

Trumpet of the Spirit, Bass of Faith: Jazz as a Cold War Spiritual Weapon¹

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¹ The title of this paper is an allusion to one of this course's main textbooks: Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

Even though it preaches separation of church and state, during the Eisenhower administration the United States government did the work of religion.² Particularly after WWII, the US government led perhaps the most widespread and inclusive religious revivals in American history that is still bearing out to the present.³ It was a new kind of revival, and looking at President Eisenhower and Congressman Adam Clayton Powell's thought provides concrete insights into new meaning that was given to religion during the Cold War. The ways that religion was engaged as a Cold War revival was multifaceted, but this paper will focus on one of its most interesting and revealing factors: Jazz music. Jazz music is a concrete example of how a secular piece of American culture became sacralized as it was politicized.⁴ A key figure in this process was literary historian: Marshall W. Stearns, who made up jazz's spiritual history.⁵

² I use the term "religion" throughout this paper in two ways. The first two parts of this paper look at religion as a product of culture, which is close to how religion is defined by Clifford Geertz: "...a system of symbols which act to [clothe] conceptions with such an aura of factuality that... the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." At a general level Geertz's definition is useful in thinking about Eisenhower and Jazz music as "symbols" that carried and conveyed religion. I take issue with the latter parts of Geertz's definition, which constitutes an ontological claim. Geertz claims the source of religious symbols—such as God—is not real but is a projection of people's moods and motivations. Geertz goes too far beyond what can be known ontologically and theologically. Unlike Geertz, I defer to the subjects themselves as the authority at the individual level. Rather than engaging in a distracting and unproductive ontological and theological debate between my subjects and me, I am passive on their claims. For example, if Dizzy Gillespie defines jazz as created and controlled by God through His artists, then that is the way it will be presented. The subjects themselves inherently stand in for me as the ontological and theological authority. It is at the collective or social level where my analysis may be iconoclastic. I am aware that my work is open to contradictions, but having these contradictions is more historically accurate. Therefore, my argument and definition of religion in this paper does not resolve on a single definition of religion. I frame a paradox: jazz music was both a manipulative political weapon as well as a genuine spiritual praxis. Thus, my definition of religion for this paper is both that it is network of made-up symbols infused into material culture as well as humans' relationship with God [For Geertz's definition of religion, see *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90-91]

³ Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

⁴ A note on what jazz is musically: As a direct derivative of blues jazz is more ensemble than individual, more instrumental than vocal, and more upbeat than solemn. The blues was incorporated into jazz but not the other way around. One example of this was Dizzy Gillespie's reprisal of the iconic blues song by W.C. Handy "St. Louis Blues." Upon hearing the jazz version, Handy forbade its release because it was no longer a blues song. See Dizzy Gillespie 311-312.

⁵ By calling Stearns a "literary historian" is not to mean he was a historian of literature but that his history is unhistorical or a work of fiction.

But while the spirituality of jazz was fabricated, this does not mean that jazz did not facilitate authentic spiritual experiences. The autobiographical writings of jazz musicians reveal that jazz was more than just a political tool. Ultimately, Jazz gives us insight into the nature of religion in Cold War America. It was as much an agenda as it was diplomatic propaganda as well as an authentic spiritual praxis.

Granted, American revivals before the Cold War typically possessed warfare sentiments. But those wars were fought in the spirit, not diplomacy tactics; the enemy was Satan, not Soviets; its promise salvation, not conquest; its central figure Christ, not the United States; and its method surrender, not propaganda. This shift in the meaning of revival during the Cold War gave rise to a diplomatic, nationalistic, conquest-oriented, calculating, US-centric religiosity that conflated the intentionality of previous revivals with Cold War objectives, so that winning souls was synonymous to winning the war against Russians and spreading the US worldwide was tantamount to bringing heaven to earth. This was a subtle and fluid shift occurring in a multitude of ways. Overall, the character of the nation changed to a more heightened sense of how religion was meaningful for all aspects of life, or as Jonathan Herzog puts it: "...secular institutions and beliefs alone were insufficient to meet society's Cold War needs," so leaders sought to "reendow religion with social, cultural, and political meaning."⁶ Unlike religious revivals before the Cold War, it was top-down process of the sacralization of all aspects of American life.⁷ Jazz was one of its most significant sacralized subjects, and to understand why and how jazz changed as a result of government intervention requires an contextual understanding of the religious milieu that transformed jazz's meaning, specifically by looking at Eisenhower's thought and his administration.

⁶ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex* 6-7.

⁷ Herzog, 7.

It was not just jazz. In his 1958 State of the Union Address, Eisenhower perceived the tensions with the Soviet Union (SU) as all encompassing, referring to their tactics as a “total cold war,” where the only answer was to “wage total peace.”⁸ This mindset seems to capture the attitude of his generation, where the tensions with the SU consumed all aspects of life. Kenneth Osgood asserts, “Total war was the defining experience for the generation of Americans who led the United States during the early Cold War.”⁹ Thus, all aspects of American life and culture became meaningful in a new way, a way where even the most benign aspects of American life became weaponized. Or, as Osgood puts it, Eisenhower’s total war required the “harnessing all aspects of American life to meet the communist ideological challenge.”¹⁰

And while Osgood and other scholars use the term “ideology” to define the clash between the US and SU, it would be more accurate to frame it as a theological conflict. Herzog claims, “American leaders recognized that Communism was an “armed doctrine,” a disease of the psyche and spirit that arms alone could not defeat.”¹¹ This is because the biggest issue at stake, as evidenced by the president’s rhetoric, was the atheistic threat that the SU posed to American religions: “that this is, underneath it all, a battle between those people who believe that man is something more than just an educated animal and those who believe he is nothing else. That is exactly what it is. It is atheism against some kind of religion.”¹² Superficially it seems a hypervigilant leap for Eisenhower to interpret battling belief systems as an attack on America itself. However, Andrew Preston by explaining religion as the basis of democracy concludes that

⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, Jan. 9, 1958,” Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Speeches, http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all_about_ike/speeches/1958_state_of_the_union.pdf.

⁹ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006) 1.

¹⁰ Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 11.

¹¹ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 8.

¹² Dwight D. Eisenhower: “The President’s News Conference, March 21, 1956,” The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10759>

an attack on religion was interpreted in the American mindset as an act of war: “A threat to freedom of religion was thus a threat to freedom of conscience— and, eventually, a threat to American democracy itself.”¹³ Although it could be argued that clarifying ideology versus theology here is just semantics, the difference between these words in the context of this study is significant. For example, Eisenhower referred to American faith and religious freedom as the basis of civilization itself: “...as a historical fact religion has had the effect with us of giving us the undergirding for our whole system of civilization.”¹⁴ So unlike at other times and places, ideology and theology are interchangeable during the Cold War. Osgood’s use of ideology is appropriate, but framing it as a theological conflict instead emphasizes how during this period in American history religion underwrote the American system of ideas and ideals, where all aspects of American life became sacralized.

Accordingly, religion itself became weaponized. For example, upon signing the bill adding “under God” into the pledge of allegiance Eisenhower said: “... we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or in war.”¹⁵ As Herzog puts it, “religious faith was one of the most potent arrows in the quiver of domestic security.”¹⁶ So if religion was the most effective weapon in a theological war, then using secular aspects of American culture in the war effort entailed sacralizing them, even if they were not necessarily inherently religious. Interestingly, this included music. Of the spiritual weapons that Eisenhower referred to as the most powerful resources in war, Eisenhower referred

¹³ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 12.

¹⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Television Broadcast: The People Ask the President, October 12, 1956," The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10640>.

¹⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill To Include the Words "Under God" in the Pledge to the Flag, June 14, 1954," The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9920>

¹⁶ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 6.

to music as the most quintessential of them all: “The enjoyment of music--speaking for myself, at least--has a moral and spiritual value which is unique and powerful.”¹⁷ When Eisenhower adds that music is unique in that it “reaches easily and quickly across lingual, racial, and national barriers,”¹⁸ it is easy to see how jazz was an ideal weapon. Jazz was an American-born art form popularized by inter-racial bands and was predominantly instrumental. Jazz fully encapsulated US culture but could also go beyond its own cultural limitations.

Eisenhower did not specifically endorse Jazz as a unique and powerful spiritual weapon, but Baptist Pastor and Congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. did. Powell was a consistent advocate of Civil Rights and racial equality throughout his career. In his autobiography, Powell describes a close and cooperative working relationship with President Eisenhower, particularly on matters of racial desegregation in key places such as the capital’s milieu, VA hospitals, and Navy shipyards in the South.¹⁹ However, in 1955 Congressman Powell openly defied the President and the rest of Congress by attending an international conference in Bandung, Indonesia, which brought together twenty-nine different African and Asian nations to discuss the role of the Third World in the Cold War. Powell justified his defiance, saying he was motivated by a “Divine compulsion” to go.²⁰ And when the conference resulted with the majority favoring the ideals of democracy and was thus was a victory for the United States, Powell attributed to

¹⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill To Incorporate the National Music Council, Aug. 1, 1956," The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10548>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 96-97.

²⁰ Significantly, Congressman Powell viewed his government service as a way to serve God and continued his vocation as a pastor. For example, he cited one accomplishment as convincing a fellow congressman and Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, to attend church and become baptized. Indeed, as one of the first African American congressman, as he faced overwhelming circumstances in his attempts to target racial segregation in the midst of Cold War tensions, and he often cited an “Inner Voice” that both offered him wise discernment as well as provided a continual source of strength for the oppositions he faced. While Powell does not explicitly mention the endorsement of jazz as a Cold War offensive maneuver, it is reasonable to conclude that that he attributed that “Inner Voice” with later guiding him to hire Dizzy Gillespie as a US cultural ambassador (See Ibid., 39-40, 95, 102-103, 132).

God this masterstroke of Cold War diplomacy: “We *won* at Bandung only because the idea of democracy triumphed over the idea of Communism. I played a small part in this but only because God willed that I should be there.”²¹

However, the victorious conversion of the majority of third world countries to democracy at the Bandung conference was not the only, and perhaps not the most significant, victory that moment yielded. While there, Powell was alerted to a key weakness in U.S. Total War theological-ideological strategy, a revelation that would a year later lead to the adoption of jazz as one of the most powerful diplomatic weapons in the United States arsenal. While at the conference, Powell (as the only US representative present) came under a key communist ideological attack that almost cost the US its victory: how could the United States promote democracy and capitalism as beneficial for all peoples and nations while the treatment of its own black population was so appalling? In the moment Powell pointed to himself (a black man in congress) to counter this criticism. But upon his return, Powell urged Eisenhower toward an entirely new diplomacy tactic, one that made civil rights synonymous with democracy in total war ideology: “Whereas previously I had thought of civil rights in terms of rights for Negroes only, I now thought of civil rights as the sole method by which we could save the entire United States of America.”²² Powell thereafter became even more vigorous in his civil rights work. As a key part of this new project, about a year after the Bandung Conference Powell hired an already internationally famous Dizzy Gillespie as a US ambassador to do a 10-week international jazz tour in the Middle East and Europe.²³

²¹ Ibid, 107.

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ Dizzy Gillespie, *To BE, or Not... to BOP* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 413; “Gillespie Tour Starts Today,” *NY Times*, March 23, 1956, 23. Proquest Historical Newspapers (113509193).

Powell hiring Gillespie and his band as foreign ambassadors was a contentious issue, and Congress received outcries from the American public against the use of jazz as part of a Cold War initiative and something state funds should not support.²⁴ Again, as Osgood so aptly describes, the generation who experienced total war keenly understood the significance of nonmilitary initiatives and their importance for winning and were deeply invested in ensuring those weapons were appropriate, i.e., sanctified.²⁵ While Powell may have hired Gillespie because of his Bandung revelation, it would be the work of another thinker to sacralize jazz music in order for it to be an appropriate and effective weapon for the Cold War: Marshall W. Stearns, a university scholar and music critic.²⁶ As Danielle Fosler-Lussier points out, in response to the critical American public Marshall Stearns was the one called upon by the State Department to justify the use of jazz's place in a time of total war as a diplomatic initiative.²⁷ And this sacralizing would give a religious meaning to jazz that was not there before and it would thereafter change the meaning of jazz, making it complicit in the US government's Cold War revivalism.

Stearns had his work cut out for him, but he was qualified for the task. Educated at both Harvard and Yale where he focused on law and then medieval literature respectively, Stearns had only a few years before Gillespie's tour founded the Institute of Jazz Studies, which even to the present is the first and largest center for Jazz studies. His interest in jazz combined with his social activism for African-American rights deeply influenced his jazz historiography, especially his 1956 *The Story of Jazz*, which at the time and to the present has been considered a standard of

²⁴ Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 79.

²⁵ Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 2.

²⁶ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 418.

²⁷ Fosler, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 79. Also, the State Department released a formal defense of its sponsorship of jazz international tours in a *New York Times* article: "U.S. Defends Trips by Entertainers," *New York Times*, 55 (May 5, 1955), Proquest Historical Newspapers (113977836).

jazz history.²⁸ Even though people throughout the world had heard jazz music through international radio and records before Gillespie's band toured, it was not perceived positively everywhere.²⁹ Indeed, one US senator serving as an ambassador to the United Nations advised against the use of jazz in the repertoire of US cultural exhibitions abroad: Herewith my suggestions, submitted in accordance with the President's request at the last Cabinet meeting, for U.S. exhibits abroad... *All must be skillfully keyed to the taste of the country in which shown. There must be no vulgarity – no matter how funny or clever or interesting the program which contains such vulgarity may be. I would even avoid jazz music...*³⁰ Indeed, jazz music, in popular opinion, was seen as morally questionable, at odds with religious morality.

One film depiction that captures this view of jazz as incongruent with religion is the 1958 film *St. Louis Blues*, a film based on the life and story of W.C. Handy. The central plotline is the tension between Handy and his father, a Methodist Episcopalian minister, over Handy's playing of the blues. In one scene, as a young boy, Handy is playing the organ during the church service worship, and starts playing an upbeat where the congregation starts clapping and eventually diverges from the normally restrained and solemn hymn singing. Stopping his congregation abruptly, Handy's father preaches: "That kind of singin' is praise for the devil not the Lord! There are only two kinds of music in this world: the devils and the Lords... May the Lord forgive you for turning His sacred song into a tune for evil jigging."³¹ Thus in a world where American religion was at stake, expressions of religion were elevated above any association with moral laxity. Indeed, this is corroborated by Billie Holiday's childhood experiences, where jazz

²⁸ Mario Dunkel, "Marshall Winslow Stearns and the Politics of Jazz Historiography," *American Music* 30:4 (Winter 2012), 470.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁰ Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., The United States Representative at the United Nations (Lodge) to the Secretary of State. Personal. New York: July 23, 1954. *United States Department of State Foreign Relationship of the United States (FRUS) 1952-1954 National Security affairs* 1775.

³¹ *St. Louis Blues*, Directed by Allen Reisner (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1958).

music was seen as immoral: “I guess I was nine years old then. Been listening to Pops and Bessie ever since that time. Of course, my mother considered that type of music sinful; she’d whip me in a minute if she caught me listening to it. Those days, we were supposed to listen to hymns, or something like that.”³² As popular film and autobiography, these show not only what Stearns was up against but also that the religious problem with jazz up until that point was not so much its history but it being a form of expression that departed from traditional mainstream protestant’s constrained and composed worship style.

Significantly, Stearns referred to his strategic work on the history of jazz in explicit Cold War terms as “*operation jazz*.”³³ Stearns accompanied the Gillespie tour where he gave lectures on the history of jazz either before or after the band would play. He also created a historic jazz set list for Gillespie’s band to play for the first half so the band would play the musical styles that corresponded with Stearns’s historiography.³⁴ In Stearns’ hands, jazz’s history became central to its use as the tool of propaganda, where the history he wrote for it was foregrounded as its true identity.

Indeed, Stearns sets out to correct the misconceptions of jazz by reestablishing a different starting place than the one that is morally offensive to the general public:

... why has the general public rejected jazz? People think of jazz in connection with the Negro and with the red-light districts of Storyville in New Orleans... with the gangster underworld and Prohibition... in connection with the periods of ‘moral laxity’ that followed World War I and World War II.³⁵

In order to correct this, Stearns reaches farther back in time, even millions and millions of years to the time of Pangaea, to assert a foundation more ancient and thus more authentic: “In

³² Billie Holiday in *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It*, ed. Nat Shapiro & Nat Hentoff (New York: Dover Publications, 1955) 198.

³³ Mario Dunkel, “Stearns and Jazz Historiography,” 468.

³⁴ Fosler, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, 80; Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 418.

³⁵ Marshall Winslow Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956) 297.

ancient times, Europe and Africa were connected – part of the same continent – according to archaeologists. Folk tales, religions, prehistoric arts, and implements of the two areas are similar. So is the music.”³⁶ Indeed, this is the starting place of his comprehensive and lengthy definition of jazz, which asserts that jazz music is the result of the blending of African and European traditions musical aspects:

... we may define jazz tentatively as a *semi-improvisational American music distinguished by an immediacy of communication, an expressiveness characteristic of the free use of the human voice, and a complex flowing rhythm; it is the result of a three-hundred-years’ blending in the United States of the European and West African musical traditions; and its predominant components are European harmony, Euro-African melody, and African rhythm.*³⁷

Stearns claims the African basis of jazz had been preserved through Sanctified Churches and *Vodun*.³⁸ By rooting the foundation of jazz in the Sanctified Church and *Vodun* as a Catholic expression, Stearns transformed jazz into a legitimate Cold War Spiritual Weapon.

However, Stearns’s work is not based on any historical evidence but rather a comparison between the present characteristics of jazz music—such as antiphony and complex rhythms and falsetto breaks—with different aspects of Sanctified Church and *Vodun* cultures.³⁹ As well, Stearns takes for granted that jazz’s African roots were preserved in slave culture and seems shockingly naïve to how chaotic and disruptive the experience of transplantation and slavery was for black Americans: “... slaves on the large plantations in the vicinity of New Orleans heard

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 282.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32; Additionally, although Stearns does not offer his readers a definition of the Sanctified Church, we may understand it to be a precursor to what later crystallized as Pentecostalism, characterized by its revivals and literalist reading of the miracle accounts in the Bible, such as spontaneous physical healing and spontaneous speaking in unlearned languages.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

little or no European music. Left pretty much to themselves, these field hands were able to retain much of their musical heritage and the plantations became a reservoir of African music,”⁴⁰ and

A good part of the West African musical heritage, however, survived unconsciously – through attitudes, motions, habits, points of view, mannerisms, and gestures carried down from generation to generation without thought or plan. A child might absorb some part of African rhythms, for example, simply by watching and listening to his mother sweep the floor.⁴¹

While jazz may indeed have African roots, Stearns does not prove his point because he does not support his claims with any concrete historical evidence. This is problematic because his story was widely used as the authority on jazz history, despite the fact that it was closer to being a novel than authentic scholarship.⁴² It was, as Mario Dunkel aptly calls it, a “diplomatic narrative.”⁴³ It was not a “neutral” history but one that served a political function with an agenda to make jazz respectable in order to fashion it into a Cold War weapon.⁴⁴ “Stearns never attempted to write an objective history of jazz.”⁴⁵ Stearns did this most significantly by giving jazz a history that was respectable because it was spiritual.

There is really only one jazz legend that clearly corroborate Stearns’ claim that jazz’s African roots directly informed jazz through Sanctified Churches, and that was Dizzy Gillespie.⁴⁶ Yet published two decades after Stearns’s *Story of Jazz*, the influence of Stearns on Dizzy’s conception of jazz cannot be ignored. Yet on the other hand, perhaps Stearns based his history of jazz on Dizzy’s early childhood experiences where he would sit outside of a Sanctified Church listening to its music where he picked up what would later become his jazz rhythms. In that case,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42

⁴¹ Ibid., 21

⁴² Dunkel, “Marshall Winslow Stearns and the Politics of Jazz Historiography,” 475, 491.

⁴³ Ibid., 494

⁴⁴ Ibid., 486, 499.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 469.

⁴⁶ Stearns, *Story of Jazz*, 14.

the basis of Stearns' argument is exceedingly narrow.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, this is unclear and Stearns seems to want us to think that the Dizzy experience is normative of all jazz musicians.

One of the other problem areas of Stearns historiography is that it elides over the aspects of jazz that root it firmly in working class culture. As Dunkel asserts, Stearns's historiography was "class-unconscious."⁴⁸ For instance, even though Chicago was a major center for the development of jazz, Stearns overlooks Chicago's influence because of its working-class identity, and when it is mentioned it is "stripped of its working-class history."⁴⁹ Because of its intended sociopolitical function, Stearns's history elides over any association with the working class, which constituted the vast majority of jazzmen's backgrounds.⁵⁰ Thus, Stearns story of jazz does not match the story of the musicians themselves. Stearns created an account of jazz unrecognizable to its practitioners.

As well, the city he chooses to foreground as a significant shaper of jazz is New Orleans, but its Storyville aspects are absent. This contradicts the vast majority of autobiographical accounts of jazz's most significant figures, such as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charles Mingus, to name a few.⁵¹ For example, Stearns mentions the legend that many consider the first archetype jazzman: Charles 'Buddy' Bolden. Stearns emphasizes that Bolden was influenced by both *vodun* and a charismatic church, but leaves out that Bolden was psychiatrically institutionalized after a psychotic break induced by long-term alcohol abuse.⁵² By

⁴⁷ Dizzy credits exposure as a child to the Sanctified Church in his community where he first learned the rhythm of jazz that he says he followed with his music for the rest of his life. See Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 30-31.

⁴⁸ Dunkel, "Marshall Winslow Stearns and the Politics of Jazz Historiography," 494.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 492-493.

⁵⁰ Dunkel, "Marshall Winslow Stearns and the Politics of Jazz Historiography," 491-492.

⁵¹ The red-light district of New Orleans that was shut down in 1917, after which the practices of the area were forced underground and dispersed throughout New Orleans. See "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans," in *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, and Louis Armstrong, *My Life in New Orleans* (New York: DeCapo Press, 1954).

⁵² Stearns, *Story of Jazz*, 67; *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, 39.

examining what Stearns chooses to emphasize and what he chooses to ignore, we can see how much he wants to present jazz in its most favorable light by elevating it above the context of its own time and place.

Indeed, there was a notable difference between what jazz critics and musicians thought about jazz. Making fun of music critics, Charles Mingus sarcastically imagined the roles of critic and musician as reversed, where the critics were the jazzmen and he and his band where the critics: “Put Marshall Stearns on the bass and let Whitney Balliett score and John Wilson conduct. Let all them other young up-and-coming critics dance. How would you like to review that schitt [sic] for the *Amsterdam News*?”⁵³ Observing a couple of music critics in a saloon who were watching a band play, Mingus complained: “They always hear something else... Listen at them motherfuckers [the jazzmen currently playing]. Dig the critics over there still talking to each other. Don’t hear a thing.”⁵⁴ Therefore, it is important to note that while Stearns’s work claims to tell the “story” of jazz, musicians themselves thought that critics’ discourse was not really about the music. In other words, the critics did not “get” the meaning of jazz in the same way that musicians themselves did. In the above quote, Mingus emphasizes that individuals who inhabit the music in a particular way, in the immediacy of it as a lived experience understand jazz. Jazz could not be understood as a highly abstracted, intellectualized form.

Yet even though Stearns fabricated a history of jazz spirituality to promote a propagandistic image of jazz, that did not necessarily mean jazz was not used as an authentic medium of spirituality. Indeed, while Stearns through the use of history may have laid a veneer of spirituality over jazz, it was at least two jazz legends in particular who inhabited jazz as a genuine spiritual praxis.

⁵³ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 3rd ed. (New York: Canongate, 1995) 242.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

Dizzy Gillespie was, significantly, the first jazz musician hired by the US government as a U.S. foreign ambassador. Starting in 1956 and after, his tours turned out to be one of the most effective tools in Eisenhower's spiritual arsenal. Indeed, one NY Times article explicitly refers to jazz as a Cold War propaganda weapon.⁵⁵ One newspaper article describes how Gillespie's band blew out of the water the other types of music bands sent by the US government in terms of its popularity, thus emphasizing its effectiveness as a Cold War weapon: "Everywhere they went the only problem was finding auditoriums large enough to house the new converts to the American viewpoint attracted by Dizzy's bent trumpet..."⁵⁶ Significantly, the author uses the term "convert," which, in this context, does have religious significance: the US government was engaged in proselytizing through jazz. As well, one congressman remarked how successful Gillespie's band was by stating, "... his reception exceeded the wildest expectations of the Department of State."⁵⁷ As a result of Gillespie's band the Congressman concludes:

The emancipating factor within jazz is a symbol of hope for millions of oppressed peoples. And jazz – which is democracy in miniature – sets the mind free and liberates the imprisoned spirit... The strongest and most humane cold-war weapon American now holds against Communism is – the best of the music called jazz.⁵⁸

As a result of the government appropriating jazz, the meaning of jazz changed to be a poignant symbol of hope for Cold War America.

However, jazz is best understood as a spiritual weapon because it was a spiritual praxis for the musicians themselves. Gillespie invested his music with explicit spiritual meaning.

⁵⁵ Felix Belair Jr., "United States has Secret Sonic Weapon – Jazz," *New York Times* (Nov. 6, 1955). Proquest Historical Newspapers (113371861).

⁵⁶ "Jazz Wins U.S. Friends," *The Afro-American*, editorial (July 21, 1956) 4. See also, "Gillespie's Band a Hit in Beirut: American Jazz, Sponsored by State..." *New York Times*, 124 (Apr. 29, 1956) Proquest Historical Newspaper (113879146).

⁵⁷ Frank Thompson Jr., "Cold War Jazz," *American Jazz Annual, Newport Edition 1956* (New York: Hemisphere Press, 1956) 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 86, 88

Reflecting on his performances, he indicated, "... we're playing mostly for spirit, not for intellect."⁵⁹ As an expression of his Baha'i faith, Gillespie further indicates that jazz musicians play in harmony with the universe. He indicates the musicians are chosen and given their talent by God:

I believe in this parallel between jazz and religion. Definitely! Definitely! Our Creator chooses great artists. There is no other explanation for the fact that a guy like Charlie Parker had so much talent other than the fact that he was divinely inspired. Other guys practiced just as hard as he did, so why didn't they have it? There's no other explanation.⁶⁰

Thus, Gillespie viewed jazz music as God's direct intervention in people and in the world. As well, unlike Stearns, instead of omitting the Storyville cultural context of jazz outright, Gillespie comes to terms with the association, but asserts jazz's purity based on its spiritual inspiration as it is in the moment:

A lot of that negative opinion probably comes from ignorance, and then it has something to do with the early days of the music which was supposed to have been conceived in a whorehouse. I don't believe that. The jazz musicians were doing the same thing in the whorehouses as the whores, making a living. An evil society put them in there.⁶¹

Thus, Gillespie reinterprets the reputation of jazz as a spiritually pure presence that was not soiled by its sinful setting. In other words, jazz did not need a history to make it an acceptable spiritual weapon. Indeed, it was spiritually pure despite its Storyville history.

Yet perhaps the musician that encapsulates what jazz meant in Total Cold War best was Charles Mingus. Mingus was a musician recognized, even more so than Gillespie, as one of the three main pillars of this generation of jazz musicians.⁶² For Mingus, jazz was an act of spiritual

⁵⁹ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 304.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 475-476

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 475

⁶² Richard Williams, introduction to *Beneath the Underdog* by Charles Mingus 3rd ed. (New York: Canongate, 1995 vii.

transcendence that he expresses most vividly in a lengthy stream-of-conscious segment in his autobiography:

My music is evidence of my soul's will to live beyond my sperm's grave, my metathesis or eternal soul's new encasement. Loved and lovers, oneness, love. Conception, one and one is two is four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two equals you. Youman, human, newman, new man. Me. My I's personal private sacred knowing the moment of coming together with my creator or all creations I, as one, knowing God, living as life itself for love of loving...⁶³

Mingus's thought as representative of jazz indicates that jazz does not lend itself easily to analysis and intellectual understanding. Mingus provides loose associations of music with immortality, the existence of a soul, the importance of love in relationships, relationship with a creator, and as knowledge of God. This excerpt is from a larger section and this section as a whole is the only place in his autobiography where he defines jazz music. In order to do so, he departs into the stream-of-consciousness style. Because Mingus departs from the normal style and structure of his writing when it comes to defining jazz, this indicates that its meaning has a lot to do with what it is as a lived experience. That is, a key understanding of jazz is grounded in but not limited by written and spoken language but that which is constructed by inhabiting jazz music in a particular way.⁶⁴

That Mingus's inhabitation of jazz included spirituality is certain because he makes his lifelong connection with God clear throughout his autobiography. Mingus pursued a relationship

⁶³ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 283 (this is a small piece of the longer stream-of-consciousness segment)

⁶⁴ I do not have lived experience with jazz music as it was played at this time other than by watching video footage of Mingus's concerts. I know enough of Mingus's writing that jazz meant something different to him than it does to me, and I am distanced from his experience by class, race, gender, religion, and age. Therefore, I know that the particular way I have listened to jazz is different than the particular way Mingus inhabited it. I think I enjoyed the sound and watching his talent, while he may have lived jazz with his whole being. I cannot provide any more concrete insight into the way that the meaning of jazz was constructed as a lived experience because I do not have any of my own to draw from.

with God from early childhood onward, although it was partial.⁶⁵ In fact, Mingus's faith tacitly corroborates a part of Will Herberg's assertion in *Protestant Catholic Jew* – that the inner spirituality of Americans at this time was shaped as tormented souls living in a time of crisis.⁶⁶

Referring to himself in third person, Mingus writes:

...he suspected maybe the people who didn't believe might be right, that there was nothing to believe in. But if he accepted this and put down the beautiful honest good things he'd lose out on all he could have gained if he'd never lost his belief in believing. He had to hold onto both believing in disbelief and believing in belief.⁶⁷

While Herberg describes American spirituality as a stagnant and baseless spirituality, Mingus's spirituality as it is described in his autobiography was actively engaged and productively seeking to find a new way to live for God. But it was highly individualistic. This was due to what he perceived as the ineffectiveness of the church to make any moral difference in the life of modern believers:

He [Jesus] said, "Seek and ye shall find. . . Ye too have the powers to become the Sons of God." Don't these words show God isn't to be deserted for the *church* to handle our lives and is the same as the Chinese handle our laundry? But the church waves a magic wand and says, "Man can kill or do anything and atone himself through *me*, without ever passing up his TV set to commune with the Divine Spirit."⁶⁸

Mingus clues us in to the possibility that perhaps the individualization of religion and spirituality during the Cold War was a result of the majority reinvesting in institutionalized religion only to find it was no longer commensurate with their spiritual needs. Indeed, Mingus personal experience with the church supports the implication of Herberg's argument, that religious life of Americans was surface level. Perhaps this was because the churches in general

⁶⁵ It was partial because Mingus presents himself as a 3-fold person, and only one of those people had a direct connection with God and was able to represent God to him. *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁶ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1955), 102-103.

⁶⁷ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 294.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

could not come to terms with the effects of WWII and life within the Cold War context. Insights from Mingus's experience with religion seem to give that impression.

Indeed, Mingus's soul was tormented, but it was also shattered. Mingus's autobiographical work is framed as a first-person account of a threefold identity. Indeed, the issues that contributed to his splintered inner life was the dualism that he perceived the role of religion had in his family life as a child:

He was born believing but as he grew, everything around him, beginning with his parents and sisters and teachers, everybody seemed to say that what he believed wasn't so. Sure, they said they believed and they prayed and cried to God and Jesus Christ Almighty but that was a few moments out of a couple of hours in church each week. So somehow he became two personalities, one as sincere as the other, and then three, because he could stand off and watch the other two.⁶⁹

Mingus gives us a glimpse into the complexities of religion at this time for the individual, and his music was a way of searching for God within the complexities and contradictions of religious life for his generation:

... Someday one of us put-down, outcast makers of jazz music should show those church-going clock-punchers that people like Monk and Bird are dying for what they believe. That duty's supposed to be left to holy men but they're so busy building temples they haven't got the time for you and me. Dig?⁷⁰

Mingus articulated jazz as a spirituality that could meet the needs of the individual. Mingus's perspective of jazz reveals the effect of Total Cold War on religion – as all forms of life were collapsed into religious meaning, the meaning of religion therefore expanded beyond the church and into the majority, if not all, aspects of American daily life. As religion was pulled beyond its previous sphere to be a totalizing force, much was put on individuals like Mingus to fill in the gap between what religion was and what religion had to be.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 293.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 297.

Jazz was transformed by a religious Cold War America. And its contradictory spirituality—as both historically fictionalized and genuinely religious—encapsulates the essence of American religion. Significant works of current historiography leave out key factors in understanding jazz in this Cold War period. Penny Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* is a detailed analysis of jazz during the Cold War that emphasizes the connection between Civil Rights politics and Cold War diplomacy but overlooks the religious. And while Danielle Fosler-Lussier's *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, includes religion as a lens of analysis for other forms of music that were used diplomatically, she overlooks the way jazz's religious histories and meanings were contested. Thus, while the existing historiography touches on and provides more detailed insights into some of the different components that I have brought together here, this paper contributes an understanding of the religion of jazz as it was shaped by Cold War spirituality.

Beyond jazz, a valid argument can be made that religion in America is made up by a government that controls it as a tool of empire, which inherently renders religion as inauthentic and manipulative. A valid argument can also be made that because spirituality is at the individual level and is transcendent, both to and beyond any one person, no matter the cultural packaging religious meaning cannot be limited or solely arbitrated by government programming. While the Eisenhower administration and a historian may have fabricated religious significance into jazz music for Cold War diplomacy, they were not the sole arbiters of jazz's meaning. Individuals who experienced jazz filled it with authentic religious significance. One implication of this understanding of Jazz is that we should be suspicious of simplistic arguments about the role of religion in US foreign relations: religion in US diplomacy is neither genuine nor fraudulent but, paradoxically, both.

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