

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said illustrates that we have no “autonomous cultural forms,” but rather “impure” ones that are the products of historically “discrepant experiences.” American culture has an interesting relationship with the history of imperialism. The Europeans that settled the U.S. imported slave labor to assist in the growth of the new nation and this practice ironically “hybridized” American culture despite institutionalized segregation of the races, mixing disparate cultural ideas in a common social location.

Said’s theory fits an analysis of jazz in America since the music was instigated by the enslavement of native Africans, West Indians and inhabitants of the Caribbean, and the tensions this produced between traditional European and non-European cultural experiences are emblematic of its evolution into a popular form of music. Concomitant to its popularity in the later 1930s was a scholarly interest in the history of jazz, which culminated in narratives ascribing to it a recognizable “American” history and a set of familiar European aesthetic characteristics, neglecting the “discrepant experiences” of jazz history.

During the 1940s, some artists were working with musical ideas that expanded the innovative spaces left open by those preceding them. Criticized for playing “anti-jazz,” they produced music for audiences who were late to realize the significance of their contributions. Among them was John Coltrane, a saxophonist who took these controversial approaches into unconventional musical territories. Similar to the shortsighted criticisms weighed against his mentors, critics regarding Coltrane neglected the ways in which his music is important as an expression of the fundamental power struggles that are at the heart of American culture.

I analyze several of Coltrane’s recordings to illustrate how they are artifacts which can be studied for evidence of the tendency in narratives to preclude the “hybridity” important to the history of jazz. My focus is on the liner notes that accompany the recordings, which I read “contrapuntally” with other forces in their production in order to discuss the tensions between economics, communication and representation that are integral to an understanding of Coltrane’s music.

**Narrative Frames and the Works of John Coltrane**

**by**

**James Bryan Duncan**

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James Bryan Duncan, Author

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## **Narrative Frames and the Works of John Coltrane**

### ***Introduction: Reconsidering Critical Approaches to Jazz***

At the beginning of *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said states poignantly that his “principal aim is not to separate but to connect, and [he is] interested in [imperialism] for the main philosophical and methodological reason that cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality.”<sup>1</sup> I will be following this approach as I explore the evolution of jazz as an American cultural form that reflects the hybridity of which Said speaks. This model is a fortuitous one for an analysis of jazz because Said’s language for discussing the cultural ramifications of imperialism allows me to elucidate the ways in which several of the narratives that represent the music neglect the complicated history of its people and production. Similarly, Said’s concept of hybridity is useful in illustrating the ways in which a consideration of the historical power struggles behind the evolution of jazz complicates traditional critical explications of the music as an “autonomous cultural form” made in the U.S. This approach will be in contrast to a more traditional approach to jazz characterized by the imperialist perspective of the “supposed autonomy of works of art” which Said states “enjoins a kind of separation which imposes an uninteresting limitation that the works themselves resolutely will not make.”<sup>2</sup>

Many narratives that characterize the history of this music neglect the contradictory tensions that give jazz its unique character as a musical commentary on the effects of imperialism in America. Jazz is the quintessential example of commercial music and the tendency to embrace it as what Said calls a pure cultural form divorced from its political context is significantly due to aggressive marketing tactics by industries that continue to reap enormous profits from the artists who produce it. The history of jazz, like most histories, is full of erratic forces, but an examination of the actual social, economic and cultural forces influencing its evolution exposes the ways the development of this music is implicated within the power struggles that characterize American culture as it continues to deal with its imperialist past.

By way of reconnecting this historical approach, I will focus on several seminal works by saxophonist and composer John Coltrane, the “heavyweight champion” of jazz whose music is currently experiencing a resurgence in popularity among consumers.

Notorious for his individuality, Coltrane was described in 1963 by his acquaintance Leroi Jones as

a singularly unclassifiable figure, in fact, almost an *alien* power, in the presence of two distinct and almost antagonistic camps. John's way is somewhere between the so-called mainstream (which, fellow travelers, is *no longer* the swing-based elder statesmen from the 30's who, still, somehow, manage to survive, but the neo-boppers of the 50's: they are the traditionalists of this era) and those young musicians I have called the avant-garde.<sup>3</sup>

This is just one of the tensions around Coltrane's work, and it was augmented by those within his personal life. Remarkable for his open personality, especially with regard to discussing the details of his work, Coltrane "thrived on endless public activity," according to critic John Litweiler and left behind a plethora of material for us to enjoy since "surely no other jazz soloist has been so extensively documented over seventeen-and-one-half years of recording."<sup>4</sup> Coltrane, however, was far from self-promoting or extroverted, and it is somewhat ironic that such a humble individual came to be seen by critics like Litweiler as the leader of "the revolution" in jazz.<sup>5</sup>

This tension between public influence and private life is a good source to begin an analysis of the hybridity that Coltrane represents as a figure symbolic of the imperialist struggles that define the history of jazz. Religion and ceremony were important elements in the roots of jazz and also became the most significant influence on Coltrane's life and work (as well as his public image). Contrary to many accepted historical opinions, however, *religion* here should not be conflated to exclusively mean *Christianity*, since the belief systems and rituals that slaves contributed to the blues tradition were, like Coltrane's faith, a complex mix of several religious ideas that found prolific expression through music. For example, Coltrane once told an interviewer when asked if he was disappointed when he found out "how many religions there were,"

Not disappointed – I don't know what the hell. When I saw there were so many religions and kind of opposed somewhere to the next and so forth...it screwed up my head. And, I don't know, I was kinda confused...and I just couldn't believe that just one guy could be right. Because if he's right somebody else got to be wrong, you know...<sup>6</sup>

Coltrane eventually lived a life grounded in dedication to his art and strict spiritual beliefs, but prior to this were his equally serious commitments to heroin and alcohol use, and these disparate factors combined to influence the movements of his accomplishments as well as those of a number of other prominent musicians in several important ways.

Though he “rarely made extreme statements on issues of race and politics,” Coltrane’s work is not without commentary on points related to color and culture, and his music, like much jazz, still finds most of its popularity among white listeners (though economics probably take primacy over race as an issue affecting this statistic). Jazz generally suffers from misconceptions about the meaning of race in American culture, and though it is accurate to see it as an art form once primarily created by blacks, jazz is “a social, not a racial music.”<sup>7</sup> This is to imply that economics, social location and technological advances are bound up with race and ethnicity as issues that continue to influence the evolution of the music as well as the perspectives of its critics and scholars. While the most notorious antagonism about jazz is that between identifying the promoters and producers of recorded jazz, who have been predominately white, as exploiters of the black artists, the music has also been significantly affected by issues related to economics and social location. Coltrane exemplifies this as his family followed many others from the South by moving Northeast around the time of WWII, and he experienced challenges similar to many Southern musicians prior to and after him as they acclimated to the differences between the cultural values in these environments. Jazz as a genre has also been effected by the social tensions that color this geographical division, although many traditional approaches to its history circumscribe it to a series of urban migrations that swept dramatically up the Mississippi River.

Coltrane is also significant as an innovator of jazz who rather explicitly grounded his experiments in musical traditions, and one can find blues roots and elements of swing in some of his most abstract compositions. Like most jazz artists, he worked by improvising on standard chord progressions and themes, blending borrowed ideas with original and often disparate expressions to create new approaches toward organizing sound. “Originality” is a relative term when applied to cultural forms, and Coltrane is again symbolic of much of jazz history when one interprets his work as an “authentic American voice” without acknowledging the lack of substantial definition implied by “American.” Coltrane’s music borrowed from traditions around the world, and it challenged interpretations and narratives that sought to confine “American” to a standard set of European aesthetic ideals. Ideas from several different cultures continue to influence jazz today in ways similar to the music of Coltrane as well as the earliest innovators of this dynamic music.

“Anti-jazz” is an empty metaphor often critically attributed to much of Coltrane’s music, however, this is the point where the desire to characterize jazz as an “autonomous

cultural form” is most revealing. Criticism against innovations in jazz are concurrent with their revelation in many cases, an evident irony given that improvisation is one of its most recognizable features. As a “social music” jazz evolved through constant experiments with the timbre of the culture surrounding its makers, and relegating it to a structured technical classification precludes it from aesthetically harboring its opposite. Those critics of Coltrane’s “anti-jazz” were unable or unwilling to hear the statement his music made regarding what Litweiler called a “quest for spiritual principles among the ‘hysteria of the times.’”<sup>8</sup>

The irony for listeners today interested in hearing the intimacy of this statement is that we must find them through any number of the available mass-produced recordings under Coltrane’s name. A critic once remarked that “scholars have transcribed every Coltrane solo they could find on record – but the passion that makes the notes necessary is too much a part of the man” and they cannot be effectively reproduced.<sup>9</sup> It is true that Coltrane wished to communicate with audiences through his music. As he once told an interviewer, “I think music is an instrument. It can create the initial thought patterns that can change the thinking of the people... [jazz] is an expression of music; and this music is an expression of higher ideals, to me.”<sup>10</sup> How is it that such a singular nonverbal voice can make such a statement without the artist’s presence? What is it saying to us about the culture from which it came? The culture that seeks to preserve it?

The U.S., traditionally, has not been characterized as a “musical” culture, largely because those analyzing it have focused exclusively on the disdain for secular music expressed in Puritanism and other Protestant faiths introduced to this country by European explorers. Perhaps the industry that grew from the demand for recorded music had its seed in providing a surrogate form of entertainment for what continues to be a particularly tuneless leisure class. Literacy in music has consistently ebbed away in American culture; it is common now for most listeners to refer to music in terms of its marketing trend or advertised genre rather than elements of the actual composition. Alain Locke, one of the first African-American scholars to undertake a detailed study of music in this country, wrote in 1936, “*Is America musical?* – America is a great music consumer, but not as yet a great music producer. Music spreads all over the whole surface of American life, but there are few deep well-springs of native music as in the folk music of many other countries.”<sup>11</sup> Swing music at this time was enormously popular with both white and black audiences as well as bands of both races, although strict segregation was the social rule in all but a few discreet locales.



Along with its penchant for recorded music, America in the twentieth century has also seen the evolution of popular music criticism, which continues to provide listeners with information about works and artists that is often more promotional than substantially critical. Symbiotic with the growth of jazz as the foundation of the record industry, this type of criticism remains highly influential to consumers, often disguised as “news” by the Hit Parade and music video broadcasters. This provides listeners a “language” with which to discuss music that is largely inadequate with regard to actual analysis, but prior to that should be interpreted (particularly in the case of jazz) for its inconsistency as a narrative form that attempts to fairly translate the meaning of nonverbal ideas. Without reference to either technical knowledge or documented scholarly information, it is difficult to find a way to express the meaning one finds in non-verbal music. Record producers at the industry’s beginnings apparently anticipated this, utilizing the protective paper sleeve that holds records as a place to print a type of “review” of the artists and work called “liner notes.”

These notes were traditionally written by someone working as a promoter for the company who did basic research on the biographical and professional background of the artists, the evolution of their careers, a short explication of the cuts and a healthy discography of the recordings by the respective artists that are available from the label they represent. Unfortunately, they also offer misinformation, often unabashedly oversimplifying the complex nature of jazz as a cultural form that represents the history of imperialism in America. In many cases, a liner is the only “literate” explanation that an artist’s work ever receives, especially when she/he has been largely overlooked by the media, so an instrumentalist may never get a chance to “speak for” their own work. As commodities, recordings with liners appear to represent autonomous cultural forms, neatly packaging the artist through a short narrative accompaniment to the produced and packaged music, but what they extol has actually been, to quote Said, “chopped off from history and society.”<sup>12</sup> This is particularly the case with Coltrane: as an artist fueled by the creative tensions generated through a mixture of disparate ideas his life and work resist a formulaic written synopsis. Familiar words are often inadequate when interpreting how he translated the traditional, familiar vocabulary of jazz into what Leroi Jones calls “a very different way of viewing the world.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Imperialism and the Prehistory of Jazz*

My choice of sources is purposeful in discussing the prehistory of jazz. Scholarly and critical interest in this music didn't begin until after it had become the most popular form of musical entertainment in the U.S. Among these first narratives were Alain Locke's *The Negro and His Music* and Winthrop Sargeant's *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*, two seminal works that also radically oversimplify the history of jazz, overlooking much of its significance as a cultural form. To fill in these gaps, I am also using Burton Peretti's *The Creation of Jazz*, James Collier's *Jazz: The American Theme Song*, Leonard Feather's *The Book of Jazz*, and Leroi Jones' *Black Music*, all of which qualify as "revisionist histories." Each of these latter works examines jazz for its social and cultural factors, elucidating the ways in which the music is a cultural form intertwined with complex power struggles in the U.S. Following this discussion of the hybridity of jazz, I will discuss the major inadequacies with the early histories of the music, which explains the need for these revisionist works and sets up the point for my direct analysis of narrative forms.

Similar to Said's assertion that cultural forms are undergirded by "a network of interdependent histories that it would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand,"<sup>14</sup> Burton Peretti opens *The Creation of Jazz* by upbraiding the traditional view of jazz history. He writes, "Any scholar in American studies or history who endorses the truism that jazz is 'America's greatest art form' or its 'classical music' should develop a more sophisticated notion of what its establishment tells us about its originators and creative methods."<sup>15</sup> Peretti continues by pointing out that what scholars are "still lacking, however, is a synthesis, a sense of the interrelation of the practice of jazz with the maturation of its creators, the African-American identities they were led to acquire, and the social settings in which they made the music."<sup>16</sup> This tendency toward simplification is perhaps because the history of jazz is so implicit with the rise of modern American culture and the machinations of its social growth as a nation evolving out of its traditional identity as an imperialist power. To paraphrase Marx, jazz is rooted in the hardships of people who resolutely made history under terms rarely of their own choosing, and its recordings are windows on the "discrepant experiences"<sup>17</sup> that fill the history of imperialism.

This isn't to imply that traditional narratives representing jazz as a type of musical accompaniment to the increasing liberation of African-Americans are entirely misinformed, but rather to assert that it is a more polyphonal expression of the ways in

which these complex power struggles characterize American culture. To quote Said, I'm not trying to "say glibly that there are two sides to every question," but instead to restate the ways in which we contemplate them. "The difficulty with theories of essentialism," Said explains, "and exclusiveness, or with barriers and sides, is that they give rise to polarizations that absolve and forgive ignorance and demagoguery more than they enable knowledge."<sup>18</sup>

"Jazz" is believed by some to have originally been a popular euphemism for loose sexual activity, but when it lost this ignominy and became the label for the new "popular"<sup>19</sup> dance music being played in several places around the U.S., debates surfaced immediately about the sources of its lineage and the identities of its major innovators. According to one legend, Jelly Roll Morton in 1909 distributed business cards to people in New Orleans that listed, among his other qualifications as gambler and pimp, "inventor of jazz."<sup>20</sup> Morton is decidedly among the first to have charted compositions incorporating elements of polyphony (more than one melody line) phrasing, a strategy that musicologists use to define jazz, but this "sound" had been evolving for decades in more fundamental ways throughout America. As an individual, Morton is emblematic of the "impure" history that ties jazz with the complexity of imperialism. His professional name was one of a series of aliases he used to avoid disclosing his actual French mulatto identity, and by 1927 Peretti notes that it wasn't uncommon to see him replete with a diamond stud in his incisor, "dress[ed] in bell-bottom pants and cowboy hat," presumably to "present a clownish image to listeners" that was reminiscent of "the laughter-inducing traditions of the minstrel and medicine shows."<sup>21</sup>

What Morton laid claim to didn't qualify for patent, however, but was the culmination of several influences that for over a century had been imported to the U.S. from around the world. J.L. Collier described this directly in 1993:

Jazz happened in America, and it could have happened only there. There existed a unique set of conditions – social, economic, intellectual – that allowed it to take root and grow. Jazz was not an accident. It appeared when it did because of what had gone before, and it spread through the culture with amazing speed because the American people were prepared for it – in fact, were actively searching for it, or something like it. As a consequence, we cannot really understand it in the abstract, isolated from the world around it. Jazz is part of the social history of the United States, and must be seen in that context.<sup>22</sup>

A largely black subculture which, Peretti adds, had proven extremely difficult to assimilate into the mainstream" due to the ideologies oppressing them racially in white dominated

American society was the environment for the beginnings of this new music.<sup>23</sup> Peretti points out that by 1807, those slaves that survived the Middle Passage had virtually “all social and political norms, and most language, handcrafts, dress and cuisines excised from [their] existence; and African cultural survival grew weaker among the later generations in America.”<sup>24</sup> American music, Locke points out, grew from this persisting “hardship,” but insists that its popularity was “not due to the hardships of the colonial settlers and pioneers, for the people who had the most hardships in America, - the Negroes turned out to be the songsters of the western world.”<sup>25</sup> He evokes imperialism in his dated language when he conjectures that “if American civilization had absorbed instead of exterminating the American Indian, his music would be the folk music of this country,” adding that “serious American musicians have discovered it too late to preserve it in any great way.”<sup>26</sup>

Social location was perhaps as influential as race in affecting the evolution of the roots of jazz. As slavery persisted in the predominately agrarian South, with its open, rural working spaces and communal housing nonetheless allowed slaves more freedom to express themselves collectively than free blacks and slaves in the North where Peretti notes that “the cultural hegemony of whites was stronger.”<sup>27</sup> Musical expression by Southern blacks, however, was considered seditious and he adds, “many states, counties and owners forbade the playing of drums by slaves, believing that the taps relayed rebellious messages, and they also banned daytime dances and communal singing.”<sup>28</sup> Since these activities comprised the bulk of the ceremonies that slaves had used in a variety of their religious traditions, they implicated elements of these cultural forms with the Christian rituals and beliefs with which most owners inundated them.

Christianity therefore became “creolized” in African-American communities, and was transposed onto traditions from West Africa, the Caribbean and the West Indies that focused on more “active forms of worship.” The result of this synthesis is a music Peretti characterizes as “rich in its spiritual and social role” which is “highly rhythmic” since its improvised forms of drumming on the body, ground, or with tools have a symbiotic relationship to dance.<sup>29</sup> The “diversity” evident in this new sound “was represented in the polyrhythms of drummers and clappers, the complex interweaving of pulses which Western listeners characterized as extreme ‘syncopation’ (a misleading term, since no single rhythm was irregularly accented).”<sup>30</sup> Early Christian hymns and, on fewer occasions, English or Scottish folk songs, were mixed with new harmonies and various dialects to create the rudiments of a new “style” that developed among slaves on plantations or, as Locke mentions, less often mixed with certain strains of Irish or Old English folk music

which “lingered in [the] mountain country and the backwoods” among poor whites.<sup>31</sup> These “plantation songs” or “spirituals” changed rapidly when they began gained prominence among white audiences through the popularity of minstrelsy, a form of “American” entertainment that is somewhat ironic due to the complex combination of cultural forces that surround its history.

Beginning in the 1840s, J.L. Collier notes that there was “a massive influx of immigrants” to America from Germany and Ireland, and continuing through the latter decades of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century, an “inpouring of so-called ‘new’ immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe” continued along with many people from China and “elsewhere in the Far East.”<sup>32</sup> Among the cultural and ethnic diversity that these new Americans added to the “congeries of attitudes, religions and lifestyles” already present among the “resolutely anti-Victorian” attitudes ruling the U.S. was the beginning of a recognizable musical tradition.<sup>33</sup>

Minstrelsy is a good example of a cultural form that grew out of a complex set of social relationships, and since as Sargeant notes it “characterized something of the spontaneity and rhythmic vitality that has always been associated” with jazz, it also illustrates the U.S. ties with the history of imperialism.<sup>34</sup> Slave owners, historically, would often loiter around their servants’ quarters in the evenings, simultaneously being entertained while maintaining security on the plantation as they observed them dancing and singing communally. Often, precocious wealthy slaveholders would conscript several slaves into a musical troupe for “semi-professional” entertainment at sophisticated events. Some of these bands actually traveled a circuit, but the limitations of slavery kept them bound regionally.<sup>35</sup> Enterprising whites, therefore, in what Locke called “a counterfeit imitation” of this practice, brought minstrelsy to the stage in 1830, when Dan Rice put on “black face” in a Louisville theater and delivered an act he claimed to have copied from a stable hand named Crow. It was such a success that the Bowery Theatre in New York introduced “black face” as a formal genre of entertainment in 1832, calling it “one of the most completely original contributions America has made to theatre.”<sup>36</sup> Minstrelsy remained a caricature of black life and culture when African-Americans began to assume starring roles in these productions since “the mould was too set to be radically changed.”<sup>37</sup> James Weldon Johnson later remarked that performers reclaiming this cultural form as an African-American expression had to accept

almost wholly the performance pattern as it had been worked out and laid down by the white minstrels during the preceding twenty-five years, even

to blacking their faces, an expedient which, of course, never entered the minds of the original plantation artists.<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Foster is credited with being the first widely popular black minstrel performer, “breaking its dialect bonds and smoothing it out palatably for the general American ear” with his versions of “Swanee River” and “My Old Kentucky Home” according to Locke.<sup>39</sup> In the 1840s and 50s Foster came along with the rise in popularity of black troupes among white audiences, “widening its appeal and setting the whole country humming, whistling and eventually playing and singing.”<sup>40</sup> The “rush of language and images and the change of pace typical” of his performances began to acquire new faces for traditional subject matter over time, Locke explains, “and the burlesque spirit, once the vogue began, spread from the Negro folk types to the Irish and Jewish in quick succession.”<sup>41</sup> Religious music was still the most popular genre in America, however, leaving Foster’s and his contemporaries’ sales of arrangements behind those of white musicians like Lowell Mason, whose collection of hymns, *Carmina Sacra*, sold 500,000 copies in the seventeen years between its publication and 1861.<sup>42</sup>

It was the Civil War, and Emancipation following it, that challenged what Peretti calls the “efforts at cultural maintenance” that whites had imposed upon disenfranchised blacks that “were swept up, along with everything else, in the sudden destruction of slavery.”<sup>43</sup> Combined with the economic changes that were also then coming over the U.S. through industrialism, the years up to the turn of the century spurned many alterations in African-American culture and the growth of its forms. W.E.B. Dubois hints at the effects of this shift in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* by emphasizing that blacks now “had a contribution to make,” stressing the “double consciousness” of their social position as they “remained both culturally distinct (due to their African heritage) and part of the U.S. as a whole.” He adds to this that music and dance are the strands of black heritage that would “perpetuate the integration of religion, community, time and space,” but history would first have to weather the complicated years of Reconstruction before this integration would be heard as jazz, and the gay voices of minstrelsy changed dramatically to the bittersweet sounds of traditional spirituals and the blues.<sup>44</sup>

Social location again had an effect on the shift in this musical tradition since most “free” blacks in the South still lived close to the plantations that they formerly worked, a long way from a theater or music hall while they fulfilled their obligations as tenant farmers. The church remained an important neighborhood center for black communities, and spirituals were popular as entertainment, but a different secular form of music called

“blues” for its doleful expression began to be heard in several different forms throughout the South.<sup>45</sup> This cultural form also took root in African traditions that slaves had brought to America and its basic technical structure became the basis for the methods of experimentation that still characterize jazz today.

The Fisk Jubilee Singers are probably the most romantic symbol of the popularity among spirituals or, as they were often called disparagingly by whites, “slave songs.” Credited with renaming them “jubilees,” George L. White put together a group of black singers from Fisk University in 1871, embarking on a singing tour designed to bring in money for the fledgling college. The result was an enthusiastic reception among whites, an international tour, and Locke opines, “fame for the singers, fortune for the college but most of all, recognition for Negro folk music.”<sup>46</sup> Several other colleges soon followed Fisk’s example, also gaining individual success and spreading the popularity of the music over a wider geographic region, but since these productions were organized and patronized almost exclusively by whites, they didn’t reach the lives of most African-Americans struggling with the unprecedented hardships of Emancipation.

Despite the popularity of “jubilees,” Peretti explains that “whites hesitated to embrace the former slave’s double identity as an African-American and an American, and instead worked to suppress it” through institutionalized segregation.<sup>47</sup> Economic opportunities for blacks, handicapped largely by the widespread devastation of the South, were wretched: they had the choice of sharecropping (usually for a former slave owner) or moving to a region unfamiliar to them in the North. In both the South and North, Jim Crow laws and customary segregation strove to keep black culture separate from white institutions and society. Emancipation, which because of these factors had grown stagnant and also discriminatory in many ways, ironically led to a profound evolution in African-American culture due to the ways it changed the terms of social mobility for blacks. Social groups could now be united around common ideas rather than being bound to the slave system, and family units evolved into communities developing a new locus for socialization. Individuals could now travel without the burden of an owner, though freedom as we understand it was still far off since, Peretti adds, “the first free generations [of former slaves], it might be said, also had a double consciousness of tradition and discontinuity.”<sup>48</sup> This liberty, combined with the duplicitous ideology of sharecropping, interwove with the confinement and concentrated ambition found in systems of segregation, he explains, forming a “music culture of the free blacks rife with conflicting forces, and as a result its variety was dazzling.”<sup>49</sup>

As former slaves moved about more in post-Emancipation America, several latterly recognized styles of music making were becoming more prevalent, and the consensus among scholars and musicologists is that the years between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of WWI were the formative years of Ragtime, Dixieland and the Country Blues. Often adapted from the “work songs” slaves and hard laborers used to accompany “pace work,” Peretti notes that this “song style for singing guitarists featured three-line stanzas and certain melismatic and harmonic features that seemed to have been chosen for their distinctly non-European sound.”<sup>50</sup> If one accepts this as true, it is in sharp contrast to the formal organization and textbook harmonic appeal of “jubilees” since musicians were building themes off of the “workaday rhythms of daily toil,” producing what Peretti calls a buoyant “swing which is irresistible and a philosophy which is elemental.”<sup>51</sup> As “work songs” diminished in popularity along the railroads and among the chain gangs in the South, this once “universal” style of music along the levees and edges of former plantation grounds evolved into a new way for African-Americans to express their ideas locally and informally.

While many Blues songs incorporate familiar American and Christian themes (capitalism, redemption, unrequited love), musicologists argue convincingly that they are, as a “genre,” substantially related to traditional African music. This is another example of the “discrepant experiences” Said speaks of in his analysis of imperialism since the musicians similarly “made concurrent those views that are ideologically and culturally closed to one another.”<sup>52</sup> Folklorist Alan Lomax points out that the Country Blues reached much farther than black communities as well, his conclusion being that the more provincial sounds of “old-timey, bluegrass and country are rooted in the African-American accompaniment tradition, which is but one of the American offshoots of the many solo-string accompanied styles of Western Africa.”<sup>53</sup> A signature of the Blues tradition, the solo-singer accompanying himself on guitar or mandolin was imported “from the seat of the slave trade,” with its long history of “solo-string and accompanied bardic traditions, with evident connections to the Moslem, the Mediterranean, and ultimately the Asian world.”<sup>54</sup> One can interpret this style of music making to have “dominat[ed] the entire landscape of ancient imperial civilization,” its origin perhaps owing to the “centralization of power” that is represented by the audience focus on a single performer.<sup>55</sup> Virtuoso bards known as “griots” who accompany themselves on complex stringed instruments<sup>56</sup> apparently continue to be influential as social satirists in West African communities today, their verses having once dethroned chieftans.<sup>57</sup>



Most audiences interpreted the Blues as “dance music,” creating hybrid forms that drew from West African traditions, combining movements in quadrilles and square dances with “hops,” “shimmies,” and “hitches” that were prominent in several native ceremonial dances.<sup>58</sup> Many of the religious themes in “jubilees” were reinterpreted in Blues lyrics as singers blended symbols from various tribal faiths with ostensibly Christian themes. Historians argue rather convincingly that this was “part of a folk movement that reacted against the heavy post-emancipation white Christian influence among blacks,” citing Robert Johnson’s “Crossroads” as a familiar and quintessential example of this “hybridity.” Alan Lomax also presents a substantial claim that performance patterns are “virtually identical” between African and American forms of solo-string accompaniment, although they technologically differ in the “kinds of lutes, different scales and [the] different languages” they use.<sup>59</sup>

Technically, the Country Blues used a loose pattern that became the basis for jazz, which grew by expanding the room for improvisation between parallel phrases of similar melodic lines. Blues alternate between twelve-bar lines structured around a “call and response” pattern (similar to early “spirituals”), and musicians began to use the beats between these sections to “riff” beyond the standard melody. Locke characterized this convincingly as “the original ‘break’ – the narrow cradle for improvised rhythm and eccentric tone intervals from which jazz was born.”<sup>60</sup> During the years following 1910, “blues” became a universal label for almost any music composed or performed by African-Americans, despite the fact that the form had been expanded into thirty-two bar phrases with different patterns of repetition. This was mainly due to commercial promotion of the music, but isn’t wholly an exaggeration since one can hear this internal line structure in much of the music following the Country Blues, including contemporary rock n’ roll. Many of the “experimental” compositions by Coltrane, Davis, Monk and Mingus also are grounded in ideas prevalent in the Country Blues.

Concurrent with this, pianists began expanding the rhythmic lines they kept with their left hands, and this melodic accompaniment or “secondary rag” produced a more complex polyphonic music widely known as “Ragtime.” This style became popular throughout the U.S. in a relatively short time, aided significantly by the development of recording technology. “Ragtime” had many innovators, but Leonard Feather explains that material evidence suggests that the style was first promoted by “a pale-skinned, slight youngster whose features were more Indian and Spanish than Negro: Louis Chauvin, who died at twenty-eight, leaving no testament but three public compositions and the memory

of contemporaries who recalled the exquisite originality and beauty of his work.”<sup>61</sup> “Bunk” Johnson and Jelly Roll Morton would later be considered by many to be the originators of “Ragtime,” but Scott Joplin, composer of the famous “Maple Leaf Rag,” was the artist that probably prompted its commercial popularity in 1903 when he opened *A Guest of Honor*, a “Ragtime Opera,” in St. Louis.<sup>62</sup> This style spread quickly throughout communities of all races, making its performance by community brass bands a common feature in many U.S. towns during the first part of this century. Charles “Buddy” Bolden organized some musicians shortly after 1900 in one of the more historicized of these groups, and Feather notes that their combination of popular band music, like Sousa’s marches, with “secondary rags” are seen by many to have been “statements of jazz,” although “beyond any doubt, too, [they] played the blues.”<sup>63</sup>

The prehistory of jazz, then, is emblematic of the history of imperialism as it evolved with modern America. From the first beginning of the slave trade to the turn of the century, a largely African-American subculture had been developing ways of expressing ideas in music and dance that can now be seen as representations of their experiences as oppressed subjects of imperialism. These ideas changed with the social and cultural circumstances surrounding the musicians and audiences, and the form they influenced is a product of those “discrepant experiences.” To consider the evolution of jazz, one must recognize what Said calls the “deeply symbiotic relationship” between modern Western imperialism and the influence it has had on our perspectives of culture.<sup>64</sup> The prehistory of jazz is not simply the collective experience of a group of determined African-Americans that sought to in Said’s words “restore history to people and a culture without history,” but rather it provides the accompaniment for the complexity they faced as people forced into a cultural paradigm that radically altered their concepts of tradition and reality.<sup>65</sup> Jazz resists classification as an “autonomous cultural form;” its past is to again quote Said “a complex genealogy of contemporary culture and ideology” in the U.S. and it is from this perspective that it, like the cultural archive of American imperialism, “can be reread not univocally but *contrapuntally* with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.” This is similar to the counterpoint of Western classical music, where “various themes play off of each other” resulting in a “polyphony” or “an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.”<sup>66</sup>

“Ragtime” was heard throughout the U.S. in the years leading up to and comprising WWI as brass bands became staples of social life among many communities. These “community bands” used one or two cornets, a clarinet, a trombone, a guitar or banjo, a bass or tuba and some array of drums to play “polyphonic interpretations” of popular songs, embellishing them with “secondary rags.”<sup>67</sup> A number of musicians rose to widespread popularity for their contributions to this trend and, as Wilbur De Paris, an Indiana native that led a popular band through the 1920s explains, should be seen as a “complement to the New Orleans school.” Many of these musicians learned techniques “from among the teachers, Italian and German, across the country,” and De Paris points out that before the introduction of phonographs or radio, “Ragtime” developed sporadically, “without one part necessarily knowing what the other part was doing.”<sup>68</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the traditional history of the music as a style incubated in New Orleans, then exported through the Great Northern Migration.

Sociologically, the principle role of community bands was for “the use of syncopated music at Negro funerals,” as Eubie Blake, veteran pianist and composer, remembers from his childhood in his hometown of Baltimore. Blake played with some of these groups when young, but his mother strongly disapproved of their function and would punish him for joining them since, as he explained, “nothing but low people followed the [funeral] parades.”<sup>69</sup> Similar oppositions were raised by people in both the black and white communities in these years as “Ragtime” became a very popular form of secular entertainment both inside homes and within American society as dancing and radio became pastimes. Following Emancipation and the slave trade, these were the next major social factors to drastically effect the music.

Thirty-five years of methodical development followed Edison’s invention of the first tin-foil cylinders, prompting the phonograph industry to grow at an explosive rate in the years following 1912. Peretti notes that this changed the role of the individual performer as musicians working with the “solo-virtuosic style, backed by the recording industry, tended to swiftly displace” the cultural form of music as a collective expression.<sup>70</sup> The new technology radically effected the growth of American music and culture in several ways. Between the years comprising WWI, gross receipts of sales of phonographs rose from \$27.1 million to \$158.7 million, and the Victor Company, “the major American producer of ‘talking machines’ and disks,” saw its assets rise from \$2.7 million in 1902 to \$51 million in 1921.<sup>71</sup> “Ragtime” underwent several stylistic changes through this very short time as well, yet, as with the whole of this tradition, no one event can be isolated

from those related to it, and it is probably worth noting Leonard Feather's cautionary remarks on jazz history here:

It must be borne in mind that none of the contrasting areas in which these jazz antecedents grew – religious and secular, North and South, folk and urban, even white and Negro – developed in a complete vacuum. There was considerable mutual encroachment, as a result of which it is impossible to determine the exact point where any one form originated or was fused with another. This is true also of the nomenclature of various jazz forms such as ragtime, blues, Dixieland and New Orleans. Even ragtime, once firmly established as a pre-jazz piano style, later became a diffuse term applied to orchestral forms.<sup>72</sup>

Musicians, Peretti explains, “confronted the technological change with equanimity” since the “phonograph for them had been a central learning tool and source of information; rather than a component of the machine age’s assault on tradition, the recording and radio studios were the incubators of their most widely distributed musical achievements.”<sup>73</sup> The first records, however, were inferior to those with which we are familiar largely due to the absence of electricity in the recording process. Metal horns “funneled” sounds through rubber tubes that connected to an apparatus that etched the sound into grooves on a wax disk around twenty-four inches in diameter and two-and-a-half inches thick. Corrections were possible through burning a new surface onto the wax, but in an effort to save as much time and money as possible, many labels released botched performances. Generally, the music was softened a great deal since loud noises from the bands would jolt the needles off of the disks, and due to this it is difficult to hear the rhythm coming from the bass and drums on older recordings. Historian David Baber argues that the use of drums was so restricted in early recordings that drumming as we are familiar with it “really came into full flowering much later than it might have,” which to me is an interesting coincidence given the controversial role of drums in the history of African-American societies.<sup>73</sup>

Victor Records introduced the first recorded jazz with its “Dixieland” record series in 1917, starring the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and “race records” featuring performances by black musicians appeared at the height of the “phonograph boom” beginning around 1920. According to Peretti, the “Original Dixieland” band was a group of white musicians from New Orleans who demonstrated “a marked ragtime influence” in their work, and several of its members would later be considered innovators largely due to their popularity from the wide circulation of their work on records. Later, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (also white) recorded and also played a significant role in “help[ing] young

musicians to concentrate on the music, for listening to recordings was generally devoid of the extramusical connotations that had become associated with nightclub settings.”<sup>74</sup>

African-American musicians, however, didn't record until after 1919, when Jelly Roll Morton and “Bunk” Johnson sat in on private sessions that would not be released to the public until several years later.<sup>75</sup> Kid Ory, an innovative trombonist, led the first African-American recording group and later became a prominent soloist in several bands with Louis Armstrong, who played at first with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and then went on to be one of the most popular entertainers in the world. The records that these artists made were ostensibly pressed for a “target audience” in the African-American communities of the South and were marketed explicitly as “race records.” It is important to note here that producers and promoters at this time did not recognize this music as “art” or significant cultural form, and their zeal to produce music was driven by the expanding market in “show business” that was evolving in several urban centers around the country.<sup>76</sup> The record market in the South was quickly glutted as a result of this and many performers, tired of stagnant competition, followed other African-Americans from the South by moving North toward the promise of better economic opportunities.

The sounds of “Ragtime” were deeply woven into the social fabric of American life by this time and the “dance craze” that had swept the country through the war years continued to spread through the next decade. Some musicologists point out that musical styles seem to have changed with this public response since the then-popular “Buzzard Lope, the Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear and, of course, the Fox Trot” seemed to “call for” the dotted (sharply accented) rhythms present in “rags” published at this time, though Collier notes that these accents were present in some earlier compositions as well.<sup>77</sup> Widespread public opinion, however, differed in perceptions of the music and the dancing it “encouraged.” To quote popular show dancer Irene Castle from her memoirs, “By the fall of 1913, America had gone absolutely dance mad. The whole nation seemed to be divided into two equal forces, those who were for it, and those who were against it.”<sup>78</sup>

Opposition to these new expressions centered around the “sexuality” many people saw portrayed in the dances and the “vice-ridden” environment from which they assumed it arose to promote this lack of virtue. It has been speculated that this is where Jazz got its name, the term originating as a euphemism for sexual activity that was first applied as a verb meaning “to dance” prior to remaining respectably with to the music to which people were dancing. Jazz itself developed in different ways largely due to segregation, the white groups led by Red Nichols and Ben Pollack receiving more ostensible public support than

those Fletcher Henderson or King Oliver fronted; as Feather explains succinctly, “A Jim Crowed society produced Jim Crowed music.”<sup>79</sup> Other movements “deeply enmeshed in the fabric of American society,” such as the “spirit of modernism, feminism and belief in technological progress” are circumstances historians also recognize as having influence on the division in American culture of which Castle wrote.<sup>80</sup> These tensions culminated in the Temperance Act of 1920, a legislative action that enormously affected the movements of jazz as a cultural form and as an emerging commodity.

Collier explains that the most vocal opposition for the music and dancing came from “middle class whites and a number of religious African-Americans” as well as “religious working people of all races.”<sup>81</sup> Neil Leonard offers this example of public opposition: in 1922, a play opened on Broadway by J. Hatley Manners titled *The National Anthem*, which took as a plot the events of “naïve, young people ignoring the counsel of wise traditionalist parents and debauching themselves into decadence.” Manners’ Foreword to the production argued that Jazz was “modern man’s saturnalia,” and Leonard explains that many Americans “began to take music more seriously, when they found out that jazz was strongly connected with social and moral problems which could not be ignored.”<sup>82</sup> This excited concerns over the constitution of this “epidemic,” and many of those battling it appealed strongly to aesthetic and cultural conventions that were familiar to “American” culture at that time, rather than ones that approached the complex relationship it had with the very term “American.”

Most opponents of the music’s technical and aesthetic qualities cited its “lack of discipline demanding restraint and craftsmanship,” a trait they recognized in the “accepted” orchestral and religious music they promoted as superior to jazz in both aspects.<sup>83</sup> Some went so far as denying it any relationship to music at all; music critic Sigmund Spaeth called it “merely a raucous and inarticulate shouting of hoarse-throated instruments, with each player trying to outdo his fellows, in fantastic cacophony.” A journalist heard it as “a droning, jerky incoherence interrupted with a spasmodic ‘blah!! blah!!’ that reminded [him] of the way that live sheep are turned into mutton.” Thomas Edison himself, who reputedly hated all recorded music, was quoted as having said that he “preferred to play ‘jazz’ records backward because they sounded better that way.”<sup>84</sup>

Others, however, were concerned with the music’s dehumanizing affect on “civilized” culture. J.P. Sousa opined that “‘jazz’ seems to provoke man’s ‘lower nature,’” objecting to its use of “primitive rhythms which excite the basic human instincts.” Elliot Rawlings, a physician in New York, explained that

Jazz music causes drunkenness...[by sending] a continuous whirl of impressionable stimulations to the brain, producing thoughts and imaginations which overpower the will. Reason and reflection are lost and the actions of the persons are directed by the stronger animal passions.<sup>85</sup>

One article claimed the music “blatant[ly] disregard[ed] even the elementary rules of civilization,” and a New York Episcopal rector named Percy Grant produced a leaflet “which said that 65,000 girls had disappeared from the U.S. in 1921 ‘without leaving a trace.’”<sup>86</sup> Leonard adds that the music had become popularly associated with brothels, “especially the Negro brothel[s],”<sup>87</sup> which wasn’t wholly an exaggeration since the music always had a “substantial connection with the life of the vice districts.”<sup>88</sup> This particular association colored public opinion significantly, as an editorial in *Etude* declared a 1924 article titled “What’s the Matter with Jazz?:”

Jazz, at its worst, is often associated with vile surroundings, filthy words, unmentionable dances and obscene plays with which respectable Americans are so disgusted that they turn with dismay at the mere mention of ‘Jazz,’ which they naturally blame for the whole fearful caravan of vice and near-vice.<sup>89</sup>

This brought on more racially motivated criticism despite the fact that people of many racial backgrounds were involved with the music as listeners, performers or producers. One writer argued that “‘Jazz’ was originally the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds,” which was similar to the perspective of Dr. Florence Richards, medical doctor of a Philadelphia high school for girls. She claimed that the music’s “influence is as harmful and degrading to civilized races as it always has been among the savages from whom we borrowed it.” This opinion was corroborated by a biologist who stated that jazz reduced Americans “to the low state of inferior races now on this planet; better extinction than a decline to the savage past.”<sup>90</sup>

### *America's Popular Music*

It is important to note Said's analysis here as it points to other important cultural forces that were prominent at this time. Trends in humanistic learning had changed dramatically in Western culture by the time of the early twentieth century and criticism as we are familiar with it had supplanted direct scholarship as "an efflorescence of secular anthropology" spread to America through the influence of popular nineteenth century European academics. This was augmented by the "striking rise of nationalism" in Europe and the U.S. through the years of the world wars, when many scholars again emigrated from the continent to the U.S. Said explains that in representing "humanity or national culture" in other societies, these scholars were "principally celebrating ideas and values they ascribed to their own national culture."<sup>91</sup> This same tendency is reflected in the titles of several dissenting articles published about Jazz in the early 1920s: "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" from *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1921; "Back to Pre-War Morals," in the same magazine later that year; "Is Jazz the Pilot of Disaster?" in *Etude*, 1925; and "Representatives of 2,000,000 Women Meet to Annihilate 'Jazz'," in *Musical Courier*, 1923.<sup>92</sup>

The infamy created by criticisms such as these fueled the popularity of the new music among listeners, and this in turn brought commercial success for instrumentalists and promoters though the most money was made in the "underground" entertainment industry defying Prohibition. Several musicians sought success in urban centers such as St. Louis, Kansas City, New York and Chicago where gang activity was prodigious among the various "speakeasies" offering illegal alcohol and dance music. Without the availability of alcohol, live secular entertainment was virtually non-existent, and the regular work offered by the mob paid much better than the one-time flat fees of \$30-\$75 paid by the recording studios for two sides of a disk.<sup>93</sup> Peretti explains that these years provided "the most striking commercial conditions under which jazz musicians worked," and as employees of mobsters they were often caught in the middle of conflicts between their employers and the police. Performers were frequently forced into extended contracts, threatened physically and on occasion maimed or reputedly even killed if they resisted.<sup>94</sup> In the federal investigations of gang activity that followed Temperance it was discovered that Al Capone had connections with several popular "clubs" in which prominent musicians had performed and one of his associates, Joe Glaser, managed Louis Armstrong's affairs in the 1930s after he lost his job as supervisor of the Sunset Café and a Chicago prostitution ring.<sup>95</sup>



After Prohibition was repealed, Jazz continued to gain popularity as a commercial form of entertainment, and economic exploitation became a major factor in its production as many people sought wealth from it. According to Peretti, managers of bands continued to repeatedly deprive musicians of their “freedom of movement, legal rights to intellectual property, and pay guaranteed by contract,” despite legislation against these actions.<sup>96</sup> Most were victimized when promoters and band leaders kept the royalties they owed to the musicians who had legal rights to the compositions or arrangements the groups they were in recorded or performed. The ASCAP was founded in 1914, but under its auspices only top-selling song composers received any royalties, and many performers that had recently emigrated to urban areas from the rural South were accustomed to a folk concept of anonymous song composition and only gradually gained awareness of their rights. Peretti adds that much of this had to do with the fact that the chief way of preserving music up until this time had been memorization, instead of using written scores, and copyright laws only protected music in a tangible form.<sup>97</sup> This practice wasn’t exercised exclusively by promoters, however, since bandleaders such as Duke Ellington took credit for some of their musicians’ works and often paid small amounts for what they did purchase. Ellington is often seen as a quintessential example of a victim of this exploitation since his manager, Irving Mills, listed his name alongside Ellington’s as composer of several of Ellington’s works, which allowed him to receive credit for the intellectual work behind them as well as the royalties from their reproduction.

The “show business” industry had also begun to affect Jazz in other important ways as the music became more popular. Bands expanded the number of musicians they employed in order to have a “bigger” sound and many formed orchestral combinations to appeal to listeners who were usually more oriented toward classical music. The “break” that Locke describes emerging in the Country Blues style had also expanded into a space for extended, often improvised solos. This made “cutting” popular as soloists informally competed with one another in jam sessions for a spot as the lead voice in various performances, but promoters usurped that privilege in the studio. For example, Okeh Records, in attempting to establish a niche among African-American record buyers, pulled Louis Armstrong into the studio when he settled in Chicago and produced the first “Hot Five” series. These would go on to be some of the biggest selling recordings in history, and their release firmly established Armstrong as a formidable soloist. Collier notes that Okeh promoters continued to pull his trumpet forward “until by 1928, when he was making masterpieces like ‘West End Blues’ and ‘Tight Like This,’ the New Orleans musicians had

been replaced by journeymen whose only function was to support Louis, sometimes with written arrangements.”<sup>98</sup> Armstrong’s emergence as a frontman is seen by most historians as one of the most significant factors in turning Jazz toward the solo-oriented music we recognize it as today, yet it is the influence of his talent, rather than the wiles of the industry, that is commonly assumed to have done this. These artistic and economic conditions changed dramatically in just a few years, however, as another technological advance opened more commercial opportunities for the musicians and the music industry.

Record companies were notorious for financial instability in their early years, mainly because they were small companies operated by large firms with other commercial interests. Gennett Records and Paramount Records, for example, were major jazz distributors in the 1920s, but both were operated as side interests of other corporations, Star Piano Company and Wisconsin Chair Company, respectively. Independent labels such as Black Swan, which was owned for awhile by W.C. Handy, were usually bought out after a few years by larger ones, but other economic difficulties plagued them as well. Columbia Records went under briefly after it couldn’t recover from a recession in 1921, and the Victor Talking Machine Company was sold to its investors in 1926 whenever its sales plummeted.<sup>99</sup>

Probably the most disastrous event for the early recording industry was the commercial introduction of radio broadcasts, which replaced the 78 rpm disk’s role as disseminator of music in the U.S. Wireless technology was strictly guarded by the government during WWI, and regular radio broadcasts didn’t begin until 1920, and even in 1925 listening to radios was still a largely private affair since listening was possible only with the benefit of headphones. In 1928, after six years of steady commercial broadcasting, \$800 million was spent on radios in the U.S., but by this time most local stations had been taken over by networks and advertising agencies. As a testament to the success of syndication and sales, Peretti notes that “Amos n’ Andy,” a vaudeville-minstrel radio comedy, gained “an unprecedented national listening audience between 1929-31,” making it “apparent that radio, unlike records, was a stable and well-funded medium for popular entertainment, especially for music.”<sup>100</sup>

Gains in radio for musicians, however, were duplicitous. Commercialization of the airwaves meant that “sweet” or “sentimental” styles monopolized the music market, so musicians had little room for interpretation or innovation, despite the fact that the performances were still live. Amplifiers, when introduced to the public, reproduced music much more realistically than 78 rpms, which then encouraged recording companies to

purchase radio technology, like electric microphones, to incorporate into their process as well.<sup>101</sup> Though caricatures of African-Americans by whites remained popular in radio comedy and drama, African-American musicians found gainful employment in the new industry, significantly because the new technology took away the visual stimulus of skin color for audiences prone to racial intolerance. Milt Hinton, longtime performer, photographer and documentarian of jazz, agrees that radio had a significant role in the gains made by African-Americans, calling radio broadcasts a

purely auditory art. A guy hears you, he don't see you. It's one of the greatest arts in the world for a black man...because if you can do the work, and qualify, they will hire you.<sup>102</sup>

Nonmusical programs like “Amos n’ Andy” were still popular with African-American audiences, however, despite the “racist” representations they promoted, and Peretti cites this as a significant factor that delayed the advancement of African-Americans in broadcasting as an industry. Clyde Bernhardt mentioned something to this extent in an interview with Hinton, saying that he couldn’t “help but [re]call how many black people liked those programs. And how many black performers got knocked out of work. Didn’t seem right because they were damn funny shows.”<sup>103</sup>

Musicians found the most money in network contracts, some getting up to \$100 a week regularly, but radio also allowed bands to play bigger, louder sounds for wider audiences since the restrictions of the recording studio weren’t problems. Louis Armstrong was playing with Fletcher Henderson in a band that was actually twice the size of the one they fronted a year earlier in 1924. Ellington, Basie and Lunceford also all had large orchestral combos that were vying for popularity in separate urban centers, but Feather notes that Ellington would later be credited as the innovator of “the first completely effective synthesis of arranged jazz and ad lib solos.”<sup>104</sup> Each of these leaders also had Big Bands that were promoting saxophone soloists that were taking new liberties with the “breaks” for improvisation in songs. Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster and Tab Smith would each later have major influences on a host of younger players that helped put the saxophone at the lead of jazz groups and create even more musical territory for improvisation.

It is important to note here, however, that an improvised solo, “is not the sudden outpouring of an open heart but has been memorized and repeated,” and while other circumstances around a solo such as dynamics, shifts in timbre and shading of pitch “depend on the inspiration of the moment,” the notes themselves generally adhere to the

standard harmonic structure that supports them.<sup>105</sup> Music in the jazz idiom didn't really incorporate solos until around the middle 1920s, and some historians speculate that it could be a practice that arose out of utility rather than aesthetics. Collier describes how "Froggie Moore," a 1925 recording by King Oliver's Band, has what several musicologists recognize as the first effectively improvised solo, yet the context of the recording suggests that it may have arisen more out of surprise on Armstrong's part. This was the eighth record cut at one session, and each previous side had taken at least two takes, something which was wearing hard on Oliver's already bothersome embouchure. Oliver takes the lead on the break in "Froggie," but he may have "played down" since Armstrong cuts in over him to take the lead. Armstrong, with the break, either played 'spontaneously' out of surprise or quickly capitalized on a good opportunity.<sup>106</sup> Sidney Bechet had done something similar to this early in the 1920s when he rose as a prominent soloist in groups that performed written arrangements without being able to read music.<sup>107</sup>

This is the same time that what Said calls "the business of empire"<sup>108</sup> became a major circumstance in the evolution of Jazz as the airwaves were dominated by music broadcasting throughout the 1930s, especially with shows promoting Jazz in the evenings and on Saturdays.<sup>109</sup> Dance halls, however, began going out of business as people stayed home more to listen to music, and this reliance on the uniformity of network broadcasting made innovations in Jazz slow to blossom. These factors, coupled with the exigencies of Depression economics, led many band leaders to break up their big dance hall groups and try using smaller combos in nightclubs. In order to find work, groups that had been primarily in the Northern metropolises (where the network studios also were) had to go back through the South, something that many of them had been consciously avoiding for several years. These experiences often exacerbated tensions between races that were already tight due to the lagging specter of Jim Crow laws.

In the later 1930s another commercial change had a substantial effect on the dissemination of Jazz: radio stations implemented the disk-jockey format, and the sounds that they broadcasted sounded as realistic as live performances since studios had begun to use the same microphone amplification that was being used at this time in electrical recording. Peretti explains that DJ's however, were hesitant to play any songs that weren't three minutes or slightly less in length because they interfered with the commercial format the networks had contracted. Manufacturers of jukeboxes made a similar request since this length also made it possible for them to program their machines more uniformly, restricting the creative space of the musicians in the recording studio in the same ways as

the broadcast studios. Performer Red Saunders observed later that this “almost ruined the musician. They took their own product and then just beat them across the head with it,” and Peretti agrees with him, observing that “the players’ talents were seen by industries as a raw material, an abstract production resource that they alienated from the musicians.”<sup>110</sup>

Musicians, therefore, had an ambivalent relationship with the technological boom of the 1920s and 30s; while it ensured the survival of some players and disseminated their music to audiences they probably wouldn’t have personally contacted, the labor conditions produced by technology were not really conducive to the satisfying production of music by many capable musicians. Much of this changed radically with the beginning of WWII, however, when U.S. military commitment in Europe and Japan took away a considerable portion of Jazz’s audience as well as a number of performers. Coupled with this was the change in internal American demographics as a number of African-Americans moved from the South to Northern industrial centers in search of better paying jobs in nascent wartime production as well as a break from Southern segregation.

Compared to the large number of African-Americans that came to the Northeast and Midwest to take advantage of job opportunities, a comparatively small proportion found gainful employment. Social historian Robin Kelly explains that by March of 1942, African-Americans made up only 2.5-3% of war production workers, most of those employed in low wage positions. This number rose to 8% by the war’s end, but those working didn’t benefit equally, largely because of unionization.<sup>111</sup> The number of workers in trade unions increased almost ten-fold between 1935-45, but, Kelly notes, non-union workers made up “roughly 80% of the black working class” so they “could not take advantage of the gains.”<sup>112</sup> This created more social tension as “demographic and economic transformations caused by the war not only intensified racial conflict, but led to heightened class tensions within urban black communities.”<sup>113</sup>

Labor issues had also become prominent among those working to make music, culminating in a ban on recording that was declared by the AFM (American Federation of Musicians) in 1941. Chartered in 1896 by the American Federation of Labor, the AFM was comparatively one of the more successful labor unions, introducing collective bargaining, strikes, closed shops and unfair employers lists to its members around the country.<sup>114</sup> Chicago Local 10, though it was largely a mob racket, pioneered organized opposition to recording in the 1920s when they struck against the use of relay transmitters that broadcast live performances to remote locations.<sup>115</sup> The AFM generally lobbied in favor of the musician as *worker*, however, concentrating on the ways employers were

exploiting the commercial products rather than issues related to aesthetic characteristics or creative license. Segregation was also a factor in unions, and many African-American Jazz musicians were not dedicated unionists, although AFM and its Locals had control over most of the available jobs.

The AFM was striking by way of demanding a more substantial pension fund for its members, the money for which would come from contributions made by the recording and broadcast industries. This concern was more present among older musicians, many of whom had been in popular orchestras in the 1930s, and many of the comparatively younger Jazz musicians were more concerned with decent regular pay and a chance to become famous for their own styles. As groups cut their payrolls once again and either began touring or dedicated themselves to making patriotic music for the war effort, several young musicians began to concentrate on nuances that they heard in some Jazz at that time and worked on what would be radical changes to the music. Their efforts would also have a significant effect on American culture as it came out of WWII.

### *Narrative Approaches to Jazz*

Two important phenomena coincided here. Written criticism of jazz began to circulate for a public audience and this popular interest led many “scholars” to attempt historical analyses of the music as an “American” cultural form. Simultaneously, several musicians were working on new approaches to the tradition they had inherited, but their creations would be received by audiences with opposition reminiscent of the 20’s moral backlash against music and dancing. The main substance of these highly negative critiques were arguments that appealed to the “fundamentals” outlined by the burgeoning popular histories and criticisms mentioned above, most of which were inaccurate in their interpretations and ignorant of their subject matter. This culminated in volatile debates over the “authenticity” of Jazz, and conjectures about its nature as an “art,” both of which are arguments that historically situate Jazz in interesting proximity to imperialism.

Written criticism of Jazz didn’t really exist until sometime in the mid-1930s and was an occupation exclusively for white men for a number of years. Until the mid-1940s these critics were also all trained in Western classical music and used that knowledge as a basis for interpreting the techniques and character of Jazz.<sup>116</sup> Most critics were also U.S. citizens and they held diligently to a belief that Jazz was made in America, often to the extent that they forced it squarely into the twentieth century, ignoring its early roots. Critics in Europe were a bit quicker to pick up on some of these misconceptions, but Leonard notes that their comparative unfamiliarity with American culture made their writings “highly erratic” and they too “rely on the norms of academic music” to form opinions.<sup>117</sup> Leroi Jones also points out that critics were often too occupied with *appreciation* rather than *understanding* of the music, producing what he refers to as “the carefully documented gee-whiz attitude.” He adds that they were also, “as a matter of course, influenced more deeply by the social and cultural mores of their own society,” which results in a situation Jones calls “Crow Jim,” where racist stereotypes are promoted as positive, rather than disparaging traits.<sup>118</sup> “The major flaw,” Jones concludes, “in this approach to Negro music is that it strips the music too ingenuously of its social and cultural intent.”<sup>119</sup>

Historians of Jazz would make the same mistakes when they, along with the emerging critics, found publishers in the mid-1930s. *Down Beat* and *Metronome* are two magazines that began to circulate in 1934<sup>120</sup>, while Winthrop Sargeant’s *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*, came out in 1938, the same year as Locke’s *The American Negro* (the first major

publication on music by an African-American). Both books offer interesting insight into several of the technical achievements made within the evolution of this cultural form, but they fail to recognize its social characteristics. This is perhaps most evident in Sargeant's insistence that Jazz contrasts sharply with Western classical music due to "its lack of evolutionary development," as he speaks of the music as if it had been the same since 1900.<sup>121</sup> It is important to note that the U.S. had never recognized a musical tradition before now; the orchestra and opera had been imported from Europe. Like all histories, however, these were being written long after the events they describe, and by popular consensus the history of Jazz was most often believed to begin in New Orleans.

As I mentioned before, the prehistory of Jazz is diverse with respect to social location, having spread to/from many different places through a variety of media, so it is interesting that New Orleans would become known as the "Birthplace of Jazz." Jazz histories at this time saw the music emerging there, then traveling upriver into Illinois, settling in St. Louis and Chicago. By the 1930s, most agreed that New York City was the contemporary hotspot, as many of the major broadcasters were based there. While it is factual that one can superimpose an evolution such as this on the actual history of Jazz, this trajectory follows the emergence of the music industry. Many famous names in the music came to Chicago from places in the South, where everyday life as well as economic opportunities for African-American musicians were better,<sup>122</sup> but to rely on the commercial reproduction of Jazz to comprehend its evolution is to ignore the cultural experience that is implicated in its sounds.

New Orleans also figures into perceptions of white society in interesting ways. Storyville, a now legendary ghetto in New Orleans, was often designated as the specific wellspring of Jazz creativity. Full of saloons and brothels, its legends of voodoo possession rituals filled out the ways many in white society understood African-American culture. This effectively "ghettoized" the music as a cultural form. Relying on this genealogy, the Library of Congress, in response to a grant proposal submitted by Columbia University, funded a series of "field recordings" that sent scholars throughout the South in an effort to capture the vestigial strains of the musical tradition historians and critics were attempting to define. Many hours of work songs, "spirituals" and blues were documented and filed away in Washington, D.C., and over the next thirty years several musicians would be invited to come there and record other songs as well as "oral histories" of their lives. John A. Lomax organized many of these sessions, but his historical studies concentrated on "folk" songs, ballads and "cowboy" songs rather than the ways these



styles connected to Jazz. Lomax's son, Alan, has spent nearly his whole life documenting the prehistory of Jazz, although his books didn't come out until recently. In his 1993 book *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Alan Lomax recalls a scene from his father's recording trip in 1933 that illustrates the cultural history that these anthropological missions captured as well as what they ignored.

In 1933 forty convicts, assembled by the warden at shotgun point for a Library of Congress recording session, blasted our microphone with their roaring call for Rosie. On return visits to Parchman we tried again and again to capture this powerful sound with hardly adequate equipment. Someday, if Mississippi discovers its real cultural roots, all these different versions of *Rosie* we took down over the years will comprise together a magnificent *Rosie* recording.<sup>123</sup>

Recording companies also sponsored "field recordings," taking much advantage of the one-time fee that they paid for these roving, largely informal sessions. Probably the most famous of these is the session by Robert Johnson, who has newfound popularity today through the remastering of his original works on CD. Johnson stayed largely unknown until these reissues, as did his predecessor and major influence Blind Lemon Jefferson. Jefferson, like Johnson, died young of poisoning, but in his short career recording for Paramount Records he was so popular "that he had his own lemon-colored label."<sup>124</sup> Muddy Waters had been recorded by a label before his popularity, which was due significantly to the release of two of his sessions on the first records released to the public by the Library of Congress.<sup>125</sup>

It is interesting to read how musicians that were popular at the time of this historic interest in Jazz hear themselves fitting into the tradition which many of these writings establish. Andre Hodier, in his 1956 publication *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, wrote

Specialists have built up a doctrine according to which the superiority of the pioneers over their ancestors is admitted *a priori*...True, the effort of the New Orleans pioneers to form a new language still deserves respect. Esthetically, however, their work was a failure.<sup>126</sup>

This is similar to what Feather illustrated when he organized a "blindfold test" of several prominent musicians from the 1930s to record how they interpreted the music from New Orleans that was reputed to be their sources. Listening to Jelly Roll Morton's record *Red Hot Pepper*, Mary Lou Williams stated abruptly, "What does it lack? It lacks music!" and Count Basie asked in the middle of listening to Bunk Johnson, "Do you have to play this all the way through?"<sup>127</sup> While critic Orrin Keepnews referred to Morton as a "genius," Coleman Hawkins said of his record *Grandpa's Spells*, "This is a lot of hodge-podge; I

wouldn't even be particular about listening to that one anymore."<sup>128</sup> Nostalgia and cultism were becoming major factors in writing the history of Jazz, and Feather describes the narrative that situates it squarely in New Orleans "a one-sided story."<sup>129</sup>

Another tendency within popular writings on Jazz at this time was to make it sound "primitive," a condescension that was significant among those ascribing a classical understanding of music onto what they saw as a "folk tradition." Jones sees this to also be affiliated with "Crow Jim" due to its "all you folks got rhythm" insinuation that was prominent among times of slavery.<sup>130</sup> While it is true that most prominent Jazz musicians did not have formal training in conservatories, most of them had either apprenticed under accomplished teachers or practiced a great deal to teach themselves. Jazz is largely improvised music, but that does not connote the spontaneous generation of music from some "primitive" root in one's genetic ancestry. Complicit with this misconception, it was popular for writers at this time to refer to "white" and "Negro" Jazz, the former being "sophisticated" or "sweet" compositions and the latter the "hot" numbers that they claimed represented the "wildness" of African-American culture.<sup>131</sup> Adherents to this terminology were negligent of the actual non-European influences on the music, largely because anthropologists in the 1930s were more interested in excavating the early physical history of Africa than in documenting its cultures.<sup>132</sup> American historians, therefore, looked at the history of African-Americans as if it were an example of "primitive" life.

Said notes that this view of culture is characteristic of ones that ignore how commodities are bound up with "representations – their production, circulation, history and interpretation," which together form "the very element of culture."<sup>133</sup> Overlooking these connections neglects that the context "is primarily imperial" he adds, resulting in interpretations that miss the crucial power struggles that constitute cultural forms. Said's remarks here align with the misguided dissection of Jazz that many writers and critics have undertaken when they attempt to contain this cultural form in a coherent narrative.

Instead [of a contextual interpretation] we have on the one hand an isolated cultural sphere, believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation, and, on the other, a debased political sphere, where real struggle between interests is supposed to occur. To the professional student of culture – the humanist, the critic, the scholar – only one sphere is relevant, and, more to the point, it is accepted that the two spheres are separated, whereas the two are not only connected but ultimately the same.<sup>134</sup>

### *WWII and the Emergence of Bop*

While many listeners were tuned to “sentimental” Jazz and popular patriotic arrangements on their radios in the first years of the 1940s, and scholars and critics debated over the authenticity of Jazz as an “American” form, some major innovations were happening in the music. Funding larger groups was nearly impossible during wartime, especially with little money available from recording, so musicians found themselves once again in small combos where they worked more intimately. The time off, while a strain financially, gave many players time to work more on their own skills, but when audiences heard their accomplishments they found them for the most part either “shocking” or “distasteful,” as they had to begin to consider each musician as a “practitioner” rather than just an “entertainer” of their personal tastes.<sup>135</sup>

This new style would become known as Bop, a term, like Jazz, that has widely speculative origins, and “it seemed like a shocking revolution in jazz,” significantly due to the two years of undocumented work that the strike produced.<sup>136</sup> Over this time several musicians began to carefully analyze the solo techniques of their predecessors, something which critics had been ignoring since their primary concern in writing up till the 1940s had been focused on the “character and past” of jazz rather than internal techniques.<sup>137</sup> While Bop, like all Jazz, is diverse with respect to its origins and innovators, there are some principle figures that can be recognized.

Roy Eldridge, Jimmy Blanton, Jo Jones, Lester Young and Charlie Christian were technical innovators in their respective times, but “there was little discussion of the innovative qualities of their work.”<sup>138</sup> Collectively they would later be seen as offering new rhythmic and harmonic methods in Jazz that allowed for extended improvisation over recognizable melody lines, effectively creating new space within popular songs for individual voices. Alto saxophonist Charlie Parker would find his “voice” in the Ozarks after memorizing all of Lester Young’s solos he could find on record and flipping around the chord progressions. Later, Parker brought this style to New York where Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach and others had been working on related ideas in informal sessions at Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem. Eventually, these musicians began playing together and incorporating these ideas, stirring up a lot of controversy around Jazz.

Bop has several musical characteristics that set it apart from most of the Jazz that precedes it, not all of which are technical. Due to the lack of a sizable audience for Jazz through WWII years, most early Bop performances were in small clubs, often catering to

“scabs,” and musicians worked in combos that were much smaller than Big Bands. Typical Bop groups featured a single trumpet, trombone, bass and drums with either one or two saxophones or perhaps a clarinet, though quartets were not uncommon. The tempo in this style is usually twice that of classic Jazz, with the rhythms subdivided entirely into eighth notes in many cases, but most of the traditional thirty-two bar form is adhered to carefully. Traditional Bop alternates between a chorus of higher voices playing in unison and individual instrumentalists taking longer improvised solos, making the arranged dances that the audiences had accompanied the music with difficult to do, something many listeners disdained. This led many to critically interpret Bop as “intellectual” music that was meant to be appreciated technically rather than emotionally.

Written criticism about Bop misunderstood many of its stylistic approaches, and critics’ remarks are indicative of the lack of understanding promoted generally by critics and historians of Jazz at this time. While most Bop musicians were African-Americans, the majority of its listeners were white, and it was among them that a debate began around the music that is notable primarily for its ignorance and naivete. Opponents of Bop blamed it for “diluting” Jazz with “European harmonies,” without realizing that Jazz had “found itself almost from the beginning in a unique and continuing interpretation of the resources of Western music.”<sup>139</sup> Critics also accused the music of “exploit[ing] techniques for their own sake,” without qualifying how else one should employ them, and “modernist” became a label of ignominy placed on many performers.<sup>140</sup>

Supporters of the music did little to remedy these categorical oversights, often choosing instead to look down their noses at those opposing Bop for their supposed inability to appreciate “good art.” The counter-argument they offered over harmonics lauded Bop’s “new harmonies” (they were mostly from the twelve-tone experiments by Schoenberg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and they compared Stravinsky to Parker as if Bird had based his work on the former. Critics also spoke of Bop as having “invented” the practice of composing new melodic lines over old chord progressions, a practice which was actually older than Ragtime. “Polytonality” and “atonality” were two other attributes credited to Bop’s invention, yet no one ever filled out how these terms connected with the music.<sup>141</sup> Critic Martin Williams explains that, put together, both sides of this critical debate made it seem “as if this bop style had swept away almost everything that had gone before it, no matter how well or how badly the writers knew and understood what had gone before it.”<sup>142</sup>

Jazz had now been widely popular in the U.S. for about three decades, and a strong urge among those listening to it was to formalize and finalize it into a recognizable “American” form. “Anti-jazz” became a euphemism used to refer to the music that many Bop players were making, since audiences and critics couldn’t find its connection with the “traditional” definition of jazz that scholars were illustrating. Don C. Haynes, a reviewer for *Down Beat*, wrote in 1946 of Parker’s “Billie’s Bounce” and “Now’s the Time,” “These two ideas are bad taste and ill-advised fanaticism,” continuing on to declare that Bop’s influence had “thrown innumerable impressionable young musicians out of stride [and] had harmed many of them irreparably.”<sup>143</sup> Others gave foreboding messages similar to Roger Dodge’s assertion that “flatly there is no future in the preparation for jazz through Bop.”<sup>144</sup> These critics saved their praise for the Dixieland revival that was growing at this time as groups began countering this “modernist” trend by marketing another “traditional” approach to Jazz. In turn, supporters of Bop retaliated by disdaining the Dixieland style as too “primitive,” and tried to authenticate Bop as the “*real Jazz*.”

While a number of older Jazz musicians didn’t enjoy the new style that Bop offered, this debate over the nature of Jazz wasn’t primary in their lives as they tried to make a living off of a product that seemed to be slipping further from their grasp. Due significantly to the sketchy nature of the audience response to Bop, few worthy recordings of its evolution were made before 1950, when the “acceptance” of Bop was again challenged by a style that was characterized critically as its diametric opposite. Cool Jazz used modal harmonies and more complexly arranged written compositions to produce a more understated style of concert music. In retrospect, it appears that it was from between this cleft that John Coltrane began to play.

### *Coltrane: Background and Biography*

Coltrane rose to prominence as a solo saxophonist during the time of this critical debate, and audiences began to see him as the center of its controversy. One today can still hear “anti-Jazz” in reference to Coltrane, especially with regard to albums like *Meditations* or *Ascension* or his live recordings. Basically, however, he took techniques developed by innovative Bop musicians and expanded chord progressions even further beyond the standard melodic line; later he would begin to subdivide rhythms into sixteenths and then began working these ideas into new figures outside of 4/4 time signatures, which is a basis that much music had adhered to up until the 1950s. Importantly, Coltrane added ideas to his music that recalled its cultural connection to the history of imperialism, flavoring his compositions with West Indian, African and Latin sounds that, along with a strong European influence, are the rudimentary basis of the hybridity in Jazz.

John William Coltrane was born September 23, 1926 in Hamlet, NC, a small town about 100 miles from High Point, NC, which is where he grew up after he and his family moved when he was three months old. Many African-Americans were moving to this area of the Piedmont of North Carolina between the years of WWI and the Great Crash from poorer areas in South Carolina and Georgia in search of stable employment in its booming furniture and hosiery industry. The threat of racial violence was lesser here as well, since the larger towns in the area had less of a KKK presence than smaller rural communities,<sup>145</sup> and both Greensboro and Winston-Salem had three prestigious African-American colleges which lobbied for regional political representation in matters of race. Coltrane is a prominent Scottish name, as is Blair, his mother’s maiden name, and both are evidence of “the custom of giving the family slaves the [owner’s] surname.” Coltrane biographer J.C. Thomas notes that since English and Scottish settlement of the South is well-documented, “if tracing family trees was a matter of great importance, the Blair’s and Coltrane’s could count their heritage back more than just a few centuries to medieval England.”<sup>146</sup>

Coltrane’s father, J.R., was a tailor who “played violin and ukulele when he wasn’t busy,” and his mother listed her occupation as “domestic,” which she meant to imply that she was a full-time homemaker. His Grandfather Blair, a well-respected minister, was appointed presiding elder of the AME Zion parish shortly after his daughter’s family moved into his home at 105 Price Street in High Point, which meant he had to travel a good deal. Even though the reverend visited only two or three times a month, biographer Lewis Porter concludes that “his presence was palpable,” as Coltrane explained in an

interview with August Blume when asked if he had “a very strict religious life” growing up:

*Coltrane:* Well, it wasn't too strict, but it was there. Both my grandfathers were ministers. My mother, she was very religious. Like, in my early years I was going to church every Sunday and stuff like that, being under the influence of my grandfather – he was the dominating cat in the family. He was well versed, active politically. He was more active than my father, [who] was a tailor; but he never seemed to say much. He just went about his business, and that was it. But my grandfather, he was pretty militant, you know. So that's where – I grew up in that.<sup>147</sup>

During the Depression, while Coltrane was in elementary school, his Cousin Mary Lyerly moved into the Blair house with her parents. The “polar opposite” of Coltrane in personality, Porter explains that the two “shared a mutual drive for excellence and desire for knowledge, and they posted elementary school grades near the top of their class.”<sup>148</sup> Their teacher, Betty Jackson, recalls Coltrane as “meticulous with his work,” remembering a report he chose to write on Marian Anderson, the concert singer, and a short speech called “Indian Life” that he delivered as his seventh grade salutatorian address.<sup>149</sup>

When Coltrane was twelve, however, a series of events caused several changes in his life. Reverend Blair, 79, passed away on December 11, 1938; just over a year later his father died of stomach cancer, which was actually the most common kind of cancer in the first part of this century.<sup>150</sup> During that same year, Grandmother Blair and Mary's father Golar also passed away. The family took it hard, “but John seemed as calm, unruffled and quiet as always,” Mary observed.<sup>151</sup> It was also at this time that he took up music as a hobby, playing alto horn, then clarinet and, “For awhile,” remembers his high school friend David Young, “I don't think he had anything but that horn.”<sup>152</sup>

Coltrane started high school in 1939, but “rather than being a top student, as he was in elementary school, he became indifferent, earning many C's.”<sup>153</sup> While one can speculate, as Porter does, that “music was too much on his mind,” segregation had become a noticeable factor in his life as well. William Penn, the African-American high school he attended, operated with equipment that had been used and replaced by the white schools, and this reminder of second-class citizenship probably exacerbated economic tensions already present in the Coltrane household as they struggled without the assistance of male breadwinners. The family had gone quickly from middle-class to poor, and though the African-American community in High Point helped support them, the decision was made to move. Coltrane's mother traveled to Philadelphia, remaining there throughout his senior year of high school as he stayed behind to board with a neighbor who wrote to Philadelphia

once a month “that John was constantly sitting in the dining room, practicing his ‘flute,’ she didn’t know it was a saxophone.”<sup>154</sup>

Coltrane had some bouts with an asthma-like sickness shortly after his father died, and he began smoking cigarettes around this time, a habit that would bother him throughout his life. His job as a soda-jerk gave him money for a social life, and he also started drinking alcohol, something else that would figure significantly later for him.<sup>155</sup> He had started playing in a community band when he was thirteen, learning only easy marches on the clarinet mainly because the leader, Warren B. Steele, hated ragtime and the emerging “jazz.” John Ingram, a member of the band, remembers that several musicians got together after school in Coltrane’s basement, where there was a piano, and held “jam sessions.” The first song they practiced was a famous Hoagy Carmichael number that was being recorded by a host of swing bands in 1939, the Goodman, Miller and Crosby groups being the three most popular.<sup>156</sup> William Penn started a school band in 1940, and Coltrane was one of its founding members, bringing along with him a new interest in the alto saxophone, which he borrowed from a friend to practice at school, in the dining room at home and, on occasions, in the back yard.<sup>157</sup>

In 1943, Coltrane moved in with his mother in Philadelphia and found a job at a sugar refining factory. Porter explains that he preferred the more integrated racial environment of the Northeast, though it took some time for him to get adjusted to the greater violence there that contrasted with High Point. When he changed jobs to work at Campbell Soup Company, his mother bought him his first alto saxophone; Mary remembers that after this “he would just sit there all the time and practice and smoke cigarettes.”<sup>158</sup>

In 1944, Coltrane enrolled at Ornstein School of Music in Philadelphia, taking classes for about a year. Leo Ornstein was a virtuosic pianist from Ukraine whose experimental compositions aroused much controversy in the 1910s.<sup>159</sup> Here Coltrane studied under saxophonist Mike Guerra, learning music theory, and as a student he stood out to Guerra for his enthusiasm. “I wrote out complex chord progressions and special exercises in chromatic scales,” Guerra remembers, “and he was one of the few who brought his homework back practically the next day and played it on sight. He was always asking for more.”<sup>160</sup> This education, however, was cut short when Coltrane was drafted for service in the U.S. Navy in 1945.

According to Porter, this turned out to be a circumstance “managed more by logic than perversity,” since when the recruiters learned that Coltrane was an aspiring musician



they assigned him to a Navy band based in Hawaii.<sup>161</sup> The “Melody Masters,” as they called themselves, had far less time to practice than their counterparts in the outfit’s white band, so Coltrane spent most of his time in General Service, mostly kitchen work. He later told friends that he wasn’t fond of his time in the military, but he later took full advantage of his veteran’s benefits both for housing and tuition loans. He returned from Hawaii in 1946 as the U.S. armed forces began “downsizing” their presence in the South Pacific following WWII.<sup>162</sup>

As an emerging Jazz soloist, Coltrane was in the right place and time when he got back to Philadelphia. He continued schooling, now attending Granhoff Studios, a school founded by an immigrant from Russia who had traveled alone to Philadelphia when he was eleven. After playing violin on the streets for a few years, Granhoff eventually opened a tiny studio when he was twenty, and it became one of the largest in the eastern U.S.<sup>163</sup> Coltrane’s purpose in studying here was to learn fundamentals – theory, harmony, ear training – and he took two classical lessons a week. In addition to this he was learning “exotic scales – scales from every ethnic culture,” from his teacher Dennis Sandole, who adds that they also began to work on “combining notes” and “creating substitute chords,” two methods that heavily influenced Coltrane’s budding interest in composition.<sup>164</sup>

Both Porter and Thomas explain that Coltrane continued to practice “maniacally” while he studied, arriving at Granhoff an hour early and staying late after it closed in the evening. Often at home, he would sit and blow air through the horn as he fingered different patterns in order to practice without waking anyone in the small apartment the Coltrane’s and Lysterly’s shared.<sup>165</sup> Bop styles were figuring prominently in his approaches, and the first tune he is known to have recorded was with the Melody Masters when they covered Parker’s “Hot House” and “Koko” on a private disk in Hawaii. Coltrane cites Johnny Hodges as his earliest influence on alto, but Parker’s approaches also strongly affected his developing style. At this time, Parker hadn’t been recorded widely, serving mainly as a side person for bigger names, but in 1945 Coltrane had the opportunity to see him in concert with Sarah Vaughn, Don Byas and Dizzy Gillespie. Later in an interview he remembered, “The first time I heard Bird play it hit me right between the eyes,”<sup>166</sup> and while he was “overseas” he “still heard Bird’s records everywhere and I was copying like mad just to see what he was doing.”<sup>167</sup> Other influences were around his home in Philadelphia as well, such as the popular Latin music played by Machito, a pioneer of fusing Bop with the traditional sounds that accompanied the Merengue and other dances.<sup>168</sup>

Eventually Coltrane began freelancing and is quoted as considering his first “professional job” to have been when he left Philadelphia to play for a dance band that featured blues singer Big Maybelle. This was a short trip, but when he got back home he quickly left again as lead alto with the King Kolax band in February, 1947. This, he later said, “was truly my ‘school,’” and it also allowed him to meet Parker when the band was in Los Angeles. The two saxophonists had opportunities to jam together and when Coltrane returned to Philadelphia, he played Parker’s “Relaxin’ at Camarillo” for some friends before the recording had been released.<sup>169</sup>

After working in a big band with Heath where Coltrane again had several chances to play alongside Parker, he got his biggest break playing in a group led by Dizzy Gillespie. Around 1948 though, Coltrane also started using heroin, something else for which Parker had become famous. Use of the drug had been on the rise since the end of WWII, and by the 1950s it was widely discussed in magazines as a problem in the Jazz community. In 1955, Hollywood even dramatized the situation with a major motion picture, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, starring Frank Sinatra as an addicted musician.<sup>170</sup> Apparently, this didn’t interfere with Coltrane’s practice habits since he continued to work diligently, but professionally it would eventually get in his way.

Music for Coltrane was a habit, one he satisfied by drawing continually from all of the available resources around him. In 1948, Jimmy Heath remembers that he would accompany Coltrane to the Philadelphia Public Library to listen to volumes of Western classical music through earphones. During this time Coltrane was also working out of method books and had begun transcribing more music off of records. Heath remembers “going to his apartment in summertime,” when “Trane would be stripped down to his boxer shorts. He’d be sweating and practicing all day. Anything Trane grabbed, he would work on until he got it.”<sup>171</sup> It was also around this time that he picked up tenor saxophone, modeling his sound on Dexter Gordon and Sonny Stitt at first, and then drawing from Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, all of whom had been major influences on Bop, which also aided Coltrane while touring with Gillespie. In honor of Coltrane’s introduction to Gillespie’s band, his childhood friend from High Point, Franklin Brower, wrote the first published article on Coltrane as a musician in the *Philadelphia Afro-American*.<sup>172</sup> His work with Gillespie was a good introduction to professionalism as a Jazz musician, and Coltrane learned a lot about what to expect as a musician for audiences that were often looking for the “real Jazz.”

Gillespie was finding it hard to keep a larger group funded in the 1950s, and at this point he had begun to feature more commercially popular material in hopes of making this big band more economically viable. Coltrane mentioned something of this in an interview with a French critic: "This was the crazy period of Dizzy, the one where he wanted to find a new audience and played a sort of rhythm and blues in his own way, with Joe Carroll. It was a lot of fun, but I don't know if what we played was always sufficiently appreciated!"<sup>173</sup> The band was offering more recognizable, four-beat patterns for dancers, but embellished them with Bop runs and high energy. Gillespie noted this in his autobiography, "Dancers had to have those four solid beats and could care less about the esoteric aspects, the beautiful advanced harmonies and rhythms we played and our virtuosity, as long as they could dance."<sup>174</sup> Coltrane learned in this group to play the patterns that would later have an impact on his own writing; Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" and "Manteca" were in their repertoire, along with Monk's "Round Midnight." Unusual chords and minor modes were standards among these pieces and the first two involve vamping (improvising on chords as well as the melody) on one or two chords, a technique employed by many Latin pieces that Coltrane would later use between 1960-65.<sup>175</sup> Porter adds that this fusion of Latin music and Jazz "also paved the way for Coltrane's later broadening of this to include other kinds of world music from India and Africa."<sup>176</sup>

Times were hard for big bands, however, and audiences also didn't respond well to the Bop inflections Gillespie was adding to familiar music. Bookings for the group decreased weekly and the \$125 a week each musician received was quickly eaten up in costs affiliated with travel. In a 1950 concert in Little Rock, AR, only two dozen people showed up at a concert hall with space for 5000.<sup>177</sup> When they returned to New York around Christmas of that same year, the band started a six-week job at Bop City, but even with a more locally appreciative audience, Gillespie felt the need to break up the band and did so on New Year's Eve. He retained Coltrane and Heath for the septet he had been planning, also deciding, to Coltrane's delight, to move him to lead tenor.

Coltrane had been practicing tenor for awhile, but claimed he still wasn't comfortable with the sound he was getting from it. This led him to experiment with different types of mouthpieces in an effort to get more range in both the upper and lower registers he was exploring, but his performance was affected in other non-musical ways as well when his heroin habit began giving him problems on the road. Gillespie hadn't known that Coltrane and Heath had a problem while in the big band, but in a smaller group

they toured more widely. Heroin was harder to find outside of New York, and when they did score it was a lot weaker and more expensive in the less urban areas they visited.<sup>178</sup> Coltrane began drinking more as a substitute, and this combined with his nervousness and withdrawal sickness to make performing hard for him. On March 1, 1951, he got the chance to record with the group on Gillespie's Dee Gee Records label, laying down several solos, but by the spring he was back freelancing in New York after Gillespie found out his habit and fired him.<sup>179</sup>

Taking advantage of his veteran benefits before they ran out, Coltrane enrolled at Granthoff again while he also recorded sporadically as a sideman and began working around Philadelphia in various R&B bands that were making new "dance music." In 1954, Coltrane joined the original group led by one of the altos he admired so much; Johnny Hodges gave him a job he loved, but his heroin use again created problems and Hodges fired Coltrane in Los Angeles. Coltrane returned to Philadelphia to freelance with organist Jimmy Smith, and things were going well for both Coltrane and the group when, in 1955, Coltrane was offered a spot as lead tenor in Miles Davis influential combo.<sup>180</sup>

In addition to this, Coltrane met a woman that he soon married, and he credited her with helping him get over his heroin addiction. Naima Coltrane was born Juanita Austin in North Carolina in 1926, changing her first name when she converted to Islam. After meeting at a jam session in Philadelphia, Naima joined Coltrane in Baltimore during his first week with Davis, and it was there they got married. Porter explains that Davis claimed to be empathetic with Coltrane's struggles with addiction, having gotten over a similar problem just prior to an appearance with a rhythm section at the 1955 Newport Jazz Festival that "woke everybody up to his brilliance and led to a new contract with Columbia and much publicity."<sup>181</sup>

### *Coltrane: Recordings and Criticisms*

The twelve years between Coltrane's work with Davis and his death comprise his recording career as a soloist and in some ways seem like a remarkably short time for the range of stylistic achievements he accomplished. Coltrane is credited by many adherents as being the innovator of Free Jazz, another ambiguous label for another style of musical composition. As audiences and musicians began to expand the innovations in Bop into new areas, Free Jazz offered very different approaches to music than did its contemporary Cool style. Harmony and rhythm were very different in the two strains, becoming characterized among critics as polar opposites, an argument that would continue to provide substance for the public debate over the authenticity of jazz.

Litweiler notes that Bop is often described as "a music of extremes" that many critics classify as "above all a romantic art," but Cool Jazz was recognized in its time for "its distance from the emotional fires of bop."<sup>182</sup> He points to "a more literally detached emotionality" as a governing characteristic of Cool, which received this label from the 1949 *Birth of the Cool* album by Lennie Tristano and Davis. This was music designed and arranged for concerts, and many of its innovative techniques were taken from approaches to modal harmonies and eccentric rhythmic patterns that had been experimented with in early 19<sup>th</sup> century European orchestras. Often eerily erotic, many Cool compositions are notable for their use of empty space and latency (lead voices in the melody falling behind the rhythm of the rest of the group), a sharp contrast from Bop's rush to fill every moment with a different sound.

The major musicians in Cool and Free Jazz were trained in techniques familiar to Bop, and like all styles of music the two bear many interesting similarities that critics have often ignored in favor of defending either as closer to "real jazz." Substantial attention from the recording industry came late to Bop, but when it did come in the later 1950s, most promoters and audiences were already into the burgeoning "sophisticated" Cool sounds. Coltrane seems to have had something to offer both styles, and his studies in theory at Granhoff and the Ornstein School made him already familiar with the approaches Davis was taking with his own group in 1955.<sup>183</sup> This marked a major turning point for Coltrane as public attention now became a significant factor in his progress as a musician.

Porter explains that in the Davis group, Coltrane's "every musical move was noticed and analyzed by critics and fans – not to mention potential producers and promoters," and each of these struggled over ways to interpret this new soloist.<sup>184</sup> He also

gained exposure through the recordings he did as a sideman during this period, and one session with Sonny Rollins resulted in the album *Tenor Madness*, which instigated several years of critical comparisons between these two mutual admirers. Audiences were somewhat baffled by Coltrane's spiraling lines, but his tone was well suited for both leading and supporting positions. Critics would continually cast negative votes for his playing, however, often creating tension between he and Davis over how Coltrane should approach his solos.<sup>185</sup>

Coltrane recorded twice as a leader in 1957, the second of these sessions culminating in *Blue Train*, which featured four of his own compositions and quickly received critical attention. During this year he also worked alongside Thelonious Monk, whose approaches toward reworking phrases while playing two or three notes at once would heavily influence Coltrane when he started composing for his own group. A piece of one of their sessions was captured and later released as an album featuring he and Monk as co-leaders, although only two of the six numbers actually have them playing together.

In 1958 he rejoined Davis and, as Porter notes, "it was a very different Coltrane who returned."<sup>186</sup> He had begun superimposing or "stacking up" chords, a technique which critic Ira Gitler referred to in an article as "sheets of sound," a term that has hung oddly over Coltrane's music since then. During this time Coltrane was also in the *Kind of Blue* session with Davis' group, an album which many critics regard as the quintessential example of Cool Jazz. In 1959 Coltrane left Davis, however, and also took a break from playing as he recuperated from extensive dental surgery to correct problems related to his habit of smoking and love of sweets.<sup>187</sup> When he returned in 1960 though, he "knocked the jazz world on its ear" when he released an album that featured him as leader of a group, introducing the innovative ideas on which he had been working.<sup>188</sup>

Tracing the evolution of Coltrane's music from 1960 to his death, one finds the trajectory of an artist manipulating practically every musical idea that was rooted in the jazz idiom. It wasn't until this time, however, that the first decent histories of Ragtime were being compiled,<sup>189</sup> and Bop was still largely beyond the tastes or serious discussion of many critics whose criteria for interpretation were based on the shortsighted analyses that I mentioned earlier. Unable to appreciate or take the time to decipher Bop, many of these same audiences seem to have been entirely alienated by Coltrane's playing, and his name became somewhat synonymous with the label "anti-Jazz." Just as the misinterpretations surrounding Bop were subject to very misguided approaches toward recognizing the

complex cultural experiences implicated in the music, critiques of Coltrane's work were often motivated by similar oversights.

An unidentified critic in 1959 compared Coltrane's playing to the barking of a dog, while another drew an unimaginative parallel to his controversial predecessor when he wrote, "Parker's playing is like an electric fan being switched on and off; Coltrane's playing is like an electric fan being turned on and left on."<sup>190</sup> Remarks such as these were first made against Coltrane while he was with Davis, and it became customary for critics to single him out for abuse. Don Gold reviewed the Davis sextet's performance at Newport in 1958 and wrote, "the group's solidarity is hampered by the angry young tenor of Coltrane. Backing himself into rhythmic corners on flurries of notes, Coltrane sounded like the personification of motion-without-progress in jazz."<sup>191</sup> John Tynan, another *Down Beat* critic, took a more personal stab at Coltrane when he called his playing "superficially stimulating, lonely and rather pathetic self-seeking."<sup>192</sup> Later in 1960, though, Tynan's opposition became nasty: "Slashing at the canvas of his own creation, Coltrane erupted in a fantastic onrush of surrealism and disconnected musical though best appreciated within the dark corridors of his personal psyche," adding that his solos suggested "overtones of neurotic compulsion and contempt for the audience."<sup>193</sup>

Quite to the contrary, Coltrane was actually quite sensitive to his audience, and had some supportive critics; regardless of the intensity of the opposition to his creations, he was still a popular jazz musician in his time. For those listening to him, though, he presented a continual challenge to popular opinions about what constituted jazz. This resulted despite his openness with respect to discussing his ideas with critics and fans, and many find his work bewildering independent of whether it fits their tastes. Largely because of this, critical discussion about Coltrane often evokes a reconsideration of jazz as a cultural form. Opposition to his music has been largely informed by a perspective on the music that ignores the hybridity in the Jazz idiom which Coltrane was exploring; similarly, those who support him for his "avant-garde" accomplishments neglected much of the same.

To this extent, the same antagonisms I explained earlier between the "discrepant experiences" in the history of Jazz and the "imperialist secular narratives" that critics and scholars formed as a way of defining it surround the works of Coltrane. In order to analyze this specifically, I will present an example of this tension as it is literally presented to the audience who experiences his recordings. Said claims that the struggles that characterize imperialism are inscribed in the material culture that surrounds us, and I find that jazz

albums have much evidence to support this claim. As cultural forms, jazz recordings are poignant examples of hybridity since they express the complex historical forces that have produced the music while its artists have relied upon an industry that overlooked this complexity in commercializing them.



### *Liner Notes as Imperialist Narratives*

In order to refine this analysis of the interrelationships between jazz and the history of imperialism in the U.S., I will focus on the ways that Coltrane's recordings represent these power struggles through the promotion and packaging that contains the music. Liner notes accompany most jazz recordings, providing an interpretive context for the consumer to reference when listening to a recording. Originally (and usually) these are fairly formulaic in their approach: a member of the label's promotion staff scripts a short biography of the leading artist or soloist(s), a brief history of their career and several quick remarks about the merits of each song on the album. In effect, these short narratives present the recording as "an autonomous cultural form," since they fill in much of the background that the commodity – the recording itself – can't verbally represent. This amounts to a written interpretation of the music that is independent of the people responsible for its creation, taking advantage of this space to promote the recording without revealing the actual circumstances behind its production.

This isn't to imply that liners are entirely misguided in their approach, but rather to insist that they are, in fact, narratives and as such should be read *contrapuntally* with the other narratives and material culture that influences them if they are to be fairly understood. Liners are often the only written connection that listeners have with the music on a recording, offering them an accessible "language" for interpretation. It seems remarkable to me that artists rarely wrote their own liners, surrendering this to producers along with many of the other decisions about how to present their craft. Perhaps as a result of this distance between musicians and writers, the information on liners appears to be accurate and authentic, but on closer examination it becomes clear that these narratives are primarily promotional in their intentions and the writers are very selective about the information that they include. To the extent that they represent the actuality behind the production of the recordings they accompany, to quote Said their "cultural analysis or anthropology can be seen as affiliated with the empire."<sup>194</sup> In continuing to examine the interrelationships between jazz as a cultural form and the mechanics of imperialism, I will discuss three ways in which the liners that accompany some of Coltrane's recordings both obscure and expose this connection, illustrating how they can be interpreted contrapuntally.

Liners, like Said's description of imperialist narratives, tend to "obscure the business of empire itself"<sup>195</sup> when some writers present the artist and recording to the audience. Each recording is actually the result of very complicated mechanical and

economic processes, but liners rarely mention this, characterizing the recording more as the direct product of the artists. This is perhaps because the focus in liners is almost entirely on the headlining artist, and the narratives are quite coherent, beginning with information about their birth and upbringing and ending with commentary on the accomplishment of the recording itself, which is discussed in the short critiques of each song on the album. This provides the experience of listening to Coltrane or other artists on record with personal details that resonate with the music, creating a context for the listeners' interpretation. This context, however, doesn't really reflect the history of its material and cultural production.

For example, in 1960 Coltrane formed his own quartet with McCoy Tyner, Steve Davis and Elvin Jones, and was widely recognized as a tenor soloist although he had also begun to play soprano saxophone on occasions. This side interest resulted in *My Favorite Things*, an album comprised of four very interesting interpretations of traditional standards. The liner notes for this recording open with the declaration, "It's harvest time for John Coltrane. Fifteen years of serious and intelligent rotation have produced a bumper crop."<sup>196</sup> Whether or not Bill Coss, the writer of these notes, recognized how this metaphor obliquely recalled the agrarian past of jazz's prehistory is impossible to know, but he continues to insist at several places on the importance of these "fifteen years" of Coltrane's work as a "professional musician." The nineteen years before that, however, seem to have no major importance in the evolution of the music. There are notes that refer to his early years, but they only regard his work on the saxophone, and moreover they quote Coltrane out of context and are historically inaccurate.<sup>197</sup>

The tendency to "speak for" Coltrane is evident in the paragraph that closes the historical discussion in this short narrative, where Coss is explicit about his intentions, claiming that "the quality of this album" is what "John has been moving towards these fifteen years," which implies that this recording is the goal of his musical experience to date. This exaggeration grounds this commodity in a teleological narrative, but its assertion is inaccurate. During the same week that the cuts for *My Favorite Things* were made the quartet also recorded pieces that weren't released until two years later. Joe Goldberg, author of the notes to this other album, *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, claims somewhat to the contrary of this album, with songs recorded intermittently with the 1960 releases, "I doubt that it was recorded in an attempt to prove any sort of point." While the appearance of this difference is not elucidating in itself, it is important to note that *Things*, which received accolades, is all cover songs, while *Blues* culminated the first session of

Coltrane performing his own material with his own quartet, which is an important accomplishment for a musician who sought to also be a composer.

For the most part, Goldberg writes a fairly accurate liner for this recording, discussing the diversity present in the individual songs and attempting to rationalize the “controversy” around the abuse Coltrane took for his “avant-garde” style. What is notable, however, is the way he opposes “avant-garde” with a discussion of the “tradition” of the blues. Here Goldberg appeals to this “origin” as the factor that keeps Coltrane’s work “quite firmly based in jazz tradition,” which he in closing calls “the music’s oldest form.” While, as the title of the album suggests, these pieces are all rooted in traditional blues concepts, they are also fused with influences much older than the blues that are also important in the hybridity that characterizes Jazz. Goldberg mentions some of these as he discusses the songs, noting the “near-gospel piano figure” in “Blues to Elvin,” the “Eastern-minor vein” that recalls “Dahomey Dance,” and the “synthesis of West Indian and African music” in the piano and rhythmic basis of “Mr. Knight,” adding that it is “a unique cultural-musical blend.” Goldberg doesn’t, however, endeavor to connect these bits of information with the context of the Blues in order to illustrate how this initial example of Coltrane’s imagination is, in a way, illustrating the expansiveness of the jazz idiom, recalling through music its complex history of influences.

Perhaps one of the more intriguing examples of a liner that obscures the actual history of the production behind the recording is the one that accompanies the album *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*. Only three of the six songs are actually from the time that Coltrane spent with Monk, but Ira Gitler opens the notes with the claim that these recordings are examples of the “historic teaming” of two musicians who have “produced music of lasting value.” The recordings were made in 1957, so by the time of their public release in 1961 the partnership probably did seem historic, but more actual history is made on this recording by the presence of Coleman Hawkins. Hawkins had been a major influence on several tenor saxophonists, and was close to legendary among musicians at this time. Coltrane remarked about this in an interview:

The first time I heard Hawk, I was fascinated by his arpeggios and the way he played. I got a copy of his ‘Body and Soul’ and listened real hard to what he was doing. And even though I dug Pres, as I grew musically, I appreciated Hawk more and more.<sup>198</sup>

Hawkins, however, is mentioned only once in this liner close to the end in what amounts to an aside. Hawkins and Coltrane never actually recorded together, but the appearance of these two saxophone players together on a Monk recording seems like a pretty important

historic event as well. Hawkins, however, wasn't a major selling name at this time, and Coltrane's popularity was probably pushed forward to his obscurity.

Another example of the relationship between the narratives in liner notes and the history of imperialism can be seen with regard to communication between the persons responsible for the music and the audience. Using Said's language, there is "an unequal relationship of force"<sup>199</sup> between the writers of the notes and musicians due significantly to the fact that American culture privileges literacy when discerning meaning in the world. In liners, promoters and critics generally get to "speak for" the music and often, just as Said describes the ways empire "uses its authority and its power to impose" upon the culture of those it controls, they selectively use ideas credited to the musicians to prove their own critical points. When analyzed in the context of Said's argument, this can raise some very important political issues.

Coltrane was quite candid about discussing his desire to communicate effectively with his audience through music, but negative criticisms of his work had little visible effect on him. He also had little to say in way of defending himself against assertions that he played "anti-Jazz," and instead would explain that he understood his music as a "search," something that he would reiterate several times after ending his work with Davis in 1959. Coltrane became notorious when *Jazz Hot*, an influential magazine of music criticism that was the first popular voice to defend Bop, featured four statements by as many critics under the heading "For or Against John Coltrane."<sup>200</sup> At a concert recorded in Paris a few months earlier, several members of the audience loudly booed Coltrane during his solo in "Bye Bye Blackbird," and the article responding to this incident in *Jazz Hot* took as its focus the "torrential accumulations of notes" and "his technique and his facility" as opposing views.<sup>201</sup> As debates such as this became more heated, Coltrane continued to experiment more on his own.

Coltrane's release of *Giant Steps* in 1960 marked the first example of his own compositions and abilities as a solo wind player. Recorded in 1959 just before he formed his own quartet, this would become one of the most famous jazz albums to date, but at the time of its release it was a public example of the techniques responded to so negatively by French critics. The "newness" in Coltrane's playing was due mainly to his interest in third-related chord movement ("stacking" chords up in twos and threes to cover much more than their normal range), something he worked with in Monk's group and the controversy it caused is discussed at length by Nat Hentoff in the notes to this recording. It also marks an example of what Porter calls Coltrane's "typical openness" about his music

since the liner notes contain a quotation that expresses a certain misgiving about his music's effect.

Hentoff apparently spoke directly with Coltrane about his work on this album, publishing Coltrane's remarks in with his own narrative, "something that is never done in liner notes," Porter adds.<sup>202</sup> The piece itself is filled with quotes from Coltrane, as well as from Miles Davis and two critics, and a read through it seems to offer insight into what Coltrane is trying to say with his music. These quotations, however, have no citations or connections to any time and place, which contrasts sharply with the references for both of the critics' remarks since they are complete. While it appears that these ideas are being communicated directly from the artist to the reader, these phrases are actually borrowed by Hentoff to illustrate the point he is trying to prove. Perhaps this is most clear at the end of the notes where he asserts what can be "expected" from Coltrane, ending with a statement about how the listener can most beneficially listen to the album by remaining "willing to try relatively unexplored territory with him." At this point, Hentoff is standing directly between Coltrane and his audience, making an appeal on Coltrane's behalf where he assumes that Coltrane expects listeners to have this intimacy with him. As a statement, this is well-suited as a conclusion to a piece of writing that is so "personal" in its presentation of quotes directly from Coltrane. These quotes, however, have been arranged rather than included in their full context, serving the writer more than the musician.

The reservations that Hentoff notes on Coltrane's behalf were actually misinterpreted, as the artist told Carl-Erik Lindgren in Stockholm on March 22, 1960 during his last tour with Davis. Asked if he was "trying to get a more beautiful sound" in regard to a quote in Hentoff's piece about his "trying more and more to make it sound prettier," Coltrane explained himself in more detail.

Well, I hope to play, not necessarily a more beautiful sound – though I would like, tone-wise, to be able to produce a more beautiful sound – but now I'm primarily interested in trying to work what I have, what I know, *down* into a more lyrical line. That's what I mean by beautiful – more lyrical, so it'll be, you know, easily understood.<sup>203</sup>

It is interesting to see both artist and critic wrestling with language here as they attempt to communicate the non-verbal impressions of Coltrane's music. While this isn't an example of a huge misreading on Hentoff's part, it is also interesting to see how these remarks affected Hentoff's views on Coltrane as he describes his work in a later liner.

*Crescent* is a recording made with Coltrane's own quartet (now with Jimmy Garrison on bass) on April 27, 1964. This album was in the wake of an interview Coltrane

gave in Paris on November 1, 1963 where he explained that he “need[ed] to get away from playing the same tunes over and over.”<sup>204</sup> He returned to New York in late 1963 and recorded the piece “Alabama” for later release on a live album, after which he did the two separate recordings that ended up on *Crescent*. Hentoff introduces the notes to *Crescent* by hypothesizing that it “is a summation of Coltrane’s present style of self-exploration – a gathering together of his current attempts to fulfill his credo.” Coltrane had also recorded the tracks for his best-selling *A Love Supreme* on either side of the *Crescent* sessions, and the album was actually assembled by promoters rather than the musicians, but what follows this in the notes is interesting. Hentoff seems to have read Coltrane’s remarks to Lindgren, since here he makes the sweeping statement, “In everything he does, Coltrane is fundamentally a lyrical musician.” Coltrane himself earlier admitted that much of his work wasn’t understandably lyrical, yet Hentoff praises him for it. Again in these notes Hentoff closes with an assessment that predicts Coltrane’s next moves, ranking him among “the best of the lyrical lineage in jazz.” All of this sounds very supportive, but Hentoff fails to explain how exactly this often quite dissonant album is still “lyrical” or exactly how we are to understand his use of this term as a description of instrumental music.

The specific explanation behind this assertion is quite compelling, and it would have made a more palpable subject for the narrative liner than the claims that Hentoff exaggerates. Coltrane told an interviewer in Paris in 1965 that pieces on *Crescent* – “like ‘Wise One,’ ‘Lonnie’s Lament’ and ‘The Drum Thing’”- are actually based on poems that Coltrane wrote. He explained,

I sometimes proceed in this manner because it’s a good approach to musical composition. I am also interested in languages, in architecture. I would like to arrive at the point where I am able to grasp the essence of a certain place and time, compose the work and play it on the spot naturally.<sup>205</sup>

This is likely the source of the “lyricism” that Hentoff refers to, but his way of communicating Coltrane’s meaning fails to explain this actual connection behind the recording. Porter notes that written music in Coltrane’s hand is scarce after 1961 since he began to use his poems or spoken directions to explain to quartet members what he was looking for in a composition.<sup>206</sup>

After Coltrane began working with his own quartet, supportive commentaries became scarce as critics and audiences chafed at the different musical ideas he presented. Again, Coltrane was open to discussing his music and on several occasions attempted to explain what he was trying to communicate with his horn. When he was asked how he felt

about being booed in concert he responded, “That doesn’t make me happy, of course, but at least it shows that one is being discussed.”<sup>207</sup> In the September, 1961 *Down Beat* review of Coltrane, critic John Tynan wrote scathingly of what he called “a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend” and considered the performance “musical nonsense currently being peddled in the name of jazz.”<sup>208</sup>

Comments such as these were similar to those opposed to Bop, and here again they are examples of the ways that attempts to classify jazz as an authentic cultural form ignored its hybridity. Porter notes that “Coltrane generally responded to criticism with a kind of amiable composure, and he always took the time to explain himself,”<sup>209</sup> but he told writer Franz Kofsky in a 1967 interview,

Oh man, that was terrible. I couldn’t believe it, you know, it just seemed so preposterous. It was so ridiculous, man, that’s what bugs me. It was absolutely ridiculous, because they made it appear that we didn’t even know the first thing about music – the first thing! And there we were really trying to push things off.<sup>210</sup>

It was also popular for critics in the 1960s to interpret Coltrane’s playing as “angry,” something that seemed oddly uncharacteristic of someone with Coltrane’s undisputed gentle demeanor. Following a 1961 performance in London where most of the critics openly voiced their disgust for his music, writer Kitty Grimes felt compelled to question Coltrane because, as she explained, “we’d not heard anything quite like that.” He responded at length about this recurring charge, explaining much about his art as well.

I’ve been told my playing is “angry.” Well, you know musicians have many moods, angry, happy, sad – and since those early days perhaps more sides of my musical nature have been revealed on records. I don’t really know what a listener feels when he hears music. The musician may feel one way and the listener may get something else from the music. Some musicians have to speak their anger in their playing. The beauty of jazz is that you’re free to do just what you feel.<sup>211</sup>

Coltrane was still concerned about communicating with an audience, however, and he elaborated on this in the same interview.

Jazz is a companionable thing, and I like playing in smaller places, so that I can see what people feel. I would like my music to be part of the surroundings, part of the gaiety of a club atmosphere. I realize I’m in the entertainment business, and I’d like to be a sort of guy who can set audiences at ease. If you go about music without a smile, people think you’re not happy. I don’t make a habit of wishing for what I don’t have, but I often wish I had a lighter nature.<sup>212</sup>

Nevertheless, press for Coltrane increased in negativity in the following years. Ira Gitler, an important booster of Coltrane's music in its debut, ripped at him in an April 26, 1962 issue of *Down Beat*. Reviewing the newly released album *Live at the Village Vanguard*, he assaulted Coltrane's developing style, writing "Coltrane may be searching for new avenues of expression, but if it is going to take this form of yawps, squawks, and countless repetitive runs, then it should be confined to the woodshed."<sup>213</sup>

This prompted a change in Coltrane's musical repertoire that is interesting with regard to its connection with his confessed desire to communicate effectively with an audience. Bob Thiele, his long-time producer at Impulse Records, arranged to have the quartet record a series of ballads with other prominent performers. The results were two albums featuring the Coltrane quartet with Duke Ellington on one, and on the other accompanying crooner Johnny Hartman for the quartet's only recording with a vocalist. Thiele's idea was to reportedly to exhibit the quality of the group on slower, more familiar numbers in an effort to make audiences better acquainted with the quartet's sound, and he claimed that this was not a commercial maneuver meant to subvert the negative perceptions of Coltrane by the public. Regardless, the endorsement of these two musicians was, to quote Porter, "worth its weight in gold," since the recordings illustrated the group's mastery over what critics and many audiences were interpreting as "real jazz."<sup>214</sup>

The liner notes for this recording are quick to dispel any controversy around Coltrane, stating outright that "despite the difference of background and experience, there was nevertheless a singular lack of tension on this session." This, author Stanley Dance claims, is because Coltrane, who Dance asserts is "the most *avant* of the *avant-garde*" was working with the "too modern" Ellington whose "grasp of harmony and instrumental voicing is more advanced than anybody else's in the entire range of jazz." "The reason why modern fans are unable to accept him is not that they are too modern for Duke," Dance opines, "but that Duke is too modern for them." This is a curious statement to make about an artist who had been recording prolifically since 1924 and was also one of the most popular throughout that time.<sup>215</sup> I see Dance here to be struggling with a way to defuse the criticism coming against Coltrane by representing Ellington in a similarly controversial light. The association between the two strangers – they had never met before the session – is characterized more as artist and protégé rather than collaboration arranged by the studio.

This leads into the third part of this analysis, which concerns representation of the musical ideas, or the ways liner notes "translate" the instrumental expressions on recordings. Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism* that "we live of course in a world



not only of commodities but also of representation,” and when representation is not seen in its full political context, culture becomes separated from power struggles such as those in the history of imperialism. “Culture becomes exonerated of any entanglements with power,” Said explains, “representations are considered only as apolitical images to be parsed and construed as so many grammars of exchange, and the divorce of the present from the past is assumed to be complete.”<sup>216</sup> This is what happened when critics and scholars in the late 1930s and 40s began to “define” jazz, ignoring the complex relationships that the music had with disparate cultural ideas. In the “Jazz vs. anti-Jazz” debates that still persist today, a similar oversight is often made as critics seek purchase for arguments in a coherent historical narrative in order to “prove” the truth of one side.

Leroi Jones calls the 1940s debates over “anti-Jazz” “a hideous idea,” explaining that “the music was already in danger of being forced into that junk pile of admirable objects and data the West knows as *culture*.” The passage following this is noteworthy for its contemporary relationship with Coltrane’s time, published in *Down Beat* in 1963:

Recently, the same attitudes have become more apparent in the face of a fresh redefinition of the form and content of Negro music. Such phrases as “anti-jazz” have been used to describe musicians who are making the most exciting music produced in this country. But as critic A.B. Spellman asked, “What does anti-jazz mean and who are these ofays who’ve appointed themselves guardians of last year’s blues?” It is that simple, really. What does anti-jazz mean? And who coined the phrase? What is the definition of jazz? And who was authorized to make one?<sup>217</sup>

This debate remained among critics rather than musicians, as was the interest in the origins of jazz something more concerning scholars than those involved directly with the music. This doesn’t mean that all musicians liked what others were doing, though; Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong were both outspoken about their dislike of Bop, but they never openly accused the music of being offensive to tradition. Musicians also had a different relationship with the history of jazz than did the scholars, since in order to become established as a soloist they had to learn the history of the music’s many standard compositions. Some musicians also took an active role in keeping histories; Milt Hinton took photos over several decades, compiling them into books with transcriptions of oral histories. Louis Armstrong co-wrote his autobiography in the late 1920s, as did Glenn Miller a few years later. Dizzy Gillespie did the same in 1979, and he also assisted Leonard Feather in his work, writing in the Foreword to Feather’s *The Book of Jazz*.

It is certainly high time for us to build up our own monument to the jazz culture, in the form of a national jazz collection, maybe as part of the Library of Congress, with all the music as well as the books and magazines

and records under one roof, and tape-recorded interviews with some of the great pioneers while they are still around to tell their stories. For the same reason, I believe this new book by Feather is a step in the right direction.<sup>218</sup>

It is interesting to read the ways in which critics defended the authenticity of jazz in these debates, appealing to historical narratives and sets of “fundamentals” that often proved interesting points, but overall neglected the hybridity in the music. Coltrane’s music excited some of the biggest arguments, and critics who supported him were often accurate in recognizing his adherence to traditional forms like the Blues, but in defending him they ignored several cases where he also evoked ideas borrowed from the cultures that were openly pressured by imperialism. After the controversy that started around Coltrane, it is interesting to examine how these several liners represent the “tradition” in his music.

In the notes to *Crescent*, for example, Hentoff puts himself squarely into the authenticity debate by stating, “It has always been inexplicable to me that any critic could speak of Coltrane as ‘anti-jazz’ when he has so often demonstrated how deeply rooted he is in jazz traditions.” Following this Hentoff adds that he means, “Not only the blues,” but also the “delicacy” and “intimacy” which he finds reflected in Coltrane’s playing of “Wise One.” Certainly there is evidence to substantiate this claim, but Coltrane is also reaching into traditions on this recording that are implicated with the history and traditions of jazz in more complex ways. On this album, Coltrane consciously tried to express his religious beliefs more through music; similar to the way that slaves assembled a religion from the disparate ideas they discovered when forced to the U.S., Coltrane felt himself “leaning more and more toward a kind of universal religion.”<sup>219</sup> He explained this in a 1966 interview with *Newsweek*, as part of a response to his ideas behind songs like “Alabama,” “Song of Praise,” and “Crescent:”

My goal is to live the truly religious life and express it in my music. If you live it, when you play there’s no problem because the music is just a part of the whole thing. To be a musician is really something. It goes very, very deep. My music is the spiritual expression of what I am.<sup>220</sup>

*Africa/Brass*, the first album that Coltrane recorded for Impulse Records, is another example of how the hybridity in his music gets generalized in the liner notes. This instance is similar to the way Said sees the observer positioned in imperialist narratives, “buttressed by a cultural discourse relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, and ontological status.”<sup>221</sup> This results in perspectives on cultural forms that circumscribe them with ideas that are familiar to the dominant culture, but ignore how much of them is actually resistant to that hegemony. *Africa/Brass* is one of the

most diverse of Coltrane's recordings with respect to instrumentation, combining his own quintet with an orchestra (minus strings) to create several quite different songs. The liner notes, however, written by Dom Cerulli, represent these pieces in a way that refers them to mechanical fundamentals, and in doing so he doesn't consider the ways in which these songs evoke the prehistory of jazz.

Cerulli mentions that Coltrane "listened to many African records for rhythmic inspiration" for these compositions, but this is another statement that Coltrane later clarified, this time in an interview with Ralph Gleason. Coltrane explained more simply that he "had an African record at home and they're singing these rhythms, some of their native rhythms, so I took part of it and gave it to the bass."<sup>222</sup> Cerulli's exaggeration is not extensive, but he manages to obscure something very innovative that Coltrane was attempting in these compositions.

Coltrane was using what Cerulli called "a bass line like a chant" as a means to get away from complex chord sequences, the latter being a governing characteristic of his compositions on *Giant Steps* and his earlier work with both Davis and Monk. His reasons for doing so are both personal and professional. Coltrane had long been interested in the music and the religious practices of different cultures, and for a while he experimented with simplified chord patterns such as those he found in his studies of Indian music. Ahmed Abdul-Malik, bassist for Monk's group, was also familiar with the music and culture of India, and Coltrane performed with him again on the Indian tamboura (known for its single chord drone) in 1961.<sup>223</sup> On "Africa," Coltrane experimented with this same effect on the upright bass, trying for the sound of the "water drum" in Indian music as Reggie Workman strums this "percussive" sound.<sup>224</sup> Coltrane specifically took interest in North Indian music, especially the recordings of sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankur, which he mentioned to Postif in an interview that year.

I collect the records he's made, and his music moves me. I'm certain that if I recorded with him I'd increase my possibilities tenfold, because I'm familiar with what he does and I understand and appreciate his work. I also hope to meet him when I return to the United States.<sup>225</sup>

Additionally, Coltrane at the time of *Africa/Brass* had been studying the recordings of African music by Nigerian drummer Michael Babatunde Olatunji, and the two played opposite each other on a bill with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers at New York's Village Gate in 1961. It is possible to hear Olatunji's influence, which itself draws from folkloric African music, in Coltrane's use of ostinatos, where each instrument has its own rhythm

that adds to the whole composition. African drumming groups will also often repeat one section until the leader gives a cue to go on to the next, much as Coltrane has his group do on *My Favorite Things*, at some points on *Africa/Brass* and as he frequently did in performances.<sup>226</sup>

Additionally, “Greensleeves” is an interesting composition that deserves more discussion than the short paragraph on its eccentric 6/8 time signature given by these liner notes. Coltrane assiduously studied music throughout his life, and in 1959, when he was the subject of the “blindfold test” given by *Down Beat*, he was able to identify all the major players and even the composers of the songs played for him.<sup>227</sup> He also became increasingly interested in the “folk” music he found in African-American culture as well as the music in other countries as he studied more. The early results of this are his rendition of “Greensleeves” and “Song of the Underground Railroad,” which was issued a couple of years later on *Africa/Brass*, vol. 2. Coltrane sometimes drew his ideas from a collection of spirituals edited by James Weldon Johnson that he kept in his personal library, and “Railroad” is an adaptation of a traditional African-American song called “The Drinking Gourd.” Coltrane later recorded “Spiritual,” which contains the same key and melody strains of “a rare version” of “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See.”<sup>228</sup> “Greensleeves” is the famous English song and Cerulli quotes Coltrane describing it as “just about as it is written.” What isn’t included, however, is mention of the ostinato forms over an odd rhythmic pattern, which gives a feeling of buoyancy and propulsion for the quintet to vamp over. The overall effect is a hybrid combination of European and African music within one piece.

Coltrane’s 1961 album *Olé* is the strongest example of a recording with liner notes that seem to represent the music, but end up explaining little about its complex connections to different cultural ideas. It had been seven months since *My Favorite Things* was recorded and Porter notes that on this recording it sounds like “everybody is looser now.”<sup>229</sup> Coltrane’s interests had led him to explore Spanish music and, like his composition “India,” “Olé” is based on a genuine folk source, a song known as “Venga Vallejo” or “El Vito.”<sup>230</sup> The liner notes for this recording, however, are oddly ironic given that this album includes a version of what was a popular song. Ralph Gleason (of the aforementioned interview) wrote these notes, but at the end he mentions that these remarks are actually from a conversation that he had with Coltrane “some months” before the album was made. The notes themselves are blocked quotes from Coltrane about playing longer compositions and his thoughts on *My Favorite Things*; no mention of the work on

*Olé* is included. The notes themselves close with some ambiguous remarks about Coltrane's evolution as a musician - similar to Hentoff's predictions - but this follows awkwardly after the indirect reference of the excerpts.

What Gleason doesn't mention is very interesting; along with the folk source of "Olé," Coltrane includes "Dahomey Dance" on this album, a song which was inspired by a recording of two African singers which Coltrane acquired as part of his collection of Folkways records.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, Dahomey has an interesting relationship with the evolution of jazz since at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago a group of performers from Dahomey were the first Africans to come to the U.S. officially as entertainers. This visit was "startling" to many visitors to the Fair that were familiar with the Ragtime being played more widely around Chicago at that time. In 1956, Dr. Marshall Stearns set out to answer one major question in his *Story of Jazz*: "What is the connection between jazz and West African music?" His conclusion offers the example of a tribal ceremony in Dahomey where "at its peak, the sound may seem like a combination of disordered pneumatic drills. The music is polyrhythmic," he adds and explains that it combines various "time signatures" (although this concept doesn't really translate across cultures), concluding that "this engaging rhythm identifies that a lot of jazz for us came from West Africa."<sup>232</sup> One can hear some of this in "Dahomey Dance," and it seems remarkable that an association like this would be overlooked in a narrative that introduces it as part of an album.

There is also much to be said about other aspects of the packaging and promotion of jazz, such as the fact that there are few jazz albums that are solo performances, but when packaged and sold most are given only the name of the headlining musician(s). In Coltrane's works, for example, a number of musicians are at work, but all printed information concerns John Coltrane. While there are certainly legal matters at work here, Coltrane was very responsive to the musicians with whom he worked and disdained the role of controlling the group. On most occasions, he left them to come up with their own accompaniment to the melodies he imagined rather than presenting them with an arrangement. Again, the language that packages the recording is only approximate and fails to represent the complex network of ideas that produced the music.

### *Liner Notes as Accompaniment*

This isn't to imply that liners are incapable of fairly expressing the actuality behind a recording, however, and the liner notes by Leroi Jones for *Live at Birdland*, a 1963 release, are an example of this. Jones calls the reader's attention to the fact that this recording is an "artifact" and, rather than trying to provide an historical narrative to frame Coltrane, he concentrates his analysis on *his* experience with the songs. Jones speaks of the group's accomplishments and notes the internal inconsistencies of the album and its title since three of the songs were "live" in concert at Birdland while the other three are from a "live" studio recording (which is the way Coltrane always worked). Jones doesn't presume to break the music down into its "textbook" structures but freely uses metaphors to color his interpretation of the songs. Overall, the way in which he calls attention to the presence of listening to the music, rather than presenting it as a series of ideas, characterizes the quartet's music as experience, something that Coltrane was also serious about presenting.

Coltrane also had the opportunity to write his own liner notes for his best-selling album *A Love Supreme*. Usually, Coltrane's albums sold around 30,000 copies each, but this release sold half a million copies between its release in 1965 and 1970.<sup>233</sup> Many were drawn to the album for its "spirituality" rather than its music, which was made explicit since Coltrane selected the entire layout of the album, including a poem he had written. In his notes he explains what he hoped to express with this recording, closing with an interesting reference to the production of the album. Here he thanks each of his supporting musicians and also mentions the producer, recording engineer and the rest of the staff affiliated with the album. Notable also is the way in which Coltrane includes his listeners in his words, establishing another relationship with us and the music he has written.

Interesting also is Coltrane's reference to himself and his work in these notes. Many misinterpret his reference to "a spiritual reawakening" in 1957 to be his renunciation of heroin; this occurred in 1955 though, so it is difficult to know exactly what Coltrane means. Additionally, the "period of irresolution" that he mentions in the next paragraph is difficult to simplify. Given the extent to which he was in public view after 1955, it is hard to imagine this "phase contradictory to the pledge" to have been very apparent in his life. What is truly puzzling here is Coltrane's explanation of the four parts contained in this piece. He describes the fourth part, entitled "Psalm," as "a musical narration of the theme

‘A LOVE SUPREME,’ which is written in the context.” What does he mean by this though?

The answer is that the poem included here contains the “lyrics” that he plays on the saxophone; he is “reciting” the poem through his horn as he had done on *Crescent*. One can sense this as a listener by concentrating on the call and response pattern established between the chant and echoing musical voices in the quartet. In an interview a few years before this release, Coltrane had spoken of the possibilities for communication that he heard in music. He explained, “I think music can make the world better and, if I’m qualified, I want to do it. I’d like to point out to people the divine in musical language that transcends words. I want to speak to their souls.”<sup>234</sup> Perhaps for this reason, Coltrane didn’t widely publicize his “reading” of the poem, mentioning it only in one interview in 1965 and reciting it verbally in one concert at St. Gregory’s Church in Brooklyn in 1966. Aside from the album, only one other performance of *A Love Supreme* is known to have been done, and a recording of it from a festival in France in July, 1965, is the only evidence.<sup>235</sup> It is nonetheless remarkable to learn that an artist with such diversity of style also blended instrumental music and words, making audiences even more aware of the complexity with which we communicate across time and space.

Of course, I am also somewhat involved in the machinations of imperial enterprise as a scholar and critic that, like the liner notes authors, comments on the history and culture of jazz without having a tangible association with it. Like the scholars and critics of jazz discussed earlier, I am also using the power of narrative to encourage acceptance and legitimacy, perhaps even “hegemony,” for my views. And, there is of course probably much I have ignored in making this compromise.

Rather than implying that the only position of virtue in this struggle is to be its victim, it is my hope that this analysis be seen as another voice in the accompaniment of the counterpoint that makes up part of the theme of jazz history in the U.S. It is for this reason that I find Said’s theory of hybridity and the “contrapuntal” approach to cultural analysis so useful for an exploration of material culture. Liner notes and the authority of their authors, while comparatively insignificant features among the grand narratives and historical discussions of the evolution of jazz, are nonetheless often the only written narratives that listeners today will consider as a context for the music they purchase and enjoy. Perhaps even more remarkable is our position within empire due to our reliance on the convenience of capitalism to explore these issues; without the industry’s high profit margin from low royalties and high consumer demand for jazz re-issues on CD, my

analysis would have been practically impossible. Our ability to fairly interpret the history that determines the culture in which we live must therefore be contingent with our ability to comprehend the “discrepant experiences” from which it emerged. It is my conclusion that Said’s theory of hybridity is an especially useful tool to use in considering the commentaries that circumscribe the production and representation of cultural forms.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Random House, New York, 1993, p. 14
- <sup>2</sup> Said, p. 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Jones, Leroi. *Black Music*. William and Morrow, New York, 1967, p. 58-59.
- <sup>4</sup> Litweiler, John. *The Freedom Principle*. William and Morrow, New York, 1984, p. 81.
- <sup>5</sup> Litweiler, p. 80.
- <sup>6</sup> Porter, Lewis. *John Coltrane*. Univ. of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1998, p. 258.
- <sup>7</sup> Feather, Leonard. *The Book of Jazz*. Horizon Press, New York, 1957, p. 8.
- <sup>8</sup> Litweiler, p. 81.
- <sup>9</sup> Litweiler, p. 81.
- <sup>10</sup> Porter, p. 261.
- <sup>11</sup> Locke, Alain. *The Negro and His Music*. Arno Press, New York, 1969.
- <sup>12</sup> Said, p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Jones, p. 19.
- <sup>14</sup> Said, p. 19.
- <sup>15</sup> Peretti, Burton. *The Creation of Jazz*. Univ. of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Peretti, p. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> Said, part IV, Chapter 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Said, p. 31.
- <sup>19</sup> In contrast to its opposite "classical." This distinction was made by music promoters seeking to diversify their markets by adding new genres to their commercial repertoire.
- <sup>20</sup> John Salmon, jazz pianist and music professor at UNCG, in conversation.
- <sup>21</sup> Peretti, p. 66.
- <sup>22</sup> Collier, James Lincoln. *Jazz., The American Theme Song*. Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1993, p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Collier, p. 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Peretti, p. 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Locke, p. 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Locke, p. 2.
- <sup>27</sup> Peretti, p. 12.
- <sup>28</sup> Peretti, p. 13.
- <sup>29</sup> Peretti, p. 12.
- <sup>30</sup> Peretti, p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup> Locke, p. 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Collier, p. 6.
- <sup>33</sup> Collier, p. 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Sargeant, Winthrop. *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*. E.P. Dutton, New York, 1946.
- <sup>35</sup> Locke, p. 43.
- <sup>36</sup> Locke, p. 44. He adds that this is assertion is made "correctly."
- <sup>37</sup> Locke, p. 44.
- <sup>38</sup> Johnson is quoted by Locke throughout Chapters 6 and 7 on the history of early jazz.
- <sup>39</sup> Locke, p.2, p.46.
- <sup>40</sup> Locke, p. 3.
- <sup>41</sup> Locke, p. 52.
- <sup>42</sup> Leonard, Neil. *Jazz and the White Americans*. Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962, p.7.
- <sup>43</sup> Peretti, p. 13.
- <sup>44</sup> Dubois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903; rpt. in Dubois, *Selected Writings*. New York, Library of America, 1986, p. 365.
- <sup>45</sup> Lomax, Alan. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Delta, New York, 1993, p. 72.
- <sup>46</sup> Locke, p. 19.
- <sup>47</sup> Peretti, p. 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Peretti, p. 14.
- <sup>49</sup> Peretti, p. 15.
- <sup>50</sup> Peretti, p. 16.

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- <sup>51</sup> Locke, p. 29.  
<sup>52</sup> Said, p. 33.  
<sup>53</sup> Lomax, p. 356.  
<sup>54</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>55</sup> Lomax, p. 357.  
<sup>56</sup> These are precursors to the modern guitars and pianos with which we are familiar.  
<sup>57</sup> Lomax, p. 357; these are primarily around Senegal and often will include other musicians for "back-up rhythm."  
<sup>58</sup> Peretti, p. 16.  
<sup>59</sup> Lomax, p. 357.  
<sup>60</sup> Locke, p. 33.  
<sup>61</sup> Feather, p. 17.  
<sup>62</sup> Feather, p. 18.  
<sup>63</sup> Feather, p. 21.  
<sup>64</sup> Said, p. 35.  
<sup>65</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>66</sup> Said, p. 51.  
<sup>67</sup> Feather, p. 20.  
<sup>68</sup> Feather, p. 22.  
<sup>69</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>70</sup> Lomax, p. 357.  
<sup>71</sup> Peretti, p. 152.  
<sup>72</sup> Feather, p. 17.  
<sup>73</sup> Peretti, p. 161.  
<sup>73</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>74</sup> Peretti, p. 152.  
<sup>75</sup> Sargeant, Winthrop. *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*. E.P. Dutton, New York, 1946, p. 20.  
<sup>76</sup> Feather, p. 76.  
<sup>77</sup> Collier, p. 21.  
<sup>78</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>79</sup> Feather, p. 42.  
<sup>80</sup> Collier, p. 22.  
<sup>81</sup> Collier, p. 23.  
<sup>82</sup> Leonard, p. 29.  
<sup>83</sup> Leonard, p. 30.  
<sup>84</sup> Leonard, p. 32.  
<sup>85</sup> Leonard, p. 33; all punctuation is from original source.  
<sup>86</sup> Leonard, p. 36.  
<sup>87</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>88</sup> Collier, p. 21.  
<sup>89</sup> Leonard, p. 36.  
<sup>90</sup> Leonard, p. 39.  
<sup>91</sup> Said, p. 44.  
<sup>92</sup> Leonard, chapter two.  
<sup>93</sup> Peretti, p. 153; women were often not paid at all for recording until later in the 1920s.  
<sup>94</sup> Peretti, p. 146.  
<sup>95</sup> Peretti, p. 147.  
<sup>96</sup> Peretti, p. 149.  
<sup>97</sup> Peretti, p. 150.  
<sup>98</sup> Collier, p. 115.  
<sup>99</sup> Peretti, p. 153.  
<sup>100</sup> Peretti, p. 154.  
<sup>101</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>102</sup> Peretti, p. 155, original punctuation in source.  
<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>104</sup> Feather, p. 176
- <sup>105</sup> Collier, p. 22.
- <sup>106</sup> Collier, p. 33, "playing down" is when an instrumentalist beckons someone to cover while he rests.
- <sup>107</sup> Collier, p. 38.
- <sup>108</sup> Said, p. 50.
- <sup>109</sup> Peretti, p. 155.
- <sup>110</sup> Peretti, p. 162.
- <sup>111</sup> Kelly, Robin. *Race Rebels*. The Free Press, New York, 1994, p. 164.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>113</sup> Kelly, p. 165.
- <sup>114</sup> Peretti, p. 157.
- <sup>115</sup> Peretti, p. 158; they also struck against theater owners and the film industry.
- <sup>116</sup> Collier, p. 226.
- <sup>117</sup> Leonard, p. 136.
- <sup>118</sup> Jones, p. 12.
- <sup>119</sup> Jones, p. 14.
- <sup>120</sup> Leonard, p. 137.
- <sup>121</sup> Sargeant, p. 259.
- <sup>122</sup> Stokes, W. Royal. *The Jazz Scene*. Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1991, p. 3.
- <sup>123</sup> Lomax, p. 265; *Rosie* was a song popular among convicts in the South, "I seen little Rosie in my midnight dreams. Midnight dreams, Lord, my midnight dreams."
- <sup>124</sup> Lomax, p. 13.
- <sup>125</sup> Lomax, p. 406.
- <sup>126</sup> Hodeir, Andre. *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*. New York, The Grove Press, 1956, pp. 47,48.
- <sup>127</sup> Feather, p. 31.
- <sup>128</sup> Feather, p. 32.
- <sup>129</sup> Feather, p. 27.
- <sup>130</sup> Jones, p. 13.
- <sup>131</sup> Feather, p. 40.
- <sup>132</sup> Sargeant, p. 214.
- <sup>133</sup> Said, p. 56.
- <sup>134</sup> Said, p. 57.
- <sup>135</sup> Leonard, p. 141.
- <sup>136</sup> Williams, Martin. "Bebop and After: A Report," in Hentoff, Nat. *Jazz*. Rinehart and Company, New York, 1959, p. 289.
- <sup>137</sup> Williams, p. 290.
- <sup>138</sup> Williams, p. 289.
- <sup>139</sup> Williams, p. 291.
- <sup>140</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>141</sup> Williams, p. 291.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>143</sup> Jones, p. 19.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>145</sup> Thomas, J.C. *Chasin' the Trane*. Doubleday, New York, 1975, p. 4.
- <sup>146</sup> Thomas, p. 3.
- <sup>147</sup> Porter, p. 12-13.
- <sup>148</sup> Thomas, p. 7.
- <sup>149</sup> Porter, p. 17.
- <sup>150</sup> Porter, p. 17; this was due largely to a poor diet – high salt, low fiber, low protein and food that is not fresh are the major causes. Refrigeration has had much to do with its decline in U.S. populations, though it thrives in countries that are less technologically advanced.
- <sup>151</sup> Thomas, p. 8.
- <sup>152</sup> Porter, p. 17.
- <sup>153</sup> Porter, p. 18.

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- <sup>154</sup> Porter, p. 20.
- <sup>155</sup> Porter, p. 28.
- <sup>156</sup> Porter, p. 29.
- <sup>157</sup> Porter, p. 33.
- <sup>158</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>159</sup> Porter, p. 34.
- <sup>160</sup> Ibid; Coltrane also met other Jazz musicians here, and saxophonist Bill Barron also remembers Coltrane showing an interest in his tenor saxophone during their studies.
- <sup>161</sup> Thomas, p. 34.
- <sup>162</sup> Porter, p. 39.
- <sup>163</sup> Porter, p. 50.
- <sup>164</sup> Porter, p. 51.
- <sup>165</sup> Porter, p. 52.
- <sup>166</sup> Porter, p. 37.
- <sup>167</sup> Porter, p. 44.
- <sup>168</sup> Porter, p. 54.
- <sup>169</sup> Porter, p. 57.
- <sup>170</sup> Porter, p. 62.
- <sup>171</sup> Porter, p. 64.
- <sup>172</sup> Porter, p. 77.
- <sup>173</sup> Postif, Francois. "Coltrane en Tete du Peloton des Tenors," *Jazz Magazine* 40, p. 30.
- <sup>174</sup> Gillespie, Dizzy. *To Be or Not...to Bop: Memoirs*. Doubleday, New York, 1979, p. 356.
- <sup>175</sup> Porter, p. 78.
- <sup>176</sup> Porter, p. 79.
- <sup>177</sup> Thomas, p. 50.
- <sup>178</sup> Porter, p. 90.
- <sup>179</sup> Porter, p. 92; this was the second time Gillespie had fired Coltrane, but on the first occasion Coltrane had talked him into giving him another chance.
- <sup>180</sup> Porter, p. 93.
- <sup>181</sup> Porter, p. 97.
- <sup>182</sup> Litweiler, John. *The Freedom Principle*. William and Morrow, New York, 1984, p. 14-15.
- <sup>183</sup> Porter, p. 113.
- <sup>184</sup> Porter, p. 114.
- <sup>185</sup> This was due primarily to Davis' reticence about being a "leader." He preferred to let Coltrane come up with his own approaches, but Coltrane had trouble adjusting to this open environment since he wanted to get it right.
- <sup>186</sup> Porter, p. 132.
- <sup>187</sup> Porter, p. 140; sweet potato pie was his favorite. He actually had his entire upper bridge replaced, forcing him to rework his embouchure in order to continue performing.
- <sup>188</sup> Porter, p. 145.
- <sup>189</sup> Feather, p. 30.
- <sup>190</sup> Clar, Mimi. *Jazz Review*. April, 1959, p. 24.
- <sup>191</sup> *Down Beat*. August 7, 1958, p. 16.
- <sup>192</sup> *Down Beat*. August 6, 1959, p. 32.
- <sup>193</sup> *Down Beat*. April 14, 1960, p. 42.
- <sup>194</sup> Said, p. 50.
- <sup>195</sup> Said, p. 51.
- <sup>196</sup> Liner notes by Bill Coss; recording by Atlantic Records, October 21-26, 1960.
- <sup>197</sup> For example, they list Coltrane as born in Hamlet, New York and only quote him parenthetically.
- <sup>198</sup> Porter, p. 71.
- <sup>199</sup> Said, p. 50.
- <sup>200</sup> *Jazz Hot*, Issue 154, p. 28-29; the actual title of the article is "Controversy around Coltrane."
- <sup>201</sup> Porter, p. 143.
- <sup>202</sup> Porter, p. 157.
- <sup>203</sup> March 22, 1960, between shows, taped and later issued on an LP.

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- <sup>204</sup> Porter, p. 231.  
<sup>205</sup> Delorme, Michael, "Coltrane, Vendette D'Antibes," *Jazz Hot*, Issue 265.  
<sup>206</sup> Porter, p. 214.  
<sup>207</sup> Postif, Francois, interview between shows, November 18, 1961.  
<sup>208</sup> John Tynan, "Take 5" column, *Down Beat*, November 23, 1961, p. 40.  
<sup>209</sup> Porter, p. 193.  
<sup>210</sup> Kofsky, Franz, "John Coltrane: An Interview," *Jazz and Pop*, September 1967, p. 23.  
<sup>211</sup> Grime, Kitty, interview in *Jazz News*, 1961.  
<sup>212</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>213</sup> *Down Beat*, April 26, 1962, p. 20.  
<sup>214</sup> Porter, p. 196.  
<sup>215</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>216</sup> Said, p. 57.  
<sup>217</sup> Jones, p. 15, 18.  
<sup>218</sup> Gillespie in foreword to Feather, p. vi.  
<sup>219</sup> Porter, p. 232.  
<sup>220</sup> Zimmerman, Paul D. "The New Jazz," *Newsweek*, December 12, 1966, p. 108.  
<sup>221</sup> Said, p. 59.  
<sup>222</sup> Gleason, Ralph, taped interview, May 2, 1961.  
<sup>223</sup> Porter, p. 202.  
<sup>224</sup> Porter, p. 199.  
<sup>225</sup> Postif interview, 1961.  
<sup>226</sup> Porter, p. 208.  
<sup>227</sup> Porter, p. 205.  
<sup>228</sup> Porter, p. 206.  
<sup>229</sup> Porter, p. 212.  
<sup>230</sup> Porter, p. 212; this song is on The Weavers' Carnegie Hall album from 1955, among other groups.  
<sup>231</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>232</sup> Feather, p. 10.  
<sup>233</sup> Porter, p. 232.  
<sup>234</sup> Zimmerman interview, 1966.  
<sup>235</sup> Porter, p. 233.

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