalled,

> I was there because I couldn't imagine not being there. And I imagine for the same reason Woody King Jr. was there. And Danny Glover was there. And Asha Bandele was there. And Michael Eric Dyson was there. And Jessica Care Moore was there. And Tony Medina was there. And Sonia Sanchez was there. And Sister Souljah was there. And Haki R. Madhubuti was there. And Cornel West was there. And Oliver Lake was there. And Glynn Turman was there. And Ras Baraka was there; the son. The chosen son,

> rhapsodizing, channeling the spirit of his father, Amiri announcing from the grave the power of a father to shape his son into a reflection of himself and into his own man. And Savion Glover was there. Savion. The sound and image of Savion tap dancing next to the coffin of Amiri Baraka, The Poet, The Master Teacher is forever seared on my cerebellum and soloing in my nervous system. It was evidence of our collective genius. The People were there . . . because they could not imagine not being there.[1]

The presence of so many people embodying different parts of Baraka's artistic, intellectual, and political life, sometimes as friends and comrades, sometimes as antagonists, and sometimes as both (at different times, if not simultaneously), suggests that the emphasis some have put on Baraka's ideological and aesthetic mutability, generally not seen as a good thing in his case, might be overstated. While there were quite a few turns in the first half of Baraka's career, one can see a thread or through line about music as sounding and shaping both the black nation and the black working class. From early in his career and even more intensely during his long Marxist period, Baraka argued that music is both history in the sense of an account of what happened and historiography in the sense of an intense engagement with questions of how history is recorded, who records it, and what that how and who mean. The music is a reminder, as Frederick Douglass suggested in his discussion of slave music in his autobiographies, that it is never only the victors who write history, especially if one is really sonically literate, has the eyes to see and the ears to hear, if one is able, as Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man* avers, "not only in time, but space as well."[2] Baraka asserted that oppressed people, the black working class in this case, are driven to record such histories in music, histories that can be used, are in fact necessary, in the cause of liberation, of the black nation, and of the working class. As Baraka wrote in the 1979 poem about alto saxophonist Lester Young, "Pres Spoke a Language," "Save all that comrades, we need it."[3] In other words, contrary to what many more negative critics of Baraka have said, there is a core in his literary engagement with the black music he saw as intertwined with black speech that was remarkably stable throughout his career.

Baraka's writing on and performance with music has been much valued, especially within Africana/African American/Black Studies, as an analysis and commentary on black aesthetics, expressive culture, and even political organization. One thinks of the frequent use and the many reiterations (if only as a suggestive phrase) of the "changing same" by writers on black culture and politics professing a variety of ideological stances from the Black Arts era to the present. However, it has been less remarked on, really almost completely unremarked on, that Baraka's writing on black music (essays, poems, plays, librettos for operas, liner notes, and so on) since the mid-1970s constitutes one of the largest and richest bodies of Marxist thought on music, art, and culture and the work music does and has done in shaping the black community and the black working class in the modern and postindustrial eras of the United States. If one includes Baraka's work from the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, which I have argued is part of the long foreground of his more overtly Marxist efforts, despite obvious ideological and aesthetic differences, say like Georg Lukács's early anarchist writing as part of the same continuous body of work as his later more clearly Marxist writings, then the sheer volume (and quality) of Baraka's work in this vein is even more striking. In other words, Baraka is among the most productive and influential Marxist cultural critics in the history of the United States, if not the world—though he is rarely seen that way.

Careful examination of this writing on and performance with music forces us to reconsider assessments of all phases of his career. It is through his study and writing on black music, again much influenced by Amina Baraka as both artist and guide to black music in Newark, which Amiri Baraka had to in some ways relearn, that he developed his mature performance style—and virtually anyone who ever saw Baraka perform practically to the end of his life can attest that he was one of the great performers, if not the greatest performer, of poetry in our time. His poetry produced in the last twenty years of his life, as contained in *Wise, Why's, Y's* (1995), *Funklore* (1996), *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems* (2003) as well as many uncollected pieces,

and his collaborations with William Parker in the last decade of his life, attest that his Marxist period, rather than one of fallow didacticism, contained some of the strongest (and I would argue the strongest) work he ever produced.

What I have tried to do here is further some new discussions about how we understand Baraka's art as well as what we might learn from it, including how we might think about what music does, what music is for, and from whence it comes. Baraka's writing and performance on and with music might also help us to reconsider the work that history and historiography do, as well as who creates history (in the sense of the narrative and the field of history). Baraka's work also comments on how history is told and itself evaluated, and through what means. In this, Baraka's work is part of a long arc of black commentary on and critique of the "mainstream" history profession—an arc that he acknowledged and honored. One might say that Baraka (and the Barakas together), following in the footsteps of Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Margaret Walker, among others, prepared the way for recent thinking about alternative "archives," especially music as a sort of archive—though the Barakas also proposed music not only as an archival source but as narratives drawing on those sonic archives, verbal and nonverbal.

Again, I see this study as only furthering a discussion. Many worthwhile projects on Baraka and music are still to be done. Baraka claimed on multiple occasions that a book or books on John Coltrane (e.g., a biography and a study of the late Coltrane's work) existed in manuscript or even were to be published in the near future, though no such work ever appeared in print. He also claimed to have written manuscripts on Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis and to have the materials to write one on Duke Ellington.[4] It is unclear whether, in fact, the manuscripts were ever completed. Fragments of some of them, and of an autobiography of Max Roach with which Baraka was helping, exist in the Amiri Baraka Collection in the Manuscripts and Rare Books Library at Columbia University. If complete manuscripts of any or all of these books could be found, edited, and published, it would be a great addition not only to the oeuvre of Baraka's writing on

music but also to the body of Marxist writing on black music in the United States. The portions of Baraka's Coltrane book that I have read are definitely attempts to see Coltrane's life and music in terms of the rise of a black urban working class from a basically rural population. Baraka poses Coltrane's music as expressing the emergence of that class with a particular sensibility and interests within a black nation. Coltrane's music, for Baraka, provides a cultural basis for thinking about the relationship between a radical black vanguard and the masses of black people: "John Coltrane's music underwent very significant and continuous changes. Also, he lived, especially in the last 20 years of his life, in a period marked by rapid and sharp social motion. The thesis that the music reflects the people must be expanded to show just what motivates and shapes the people. It must show, too, what is happening objectively in the world, and how this objective happening effects the conscious subject."[5] In fact, I considered including a chapter in this study on these unpublished manuscripts but decided that I did not want to draw too many conclusions based on the fragments we currently have. But if the full manuscripts were to emerge, scholars would have far more to go on.

In addition, while Kim McMillon in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation has uncovered and analyzed much of Amina Baraka's work as a poet and cultural organizer, there is quite a bit more to be said about Amina Baraka's work and legacy—including her impact on Amiri Baraka's work and her contributions to institutions and projects that we have hitherto associated almost completely with her husband. As I have suggested here, when that work and legacy is more fully known, the scholarly consensus will likely be that many of the political and cultural projects that we associate with Amiri Baraka after 1965 (much like pre–Black Arts projects, such as *Yugen* and *Floating Bear*) will turn out to be the result of a partnership or a larger collective effort. Some (or many) cases will no doubt reveal Amina Baraka as the primary initiator. Such scholarship will not simply give Amina Baraka her just due and provide a better analysis of her role in Black Arts, Black Power, and beyond, but also more clearly illuminate Amiri

Baraka's career and contributions, which will remain manifold even after such a readjustment.

Looping back to Symphony Hall and what Amiri Baraka's funeral might indicate about how to assess that career and contributions, one might recall again Baraka's declaration that Newark embodied for him "a measure, a set of standards and life influencing principles."[6] Given his ability to sometimes talk about himself and his past as if he were standing outside himself, passing judgment on his successes and failures, one could easily imagine him sitting in the audience of his own funeral, joking with the people onstage, looking around at the composition of the crowd, and concluding that his work had connected with the blues people of Newark and helped them survive and potentially even more forward.

But how did he make this connection? No doubt Amiri Baraka's great intelligence, wild humor, willingness (or even overwillingness) to mix it up with adversaries, and general dedication to the black community and its liberation, particularly in his hometown, were all large reasons for the turnout at his wake and funeral. Still, I would also argue that, much like the great popular black affection for Langston Hughes before him, it was Baraka's closeness to the music, to always track, feel, *and* understand the music and the work it does, that brought the blues people to Symphony Hall, the old Mosque Theater, one more time.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: BRICK CITY VANGUARD

1. Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 127–29.
2. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 286.
3. Amina Baraka has received some, but not enough, scholarly attention as a political activist and organizer from Ashley Farmer (*Remaking Black Power*), Zenzele Isoke (*Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance*), Michael Simanga (*Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*), and Komozi Woodard (*Nation within a Nation*). However, she has been almost completely ignored as an artist. Kim McMillon's Ph.D. dissertation on women in the Black Arts Movement, "Hidden Voices: The Women of the Black Arts Movement and the Rise of the Ancestors" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Merced, 2019), with a chapter on Amina Baraka, is a great step forward.
4. Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 15.
5. Staple Singers, "If You're Ready (Come Go with Me)," Stax, 1973.
6. Sonia Sanchez, *I'm Black When I'm Singing, I'm Blue When I Ain't and Other Plays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 59–98.
7. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 205–8.
8. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 122–49.
9. For Rubin's treatment of the work of Merle Haggard on labor and *as* labor, see Rachel Lee Rubin, *Merle Haggard's Okie from Muskogee* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 107–22.
10. The most widely circulated of Baraka's dichotomy of "spirit" and "ghost" no doubt takes place in Warren Beatty's 1998 film *Bulworth,* where Baraka plays a sort of street madman/wiseman ("Rastaman") and tells Beatty's character (Jay Bulworth), "Can't be no ghost, but you've got to be a spirit, Bulworth! You've got to be a spirit! And the spirit will not descend without song." Whatever one thinks about the film and the dubious, if not actually racist, notion of a slick, cynical white politician becoming honest through an embrace of a stylized, not to say stereotypical, hip hop blackness (and a black girlfriend), it seems pretty certain that Baraka scripted his own lines here.

11. Brent Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
12. Margo Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twentieth-First Century Aesthetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 2, 225.
13. Aldon Nielsen, *Integral Music: Language of African American Innovation* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 103.
14. Diane di Prima reports that the initial concept of *Floating Bear* as a sort of mimeographed broadsheet that would present what was cutting edge in poetry as she and Baraka saw it to a circle of interested writers and artists in a more immediate way than *Yugen* or other poetry journals of the time was Baraka's. However, she fully shared reading, selecting, and arranging the work presented in *Floating Bear* as well as performing the vast majority of the physical work on the journal. She also suspects that Hettie Jones did much the same with *Yugen* and Totem Books, despite receiving far less credit for it than Baraka. Di Prima, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 244, 251–54. Hettie Jones's account suggests that she was less involved editorially in *Yugen* than di Prima was in *Floating Bear* but nevertheless confirms di Prima's suspicion that Jones did almost all the physical tasks of layout and production. Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 53–55.
15. Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich, "Interview with Amiri Baraka," *Jacket 2,* January 9, 2014, http://jacket2.org.
16. Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6. As in Sugrue's study of Detroit, Baraka's sense of the "urban crisis" of deindustrialization was one that had a long foreground rather than beginning in the 1970s, when the abandoned factories of Youngstown, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, Newark, and so on gained widespread attention in the media.
17. William J. Harris, "'How You Sound??': Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz," in *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies,* ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 315.
18. The most detailed account of Karenga and US is Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). For a study of Amiri Baraka and the rise and evolution of CFUN and CAP, see Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For an organizational history and memoir of CAP, see Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
19. The Communist view of the "National Question" had its antecedents in the thinking of Lenin, Stalin, and the Bolsheviks as they theorized about how to build a successful revolution (and, after the October Revolution of 1917, successfully construct socialism) in the notoriously polyglot Russian Empire (the "prison house of nations"). The classic Bolshevik statement on what constituted a "nation," which had much influence on the Comintern's formulation of nationalism, is contained in Stalin's 1913 *Marxism and the National Question:* "A nation is a historically-constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological life manifested in a common culture." Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*

(Tirana, Albania: 8 Nentori Publishing House, 1979), 16. Although Stalin came to be rejected by large sections of the left, including the CPUSA, after Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 in which he denounced Stalin's regime, the stream of Marxism that comes out of Maoism, including that to which Baraka subscribed, did not renounce Stalin and his thinking in the same manner. However, the CPUSA after 1956 and even much of the "anti-Stalinist" left remained marked by the notion of African Americans as a people or nation, even if they did not support the idea of a "Black Belt Republic." This definition could be (and often was) applied quite mechanically as a sort of checklist where if all the items were not checked off, the population in question was not a "nation." However, black Marxists (including Baraka), especially from the Black Power/Black Arts era on, often did not follow the checklist and were extremely reluctant to separate black people in the ghettoes from those in the Black Belt, even if they did not share a contiguous territory.

20. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1983).

CHAPTER ONE: "THAT'S WHERE SARAH VAUGHAN LIVES"

1. Amiri Baraka, *Razor: Revolutionary Art for Cultural Revolution* (Chicago: Third World Press, 2012), 463.
2. Amiri Baraka, *Funk Lore: New Poems (1984–1995)* (New York: Littoral Books, 1996), 40.
3. Aldon Nielsen, *Integral Music: Language of African American Innovation* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 128.
4. Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich, "Interview with Amiri Baraka," *Jacket 2,* January 9, 2014, http://jacket2.org.
5. Amiri Baraka, *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 126.
6. William Junius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
7. Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6.
8. Baraka, *Digging,* 28–29.
9. Chanta L. Jackson, "Newark Panel to Examine the Legacy of Ken Gibson," *Newark Star-Ledger,* October 5, 2009, https://www.nj.com.
10. Amiri Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 217.
11. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 3.
12. Barbara J. Kukla, *Swing City: Newark Nightlife, 1925–50* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 9. A classic fictional treatment of Newark with a discussion of the ethnic dimensions of organized crime in this era is Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). In Roth's novel, the protagonist, Ira Ringold, is a Jewish tough guy who is not recruited into organized crime because he is one of the relatively few Jews living in the predominantly Italian First Ward, where the reigning Boiardo criminal group overlooks Ringold because he is Jewish. The novel suggests that if Ringold had lived in the Third Ward, Longy Zwillman would have recognized Ringold's potential for this gang. Instead, Ringold finds his way into the CPUSA, another

common trajectory for a rebellious working-class Jew in Newark in the 1930s. For an account of the history of organized crime in Newark, its ethnic aspects, and its impact on local politics in the first half of the twentieth century, see Brad Tuttle, *How Newark Became Newark: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of an American City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 97–118.

13. Addonizio was indicted for extortion along with leading members of the Boiardo crime family just before the election in which he was defeated by Kenneth Gibson. He was convicted in 1970.
14. Julia Rabig, *The Fixers: Devolution, Development, and Civil Society in Newark, 1960–1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 174–75, 179–80. For an account of Coggins and his role in the Newark Model Cities program, a pocket of Black Power in a Gibson administration that moved away from Baraka, CAP, and militant community organizations, see Junius Williams, *Unfinished Agenda: Urban Politics in the Black Power Era* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2014), 252–60. Williams headed Model Cities for Gibson under increasingly difficult circumstances. He remains a community activist and educator in Newark to this day.
15. Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 54–56; Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 36–37. One of the most active campaigners for Turner, Clarence Coggins was a Communist and leader of the Negro Labor Vanguard and the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC) at the time. Coggins was expelled from or departed the CPUSA in the late 1950s and was active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s. He also stayed in close touch with former CPUSA and NNLC comrades, such as Jack O'Dell and Harlem housing activist Jesse Gray. Coggins, sometimes in cooperation and sometimes in conflict with Baraka and CFUN, played an important organizational role in the campaign and the mayoral administration of Kenneth Gibson in the 1970s. One of Coggins's close associates in the NNLC was Ernest "Big Train" Thompson, a national official in the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Union and the director of organization for the NNLC from Jersey City. Thompson settled in nearby Orange, New Jersey (a small, blue-collar city with a large and longstanding black community with close ties to its counterpart in nearby Newark), after Cold War repression destroyed the NNLC and drove him from the labor movement. In Orange, Thompson became active in black political empowerment and the labor adviser to the Newark Coordinating Council, a major civil rights organization in Newark that did much work around housing and fair employment practices and hiring of black workers on public projects in the city, notably the reconstruction of Barringer High School. Ernest Thompson and Mindy Thompson, *Homeboy Came to Orange: A Story of People's Power* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 156–80.
16. Amiri Baraka, "Confessions of a Former Anti-Semite," *Village Voice,* December 17–20, 1980, 18–22. According to Baraka, the title of the essay was not his but that of a *Voice* editor.
17. Rabig, *The Fixers,* 11.
18. Amiri Baraka, *Three Books by Imamu Amiri Baraka* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), 125–26, 128.
19. Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892; Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

20. Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967).
21. For a history of Newark's jazz scene (with some reference to r&b and other forms of black music) from the 1920s to the early 1950s, see Kukla, *Swing City.*
22. Amina Baraka, interview, Queer Newark Oral History Project, March 2, 2018, https://queer.newark.rutgers.edu.
23. Amina Baraka, interview with author, Newark, December 7, 2018.
24. Edward Kennedy Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 422–23.
25. For a beautiful book of photographs showing one such artist, Billie Holiday, performing at the Sugar Hill Club on Broad Street in Newark in the late 1950s, including wonderful pictures of Holiday interacting with fans or simply walking down Broad Street in Newark, see Jerry Dantzic, *Jerry Dantzic: Billie Holiday at Sugar Hill* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2017). These photographs reveal much about the contemporary Newark jazz scene in that some show posters advertising the appearance of various musicians in the club, including Cecil Payne, Randy Weston, Horace Silver, Carmen McCrae, and Big Maybelle, giving a sense of the range of artists featured there in the club (and Newark generally) in the 1950s.
26. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 68.
27. Amiri Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1971), 65.
28. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
29. William J. Harris, "'How You Sound??': Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz," in *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies,* ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 314–15.
30. Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze,* 65.
31. Baraka, *Black Music,* 134. Similarly in *Blues People*, Baraka wrote, "These young musicians also rely to a great extent on a closeness of vocal reference that has always been characteristic of Negro music. Players like Coleman, Coltrane, and Rollins literally scream and rant in imitation of the human voice, sounding many times like the unfettered primitive shouters. Charlie Parker also had to restore this quality to jazz timbre after the legitimatizing influences of commercial swing." *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow, 1963), 227.
32. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 76.
33. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 79.
34. William J. Harris, "Amiri Baraka's Adventures with the Out and the Gone" *Callaloo* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 484.
35. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 56.
36. Harris, "Amiri Baraka's Adventures with the Out and the Gone," 484.
37. Amiri Baraka, *Tales* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 76.
38. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 83.
39. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 82–83.
40. Kukla, *Swing City,* 154–55.
41. Baraka, *Digging,* 103–4.
42. Kukla, *Swing City,* 159. Newark was also home to a group of left-wing, largely Jewish jazz fans, the Hot Club of Newark, whose members included Lorraine Gordon and her brother the artist Phillip Stein, and the artists John Hermansader and Paul Bacon. Although Baraka never wrote about the Hot Club, like him club members were interested in the social meaning of jazz as well its sonic pleasures: "I mean, we were wonderfully brilliant young kids who just

wanted to hear music—jazz. We gave each other assignments. They'd say, 'Ok, tonight when you come, you do the life of Bessie Smith.' I'd sit home, getting all of Bessie's records out, notating. . . . I said, 'Oh, I can't do that. Whoo. . . .' Whoo, I loved Bessie. She was my favorite at the time. She taught me about life in the South. She taught me a lot. You have to understand. Her lyrics were not just bawdy or off-color. They were about LIFE, about floods coming up to her door, about poverty, about discrimination. I learned so much from Bessie Smith. I fell into it. I listened to her." Lorraine Gordon, interview, July 7, 2012, Archives Center, National Music of American History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian. Gordon, with her first husband, Alfred Lion, played an important part in Blue Note Records' move toward bebop and did much the same with her second husband, Max Gordon, and his famous music club, the Village Vanguard. Lorraine Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard: My Life in and Out of Jazz Time* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2006), 27–41, 45–70; Lorraine Gordon, interview. Hermansader and Bacon provided much of the distinctive cover art for Blue Note albums. Stein, who moved to Mexico during the McCarthy era, was a protégé of and collaborator with the Communist Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros.

43. Baraka, *Digging,* 28–29.
44. Van Gosse, "Home Rules: An Interview with Amiri Baraka," *Radical History Review* 87 (Fall 2003): 118.
45. Russell Atkins, "The Invalidity of Dominant-Group 'Education' Forms for 'Progress' for Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups as Americans," *Free Lance* 7, no. 2 (1963): 32.
46. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 76.
47. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 81.
48. Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 82.
49. This is not to say that the more famously cosmopolitan centers of black life, such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, were not homes of an industrial black working class. Chester Himes's early novels set in Los Angeles, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and *The Lonely Crusade*, featured black industrial workers as protagonists. Langston Hughes's Simple also remarks that he had worked a significant time in New York's garment industry. *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: The Later Simple Stories*, ed. Akiba Harper (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 180. Oddly enough, the most famous African American literary works associated with Chicago, well-known as a center of manufacturing, such as Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha*, Theodore Ward's *Big White Fog*, and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, give much less prominence to black industrial workers, tending to focus instead on domestic workers and laborers.
50. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 87.
51. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 183.
52. Amina Baraka, interview with author; Amiri Baraka, "Spirit House, the New Fortress," Rise Up Newark, http://riseupnewark.com. ("Spirit House, the New Fortress" is an unpublished essay written in 2013.) Not only did Ginsberg bring a team of bohemians across the Hudson River to help locate Amiri Baraka, but he immediately reached out to his own far-flung web of contacts. The Newark city administration soon received a message from Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, demanding Baraka's release. Ginsberg was not only a visionary counterculture poet from New York but also someone from New

Jersey who had basically grown up in the Popular Front and knew something about defense campaigns, local lawyers, and so on.

53. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 340.
54. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 344.
55. The major exception was his introduction to the 1997 version of his autobiography. The introduction largely consisted of Amiri Baraka's account of Amina Baraka's personal and ideological critique of his activities and behavior during and after Black Arts/Black Power, particularly taking him to task for male supremacy. Although at times Amiri seemed to agree with this critique, often he was simply registering the critique as if he were an observer somehow outside of himself. Baraka, *Autobiography,* xi–xxv. As Kim McMillon notes, at other times the introduction reads like a staging of a debate between the Barakas. McMillon, "Hidden Voices: The Women of the Black Arts Movement and the Rise of the Ancestors" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Merced, 2019).
56. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
57. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
58. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
59. Baraka, "Spirit House, the New Fortress," 2.
60. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 334.
61. Amina Baraka, interview, Queer Newark Oral History Project.
62. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
63. Amina Baraka, interview with author.
64. Amina Baraka, interview with author; Eric Beaumont, "The Nathan Heard Interviews," *African American Review* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 409.
65. Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79–80. The exceptions to this are Simanga himself and Ashley Farmer's *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Even in those cases, the discussion of Amina Baraka's work is a relatively small, if important, part.
66. As Ashley Farmer and Michael Simanga argue, even within Karenga's own US organization, as well as in CAP, women were able to reshape Kawaidaist principles to strengthen their position within US and significantly alter its (and eventually Karenga's) stance on the role of black women in the movement. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 93–126; Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People,* 73–84.
67. Woodard, *Nation within a Nation,* 122–26; Amina Baraka, interview, Queer Newark Oral History Project; Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 108–10; Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People,* 82–84, 119–21; Amina Baraka, interview with author.
68. Amina Baraka, interview with author; Flyers for Kimako's Workshop, Amiri Baraka Papers, box 57, folders 2–10, Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New York.
69. Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze,* 65.
70. Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 195–96.
71. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 569; Amiri Baraka, *SOS: Poems, 1961–2013* (New York: Grove Press, 2016), 381.
72. Chris Funkhouser, "In Audio Practice VI: Notes on Baraka Recording," *Jacket 2,* May 9, 2014, http://jacket2.org.

73. Baraka, *Digging,* 130–32.
74. Amiri Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 271–72. Coltrane died on the last day of the Newark uprising, July 17, 1967. No doubt his death at that moment gave Baraka's memory a particular resonance. The jazz trombonist and Newark native Grachan Moncur III recalled of that moment: "I was here; as a matter of fact, the night of the riot, I was on my way to Canada. And . . . Baraka and some of his people came by my pad. See, a lot happened during that time. John Coltrane died. You know? I remember when I was in Canada, the first or second night that I opened there in Toronto, we got the word that Trane had died and I had just left Newark. But Baraka came over to my house during the riot. . . . I don't know if I should say all that went down, but anyway. He came by; a stop before they were doing their thing." Sean Singer, "Interview with Grachan Moncur III," *Cerise Press: A Journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture* 4, no. 10 (Summer 2012), http://www.cerisepress.com.

CHAPTER TWO: "FORMAL RENDITIONS"

1. "Ain't but a Few of Us: How Black Jazz Writers Persevere," *Open Sky Jazz* (blog), May 21, 2009, http://www.openskyjazz.com.
2. Nathaniel Mackey, "The Changing Same: Black Music in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka," *Boundary* 2 6, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 359.
3. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 249.
4. Baraka, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow, 1963), 176.
5. Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 137.
6. Amiri Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Morrow, 1966), 93.
7. Baraka, *Blues People,* 236.
8. Amiri Baraka, *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 29; Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 109.
9. Charles Edward Smith and Frederic Ramsey, Jazzmen (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1939); Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz* (New York: Knopf, 1946).
10. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–27.
11. For an example of such work, see Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America* (New York: Viking, 1952).
12. Baraka, *Digging,* 152.
13. Sidney Finkelstein, *Jazz: A People's Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948). For an excellent summary and analysis of the different schools and figures of jazz history from the 1930s to the 1950s, see John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 117–63.
14. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 206.
15. Frank Marshall Davis, *Livin' the Blues: Memoirs of a Black Journalist and Poet,* ed. John Edgar Tidwell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 190–91.
16. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 202–41. As many commentators have noted, one complicated thing about Baraka's *Autobiography* was his predilection for using pseudonyms for some, but not all, people, places, organizations, and institutions. This use was not for preserving anonymity in many cases since

anyone even moderately familiar with Baraka's life would know, for example, that "Nellie Kohn" is his first wife, Hettie Cohen (whom he met working at the *Record Changer*), and "Lucia DiBella" is the poet Diane DiPrima. Baraka himself claimed that these changes were not for disguise but as a sort of psychological device for himself that helped create a certain psychic distance which allowed him to write about emotionally difficult events. Charlie Reilly, ed., *Conversations with Amiri Baraka* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 240. Whatever the motivation, anyone checking the citations of the *Autobiography* here will find some differences between the names I use in this (and other) chapters and those in the cited sections of the *Autobiography*.

17. Baraka, *Blues People,* xii.
18. Baraka, *Digging,* 20.
19. Baraka, *Blues People,* 57–58.
20. Baraka, *Blues People,* 140.
21. Baraka, *Blues People,* 194.
22. Baraka, *Blues People,* 208.
23. Baraka, *Blues People,* 225.
24. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 79.
25. Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
26. Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 256.
27. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
28. Probably Wright's most famous critique of the arc of previous black writing is "Blue Print for Negro Writing," *New Challenge* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1937): 53–63. Baldwin's most pointed commentary on his former mentor is "Alas, Poor Richard," in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dial, 1961), 181–215.
29. Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 140.
30. Baraka, *Home,* 105, 107.
31. Claudia Moreno Pisano, *Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 176. Ellison wrote in the early portion of his review, "Jones would take his subject seriously—as the best of jazz critics have always done—and he himself should be so taken." Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 248.
32. Vance Randolph, "The Roots Go Deep," *New York Times,* November 17, 1963, BR12.
33. Roger D. Abrahams, "Review of *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* by LeRoi Jones; *Negro Folk Music, U. S. A.* by Harold Courlander; *The Book of the Blues* by Kay Shirley; *Shadow and Act* by Ralph Ellison," *Journal of American Folklore* 79, no. 313 (July–September 1966): 494.
34. Jerry Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 478–79; Joe Lesueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 247–48.
35. Abrahams, "Review," 494.
36. One can also see Ellison's implicit presence in Richard Howard's 1965 review of *Blues People* in *Poetry*, where Howard attacked what he found to be Baraka's obscurantist social science jargon and incipient black nationalism. Howard condescendingly attributed Baraka's diction and approach to a pseudo-French desire to freight popular culture with an overwrought significance, which might be seen as ironic considering Howard's later work as a translator of Roland

Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Giles Deleuze. Howard, "Some Poets in Their Prose," *Poetry* 105, no. 6 (March 1965): 403–4.

37. William Harris, "Manuals for Black Militants," *Antioch Review,* 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1967): 408–16.
38. Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 234.
39. Ellison, *Shadow and Act,* 255.
40. Kenneth Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 41.
41. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), xiii–xx.
42. For example, during the decade between 1965 and 1975, Broadside Press alone put out dozens of poetry titles in editions totaling something like half a million volumes. The number of titles by black poets issued by Broadside far exceeded those from *all* U.S. publishers combined in the previous decade. Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 3–4.
43. For a recorded version of Brown's remarks, see *From Spirituals to Swing: The Legendary 1938 and 1939 Carnegie Hall Concerts Produced by John Hammond*, Vanguard 169/71–2, 1999.
44. William Parker, *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,* AUM Fidelity 062/63, 2010.
45. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 9.

CHAPTER THREE: "A MARCHING SONG FOR SOME STRANGE UNCHARTED COUNTRY"

1. Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamplet: The Crisis of German Social Democracy," trans. Dave Hollis, 1916; Luxemburg Internet Archive, 1996, https: //www.marxists.org.
2. What is meant by "hack work" here is commercial writing in one of the mass culture industries, such as advertising, music, journalism, television, film, publishing (in the sense of blurbs, back cover copy, ghost writing, and other sorts of marginalia), and so on. It is not necessarily a commentary on the literary or creative quality of the work—though obviously some popular culture genres offer more scope than others (e.g., screenplays or liner notes versus advertising)—and all are more overtly commercial than so-called creative writing, though that may be a matter of some dispute from certain perspectives.
3. Aram Saroyan, *Genesis Angels: The Saga of Lew Welch and the Beat Generation* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 109.
4. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire, a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1989), 34.
5. Recording Industry Association of America, http://www.riaa.com. While the packaging of CDs continued to include cover art, notes, and information about the recording dates, group personnel, and so on, the greatly reduced physical size of the CD also shrank the importance of the visual elements that had been such a distinctive aspect of the LP's impact.
6. "I even got something like a gig about this time. Esmond Edwards, the A&R man for Prestige records, gave me a gig writing liner notes. I got a disc about two or three times a month, and for each set of notes I wrote I got $50. I wrote liners for Gene Ammons, Shirley Scott, Arnett Cobb, Willis "Gator" Jackson, and many many others. The *Blues People* research also meant that I had

to study not only the history of African American music but also the history of the people. It was like my loose-floating feelings, the subordinated brown that was hooked to the black and the blues, were now being reconstructed in the most basic of ways." Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 256.

For the view of one leading jazz musician on the ways Prestige exploited him and other jazz artists, see A. B. Spellman, *Black Music: Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 213.

7. The important jazz label Blue Note released its first record in 1939 but did not really take off until after World War II and the easing of restrictions on recording. Similarly, the Newark-based Savoy Records (discussed in chapter 1) released its first sides in 1942 but increased its output greatly in the late 1940s, largely through the recording of bebop and post-bop jazz.
8. The first discs had a short paragraph on the back jacket that explained the purpose of the series: "PRESTIGE presents jazz for the modern collector on extended play. This series represents the best in modern music from 1949 up to today. Each album is an individual record session in itself, with actual dates of the recordings inscribed on the cover. This series will be invaluable to all students and fans of jazz as it will give them an accurate, documented, chronological picture of both the jazz scene as a whole and the important musicians as individuals, beginning with 1949 and continuing on as each new year brings new developments in jazz."
9. Darren Mueller, "At the Margins of Music: The Early LPs of Prestige Records," American History Now, April 23, 2014, http://americanhistorynow.org.
10. Tom Piazza, *Setting the Tempo* (New York: Anchor, 1996), 2–4.
11. Marc Myers, *Why Jazz Happened* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 62.
12. For a sense of Gitler's position, see his comments in a *DownBeat* roundtable panel, "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part I," *DownBeat,* March 15, 1962, 20–26.
13. Piazza, *Setting the Tempo,* 1–2.
14. Brent Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 11–12.
15. Renee Gladman, "Liner Notes: A Way into the Invisible," *Paris Review,* November 2017, https://www.theparisreview.org.
16. Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, *Bacalao,* Prestige PRLB 7178, 1959.
17. For example, Baraka wrote of saxophonist and Newark native Wayne Shorter in a 1959 article in the *Jazz News,* later collected in *Black Music*, "I KNEW Wayne Shorter first in Newark where we were both, malevolently, born. He was one of the two 'weird' Shorter brothers that people mentioned occasionally, usually as a metaphorical reference, . . . as weird as Wayne." Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 81. In the early Black Arts poem "Return of the Native," Baraka uses the slant rhyme "weird word" in reference to "Egypt." Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 217. As noted in the previous chapter, in "City of Harlem" Baraka describes black people, particularly those who lived in the urban ghetto, as involuntary nonconformists with one of the markers of their status being their weirdness: "Harlem for this reason is a community of nonconformists, since any black American, simply by virtue of his blackness, is weird, a nonconformist in this society." Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Morrow, 1966), 93.
18. John Wright Trio, *South Side Soul,* Prestige PRLP 7190, 1960.
19. Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 14.

20. John Gennari, "Baraka's Bohemian Blues," *African American Review* 37, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2003): 254.
21. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 266–67.
22. Sonny Terry, *Sonny Is King,* Prestige Bluesville BV 1059, 1963. The career of Sonny Terry, usually in tandem with his longtime playing partner, the singer and guitarist Brownie McGhee, had an upswing in the 1960s with the folk blues revival as part of the larger folk revival. However, one side of this Prestige album, released on its Bluesville sublabel devoted to more straightforward blues offerings, features Terry in a much less "folk" setting with guitar (played by the Houston-based Lightnin' Hopkins), bass, and drums, suggesting that it was a session aimed at more contemporary black blues listeners rather than the largely white base of the folk revival—though, of course, such more urban blues formats would later find a large white audience with the championing of that format by such British rock bands as the Rolling Stones and the Animals in the mid-1960s. Baraka here is more enthusiastic about the sessions with Lightnin' Hopkins, who too experienced a growth in record sales as part of the folk blues revival but had a significant black following for music played and recorded in a much more urban, electrified style.
23. Billie Holiday, *Ladylove,* United Artists Jazz UAJ 14014, 1962.
24. Baraka, *Black Music,* 25.
25. Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Baraka's Billie Holiday as a Blues Poet of Black Longing," *African American Review* 37, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2003): 315.
26. Baraka, *Black Music,* 25.
27. Griffin, "Baraka's Billie Holiday," 316.
28. Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13–15. The British-born Feather can be seen as a good example of the evolution of liberal anticommunism in the jazz sphere, transitioning from a stance of jazz as the soundtrack of antifascism in the 1930s to a weapon in the ideological struggle against communism in the 1950s. For an example of the ideological work Feather saw his program doing, see his "Music Is Combatting Communism: Voice of America Shows Bring Universal Harmony," *DownBeat,* October 8, 1952, 1, 19.
29. John Coltrane, *Live at Birdland,* Impulse! A-50, 1964; Baraka, *Black Music,* 63.
30. Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896), 167.
31. Baraka, *Black Music,* 63–64.
32. John Bracey, "Coming from a Black Thing: Remembering the Black Arts Movement," in *SOS: Calling All Black People, A Black Arts Movement Reader,* ed. John Bracey, Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 653.
33. Baraka, *Black Music,* 64–65.
34. Askia Touré, "Keep on Pushin': Rhythm and Blues as a Weapon," *Liberator* 5 (October 1965): 8.
35. Baraka, *Black Music,* 66–67.
36. Various artists, *The New Wave in Jazz,* Impulse! AS-90, 1966. The album was released in Britain and France in 1965.
37. Baraka, *Black Music,* 175.
38. Baraka, *Black Music,* 175.
39. Baraka, *Black Music,* 175–76.

40. Amiri Baraka, "The Language of Defiance" speech, Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, 1996, 3, Amiri Baraka Papers, box 20, folder 2, Manuscripts and Rare Books Library, Columbia University, New York.

CHAPTER FOUR: "SOUL AND MADNESS"

1. William J. Harris, "'How You Sound??': Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz," in *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies,* ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 315.
2. For a discussion of Ellison's interest in audio technology, see Casey Hayman, "'Black Is . . . Black Ain't': Ralph Ellison's Meta-Black Aesthetic and the 'End' of African American Literature," *American Studies* 54, no. 3 (2015): 132–33.
3. Meta Du Ewa Jones, "Politics, Process and (Jazz) Performance: Amiri Baraka's 'It's Nation Time,'" *African American Review* 37, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2003): 346–48; Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 32; Kimberly Benston, *Baraka: The Renegade behind the Mask* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 104–5; William J. Harris, *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 35–38.
4. Amiri Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Morrow, 1966), 174.
5. Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement,* 24–25, 32–33; Aldon Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 121–36.
6. Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960,* ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 397.
7. Benston, *Baraka,* 91–95.
8. Amiri Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 240.
9. Amiri Baraka, ed., *African Congress: A Documentary History of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* (New York: Morrow, 1972), 103.
10. Jones, "Politics, Process and (Jazz) Performance," 250.
11. Baraka, *African Congress,* 93.
12. Baraka, *African Congress,* 99.
13. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 190, 208. The cover of the album too, with its ancient Egyptian/Kemetic references, is at least in part an homage to Sun Ra and his artistic vision of a cosmic blackness reaching deep into the past and far into the future—with a tribute perhaps also to Malcolm X, indicated by the minarets, domes, and other Islamic architecture in the far background. As Aldon Nielsen observes, the cover displays a landscape that is "at once an ages-old architectural wonder and a wonderous brick road pointing into the flaming sun of an Afrocentric future." Nielsen, *Integral Music: Language of African American Innovation* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 139.
14. Amiri Baraka, *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 104.
15. Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, eds., *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (New York: Morrow, 1968), 653.
16. James Brown, "Call Me Super Bad," King 6329, 1970.
17. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 209.

18. Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "How You Sound," in Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry,* 424.
19. Williams claimed in response to a British interlocutor that his sense of "American" literary language sprung "from the mouths of Polish mothers." Williams, *Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 311. Typically Baraka framed Williams's poetic stance and his importance to all of the schools of the New American poetry in terms of music: "Williams was the common denominator because he wanted American speech, a mixed foot, a variable measure. He knew American life had outdistanced the English rhythms and their formal meter. The language of this multinational land, of mixed ancestry, where war dance and salsa combine with country and western, all framed by African rhythm-and-blues confessional." Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 233.
20. Kimberly Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 190–91.
21. Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower Eastside Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 203.
22. Kane, *All Poets Welcome,* 5–6.
23. It might be worth considering whether the sometime antipathy between Kerouac and O'Hara was in part a regional Lowell versus Grafton/Worcester rivalry or even a French Canadian versus Irish tension that would be quite familiar to almost anyone who ever lived in Massachusetts, especially in the 1940s and 1950s.
24. Jerry Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 21.
25. Baraka, *Autobiography*, 2–4.
26. Coyt L. Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, Rutgers University Community Repository, New Brunswick, NJ, https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu; Baraka, *Autobiography,* 3.
27. Harris, "'How You Sound??,'" 316.
28. Coyt L. Jones, interview; Baraka, *Autobiography,* 1–51.
29. Baraka rhapsodized at length in his autobiography about the sense of pride and community at Newark Eagles games in the 1940s. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 42–46. It helped that the Eagles were one of the dominant Negro League teams of the decade, featuring such local stars as Larry Doby (Paterson) and Monte Irvin (Orange), who both went on to be among the first black players in the Major Leagues—in Doby's case, the first African American in the American League, name-checked in Count Basie's 1949 single "Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball."
30. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 20.
31. Coyt L. Jones, interview.
32. Amiri Baraka, "Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion," *Washington Post,* November 16, 1986, F1.
33. Baraka, *Wise, Why's, Y's: The Griot's Song Djeli Ya* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1995), 115.
34. New York Art Quartet, *New York Art Quartet,* ESP Disk 1004, 1965. The album was recorded in November 1964 and released the next year.
35. Baraka wrote about his encounter with Heidegger as a developing artist: "I also had met some painters. A guy named Peter Schwarzberg was actually the son of one of Nellie's relative's friends. Peter was really out, out, out. He was in graduate school at the New School, in philosophy. He said he was 'a

phenomenologist' and his endless discourse about 'the self and the *other,*' existentialism and phenomenology, made me begin to study these philosophies myself. I began to read Heidegger and Wittgenstein and Husserl." Baraka, *Autobiography,* 221.

36. For a personal account of the Asilomar Conference and Baraka, see poet and fiction writer (and former poet laureate of California) Al Young's musical memoir *Things Ain't What They Used to Be* (Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1986), 57–63. As in Young's other musical memoirs, *Things Ain't What They Used to Be* is organized in chapters that reference a song or piece of music linked to a particular moment (in this case The Supremes' "Where Did Our Love Go"). As is often the case in these works, Young created a semifictionalized narration from the point of view of a more "street" narrator who is a sort of homage to Langston Hughes's Jesse B. Semple (Simple) in dialogue with a past version of Young. In this case, this fiction allows a certain distance so that the sketch is admiring yet critical of Baraka—and obviously not reliable. One thing that is apparent from the sketch is Baraka's engagement with popular black music as well as avant-garde jazz. See also Baraka, *Autobiography*, 280. What is not clear is the composition of the audience of the Asilomar. While some commentators suggest that there were few African Americans, Baraka and Young noted that it was a racially mixed audience—though neither commented much on the actual conference lectures, readings, and discussion but primarily focused on what might be thought of as the after-parties. For revised, often (as in Baraka's case) heavily revised, versions of the Asilomar lectures, see Herbert Hill, ed., *Anger and Beyond: The Negro Writer in the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
37. For a condescending (to black and white speakers and attendees alike) account of Asilomar and the concern of many of the speakers about the 1964 Harlem uprising, see Kenneth Rexroth, "Descendants of a Heroic Negro Past," *San Francisco Examiner,* August 16, 1964, 34.
38. Penn Sound: Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, University of Pennsylvania, Asilomar Negro Writers Conference, Pacific Grove, California, early August 1964, https://media.sas.upenn.edu.
39. Harris, "'How You Sound??,'" 34.
40. Nielsen, *Black Chant,* 191.
41. Benston, *Performing Blackness,* 220.
42. Benston, *Performing Blackness,* 200.
43. Benston, *Performing Blackness,* 220.
44. Amiri Baraka, *The Dead Lecturer* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 62.
45. All of these groups could be thought of as proto–Black Power organizations. On Guard for Freedom in particular was an attempt to continue the alliance of black political and cultural radicals in Harlem and Brooklyn with politicized African American artists and intellectuals in New York's Lower East Side and Greenwich Village that had been established by the 1961 demonstration at the United Nations protesting Patrice Lumumba's murder. The Monroe Defense Committee was a national solidarity group supporting Robert Williams, Mae Mallory, and other Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP activists who had been charged with kidnapping—resulting in Williams's flight, first to Cuba and then to China, and Mallory's jailing.
46. Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 92–93.

47. George Lipsitz and Richard E. Polton, *The 1964 Paterson Riot* (Woodland Park, NJ: North Jersey Media Group Books, 2014), 3–4, 30.
48. New York Art Quartet, *New York Art Quartet,* ESP Disk 1004, 1965.
49. Nielsen, *Black Chant,* 177–78.
50. Sunny Murray, *Sonny's Time Now,* Jihad 663, 1965.
51. Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 193, 199.
52. Baraka, *Digging,* 251.
53. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 22.
54. Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work: An Autobiography* (Napierville: J. L. Nichols, 1901), 19.
55. Baraka, *Wise, Why's, Y's,* 8–9.
56. Amiri Baraka (with The Jihad), *Black and Beautiful Soul and Madness,* Jihad 1001, 1968.
57. Baraka, *Autobiography,* 236–37; Amiri Baraka, interview with author, July 15, 2000, Newark, NJ; Lorenzo Thomas, *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 130–31; Thomas, "'Communicating by Horns': Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement," *African American Review* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 295–97; A. B. Spellman, interview with author, December 28, 2000, Washington, DC; Askia Touré, interview with author, December 2, 2000, Cambridge, MA.
58. Baraka, *Autobiography*, 337.
59. For a rare recorded version of Touré reading during the Black Arts era, see "Notes from a Guerilla Diary," *Black Spirits: Festival of New Black Poets in America,* Black Forum B 456L, 1972.
60. Baraka, *Black Music,* 190–91.
61. Baraka, *Black Music,* 240.
62. Baraka and Neal, *Black Fire,* 655.
63. Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 56–64.
64. Harris, "'How You Sound??,'" 315
65. Reading with Ed Dorn at the Just Buffalo Literary Center, Buffalo, NY, December 8, 1978, Penn Sound: Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, University of Pennsylvania, http://writing.upenn.edu.
66. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 263.
67. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 263–64.
68. Nielsen, *Black Chant,* 196.

CHAPTER FIVE: "I SEE HIM SOMETIMES"

1. William Parker, *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,* AUM Fidelity 062/63, 2010; William Parker, *The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield: Live in Rome,* RAI Trade RTPJ 0011CD, 2007.
2. "The Language of Defiance," speech at the Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, 1996, 2, Amiri Baraka Collection, box 20, folder 2, Manuscripts and Rare Books Library, Columbia University, New York.
3. For an insightful discussion of the Italian recording of "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue" by Parker and his band, especially Baraka's part in it, see Casey Hale, "'Different Placements of Spirit': The Unity Music of William Parker's Curtis Mayfield Project," *Jazz Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2015): 259–87.
4. Hale, "'Different Placements of Spirit,'" 269–73.
5. Hale, "'Different Placements of Spirit,'" 278.

6. Hale, "'Different Placements of Spirit,'" 261.
7. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), online edition.
8. Michelle Mercer, "William Parker on Curtis Mayfield," *Jazz Times,* June 1, 2006, https://jazztimes.com.
9. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," in *The Black Aesthetic,* ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 285.
10. For an interview with New Lafayette founder Robert Macbeth that gives a sense of the impact of this notion of ritual on many of the leading Black Arts theaters, especially in New York, see Marvin X, "The Black Ritual Theatre: An Interview with Robert Macbeth," *Black Theatre* 3 (1969): 20–24. The fact that Macbeth was early on ambivalent about the relation of the New Lafayette to the Black Arts Movement and black artistic nationalism makes his articulation of the practically and ideologically separatist notion of ritual that he articulated in his interview with Marvin X even more striking as an example of how deeply the idea penetrated among black artists. However, it should also be noted that virtually everyone to whom I have spoken about this topic, whether favoring the ritual theater or, like Woodie King, unenthusiastic about it, admits that black audiences overwhelmingly favored more naturalistic and/or humorous nonritual narrative stagings, such as the plays of Ron Milner. In other words, black audiences, by and large, preferred stories.
11. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 15.
12. "Dope" first appeared in Amiri Baraka, *Hard Facts* (Newark: People's War, 1975), an extremely hard chapbook to locate. For a more accessible printing of the poem, see Amiri Baraka, *Transbluency: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Marsilio, 1995), 151.
13. Kathy Lou Schultz, *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181.
14. Ben Hickman, *Crisis and the U.S. Avant-Garde: Poetry and Real Politics* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2015), 117. Hickman's book contains one of the few serious discussions—if not the only serious discussion—of *Hard Facts*.
15. Amiri Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 265–66.
16. Amiri Baraka, David Murray, and Steve McCall, *New Music-New Poetry,* India Navigation IN-1048, 1982.
17. Schultz, *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History,* 154.
18. Kalamu ya Salaam, "Interview: Amiri Baraka Analyzes How He Writes," Neo-Griot: Kalamu ya Salaam's Informational Blog, January 10, 2014, http://kalamu.com.
19. Sonia Sanchez, interview with author, Philadelphia, 2014.
20. All the transcriptions of Baraka's words are mine unless otherwise noted. In some cases, the words are difficult to make out. Consequently, all errors of hearing and transcription are mine alone.
21. Curtis Mayfield, *This Is My Country,* Curtom Records, 1968.
22. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man,* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 3.
23. "The Language of Defiance," speech at the Black Arts Festival, 4.
24. Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," 274.
25. As a sort of coda to his monologue at the end of *Dutchman,* Clay warns Lula, "Tell him not to preach so much rationalism and cold logic to these niggers. Let them alone. Let them sing curses at you in code and see your filth as

simple lack of style. Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll begin to listen. And then, maybe one day, you'll find they actually do understand exactly what you are talking about, all these fantasy people. All these blues people. And on that day, as sure as shit, when you really believe you can accept them into your fold, as half-white trusties late of the subject peoples. With no more blues, except the very old ones, and not a watermelon in sight, the great missionary heart will have triumphed, and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own." Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 98.

26. Amiri Baraka, *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems* (Phillipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehisi, 2003), 34–35.
27. Baraka, *Somebody Blew Up America,* 38.
28. David Remnick, "The Possessed: James Brown in Eighteen Minutes," *New Yorker,* July 30, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com.
29. Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 137–38.
30. Baraka, *Somebody Blew Up America,* 36.
31. After a reading at Amherst College in 2004, I heard Baraka tell a young man who called John Kerry "a thief" in a discussion about that year's presidential election, "Sure, but if it's a choice between a murderer and a thief, you got to go with the thief." This was certainly one of the more colorful formulations of the lesser of two evils idea that I had ever encountered—and pure Baraka.
32. Amiri Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Morrow, 1966), 85.
33. Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *New Challenge* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1937): 53.
34. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 264.
35. Parker, *I Plan to Stay a Believer,* liner notes.
36. Baraka, *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* 271–72.
37. Amiri Baraka, "How You Sound," in *The New American Poetry,* ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 424.

CONCLUSION: BLUES PEOPLE AT SYMPHONY HALL

1. "A Death in Newark: Amiri Baraka's Funeral as Told by Dwayne Rodgers," *Okay Player* (blog), n.d., https://www.okayplayer.com.
2. Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 9.
3. Amiri Baraka, *SOS: Poems, 1961–2013* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 180.
4. Kalamu ya Salaam, "Interview: Amiri Baraka Analyzes How He Writes," *Neo-Griot,* January 10, 2014, http://kalamu.com.
5. *Trane: Where Does Art Come* manuscript, 2, Amiri Baraka Collection, box 18, Manuscripts and Rare Books Library, Columbia University, New York.
6. Amiri Baraka, *Razor: Revolutionary Art for Cultural Revolution* (Chicago: Third World Press, 2012), 463.

INDEX

JAMES SMETHURST was born and raised in New Jersey. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He is professor of Afro-American studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is author of *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946*; *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (winner of the Organization of American Historians' James A. Rawley Prize); and *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance*. He also co-edited *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*; *Radicalism in the South since Reconstruction*; and *SOS—Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*.

This page intentionally left blank

AMIRI BARAKA is unquestionably the most recognized leader of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and one of the key literary and cultural figures of the postwar United States. While Baraka's political and aesthetic stances changed considerably over the course of his career, *Brick City Vanguard* demonstrates the continuity in his thinking about the meaning of black music in the material, psychic, and ideological development of black people. Drawing on primary texts, paratexts (including album liner notes), audio and visual recordings, and archival sources, James Smethurst takes a new look at how Baraka's writing on and performance of music envisioned the creation of an African American people or nation, as well as the growth and consolidation of a black working class within that nation, that resonates to this day. This vision also provides a way of understanding the encounter of black people with what has been called "the urban crisis" and a projection of a liberated black future beyond that crisis.

"Once again, with *Brick City Vanguard,* James Smethurst proves that he is one of the leading scholars of the Black Arts Movement, of New Left literary studies, and of one of its emblematic writers, Amiri Baraka."

—Jean-Philippe Marcoux, cofounder of the Amiri Baraka Society and author of *Jazz Griots: Music as History in the 1960s African American Poem*

"James Smethurst has read everything on Baraka and produced an original and important book. *Brick City Vanguard* is a major contribution to the field."

—William J. Harris, author of *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic*

JAMES SMETHURST is professor of Afro-American studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and author of *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance.*

A VOLUME IN THE SERIES
African American Intellectual History

UNIVERSITY OF massachusetts press AMHERST AND BOSTON
www.umass.edu/umpress

Cover design: Sally Nichols

Cover art: *Portrait of Amiri Baraka,* 1967.

ISBN 978-1-62534-515-8
90000
9 781625 345158