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THE ELLISON\BARAKA DEBATE:
The Conflict in (African) American Music

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The Ellison/Baraka Debate: The Conflict in (African) American

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event… is celebrated in public dances which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion.[1]

The Ellison/Baraka Debate: The Conflict in (African) American Music

I. Introduction: Critical Representations of African American Music

In Ted Gioia's book, *The History of Jazz* (1997), the first chapter has the following subtitle: "the Africanization of American Music."[2] Even though this title appears to be unproblematic, it reflects a larger debate among the critics of African American music. I shall build the theoretical framework of my argument in this chapter by taking this long debated issue of African influences as a starting point and questioning the implications of the term "Africanization." This title connotes that what initially was pure American music gradually became influenced by African culture, and, thus, Africanized. However, as I shall argue, there was never what we can call a purely American music, but only a combination, a mixture of African and European musical traditions. Barry Ulanov, in his version of American jazz history, makes the following statement: "On the surface there is disorder and conflict in jazz.... [n]o common definition of this music has been reached."[3] As well as its actual ingredients, the representation of jazz plays an important role in our understanding of it. As Peter Townsend writes in his book *Jazz in American Culture* (2000): "representations of jazz are more indications of the ideologies implicit

[1] Olaudah Equiano., (1789). *The Interesting Narrative and other Writings*, London & New York: Penguin, 1998. p.34
[2] Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. p.3
[3] Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1958. p.3

in the medium, whether in film or written literature, than of jazz itself."[4] Moreover, along with the media representations of jazz, the interpretations of jazz scholars and critics and their ideologies are also particularly important. American and European scholars have discussed the question of whether jazz reflects an African American inheritance or a new creation. Could jazz be used to highlight the black contribution to American society as a whole or is it merely a decorative creation of black life? More specifically: What is the racial/cultural character of jazz? How do we represent it? Do we consider it as black, white or both? Is jazz American per se, or should it be considered as African American expression? All those questions are highly problematic because they raise questions not only about what is really meant by the term "African American music," but about American music and thus American culture itself. Is it an amalgamation of black and white cultures? And where do other African American musical expressions – excluding jazz and the blues – relate to the questions posed above?

I find it useful to start my argument with the study of two crucial African American writers, Amiri Baraka (the former LeRoi Jones) and Ralph Ellison, and their contradictory opinions on the subject. I want to look at their critical texts, which discuss and reflect upon Black music as a cultural resource and touchstone. One of them is Baraka's *Blues People* (1963), one of the first books written by an African American writer about Black music and its historical and cultural importance for American society. The second is Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act* (1964), a collection of Ellison's interviews and essays including "Blues People", in which he responds to Baraka and criticises his approach toward African American music. Since Ralph Ellison's and Amiri

[4] Pete Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. p.93

Baraka's approaches are significantly different, it is crucial to draw attention to their understanding of African American music and its representations. Amiri Baraka is a writer of poetry, drama, essays, and music criticism. In *Blues People*, Baraka identifies African American music – the spirituals, the blues and jazz – as the keystone of an African American national identity. After its publication, it provided insights for further researches on black music.[5] He links music with African American national identity, and presents the Negro working class, the most oppressed group of American society, as quintessentially the "blues people". What he does is to use black music as a sociological instrument to analyse the role and the function of African American people in the white American society. In line with this intention, he employs the subtitle *Negro Music in White America*. In his introduction to *Blues People*, he mentions that the main concern of the book is to indicate the strong relationship between African American music and its history: "Music is the history. The history of the Negro people… I began to get into the history of the music; I found that this was impossible without, at the same time, getting deeper into the history of the [Negro] people."[6] For Baraka, it is very difficult to avoid discussing the social and the political implications of the African American music. Therefore, in *Blues People*, Baraka draws attention to the essential relationship between the development of African American music and the historical route of American blacks' social and political progress. For Baraka, African American music signifies the very essence of African based culture and it accordingly became a crucial element in definitions of black identity.

However, Ralph Ellison locates a major problem in the account of Baraka who avoids speaking of the historical influence of the African American music on mainstream

[5] See Frank Kofsky. *Black Nationalism & the Revolution in Music*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970 and Ben Sidran. *Black Talk*. New York: A Da Capo, 1971

[6] Amiri Baraka, (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, New York: Perennial, 2002, p.ix

American music. Ellison states that Negroes established a unique culture of their own, which was already hybrid long before the mainstream of American culture was instituted. Ellison does not agree with the idea that American mainstream music exists apart from the music of African Americans. Therefore, even though Ellison may accept the idea of considering black music as an authentic African American art form, he criticises Baraka for failing to acknowledge that America is culturally changed by the music of African Americans. Ellison argues that, while there are actual changes in black music, one should consider African Americans' strong influence on the mainstream American musical culture. Consequently, he refuses the idea that black culture shifts and is influenced by white America while white culture remains static or vice versa. Instead, he argues that both cultures are continually changing and being changed by each other.

Moreover, according to Ellison, we should consider the Negro music not as a direct influence of the American music but as a main source of it. As he states in his essay "Blues People": "whatever the degree of injustice and inequality sustained by the slaves, American culture was, even before the official founding of the nation, pluralistic; and it was the African's origin in cultures in which art was highly functional which gave him an edge in shaping the music and dance of this nation."[7] Ellison proposes that African American experience is one that American society as a whole should recognise "as an important segment of the larger American experience – not lying at the bottom of it, but intertwined, diffused in its very texture."[8] Thus, what Ellison asserts is that one should refuse the idea that African American culture may be seen as exotic; separate from the whole American culture. He emphasises the hybrid nature of African American and

[7] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People". *Shadow and Act* (1964). New York:: Vintage, 1972. Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.255

[8] Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview". *Shadow and Act* (1964). New York: Vintage, 1972. Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.172

American art, culture, and intellectual life.

Therefore, according to Henry Louis Gates, Ellison rejects a stance that "regarded authentic black culture as separate from the rest of American culture – something was created, and could be appreciated, in splendid isolation"[9] from American culture as a whole. Gates points out, in his article "King of Cats" (1996), that "the word 'American' had tacitly connoted 'white'."[10] He calls Ellison's theory "the most breathtaking act of cultural chutzpah this land had witnessed."[11] Ellison places black culture at the centre of American morality and history rather than understanding it as separate authentic culture in American society, as Baraka did in *Blues People*. The arguments of these two writers on African American music and what it represents will function as a departure point for my further discussion of this topic in the following chapters, where I will go back to survey earlier representations before returning to Ellison and Baraka and their analysis of African American music as a cultural touchstone, for traditional and modern forms of Black expression.

II. The Songs of Sorrow: The Spirituals in the Process of Americanization

[9] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "King of Cats", *The New Yorker* 08.April.1996, p.70
[10] ibid p.76
[11] ibid p.76

In *Blues People*, Baraka affirms that "[a] slave can not be a man."[12] With this statement, Baraka points to the fact that there was no cultural and social comparability between blacks and whites. He presents 'slave culture' and 'free culture' as polar opposites. "There was no communication between master and slave on any strictly human level, but only the relation one might have to a piece of property…"[13] Moreover, he writes that there was no future for the slave who is going to remain a slave for all his life. If one asked a slave what he wanted to be when he grew up, as Baraka writes, the male slave would have replied, "a slave."[14] In a similar way, Frederick Douglas introduces one of the most famous scenes, his brutal fight with the "nigger-breaker" Edward Covey, in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), in a single sentence: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man."[15] Here too, as in Baraka more than a century later, the aim of the passage is to draw attention to the idea that slave and man are two contradictory terms. But this opposition is, of course, very problematic if it implies that slaves are incapable of the feelings and capacities of a 'man'. (This is why now some historians prefer to talk about 'enslaved Africans' rather than slaves to suggest this is not a permanent condition) This is where music is relevant because from early on it was recognised as an area where they expressed something which did show that they were 'men' and not animals.

Frederick Douglass is one of the first African American writers who mentions slave songs in his writings. In his first autobiography, writing is used as a mark of civilization and a symbol, which makes available to him a "pathway from slavery to freedom."[16]

[12] Amiri Baraka, (1963) *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.60
[13] Amiri Baraka, (1963) *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.3
[14] ibid p.60
[15] Frederick Douglass, (1845). *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. p.63
[16] ibid p.39

Douglass foregrounds the power of writing in his autobiography. However, he also states that slave songs are deeply sorrowful and much more expressive of the realities of slavery than writing could be: "I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do."[17] Douglass himself was a fugitive slave. He gains his freedom by running away from the plantation area, and also through his mastery of his master's language. It is significant that here he talks about the slave songs and studies their powerful influence on white people, but not as a cultural resource or a mode of sustaining the slaves themselves. Thus, even though the slave songs obviously help Douglass to give a sense of self-consciousness, he does not know how to reconcile his previous identity with becoming an American intellectual or even an African American intellectual, i.e. American Negro, because of the need to justify the slave songs' worth by being like whites.

When he became his "*own master*" he merely made a link between those songs and his earlier identity. "I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs."[18] He points out the significance of the songs of the slaves and he employs them to convey the past experiences of the slaves and the blacks in the South: "To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery… the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart"[19] Furthermore, these songs represent to Douglass a tool of psychological freedom for the slaves as he states: "every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains."[20] Paul Gilroy also makes the similar assertion that African

[17] ibid p.24
[18] Frederick Douglass, (1845). *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p.24
[19] ibid p.24
[20] ibid p.24

American music owes a great deal to the early black experience in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993):

> Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words – spoken or written.[21]

When Douglass wrote about the songs of the slaves he was trying to explain an emergent compassion toward slaves. Furthermore, he helped fashion the emerging model for recognizing what kind of songs slaves sang, why they sang them, and most significantly how listeners were truly to hear them. Although, it is not clear what the music Douglass heard, he played an important role in recognising and examining the songs of the slave, what came to be called the spirituals, by white commentators. African Americans built a new structure for existence in the alien land where their cultural and historical continuation depended upon music. By singing themes of Christianity, slaves mentally escaped from being in captivity and achieved freedom in the Promised Land. These spirituals reflect African American culture in relation to Christianity, and tend to focus on religion offering slaves an area of refuge from the cruelty they had experienced. Thus, we can conclude that the spirituals have a long history, which informs us about the brutal experiences of black life. They tell us about solidarity and resistance.

Ellison too pays close attention to the monumental (memorial) aspect of the spirituals, which, for many African Americans, function as a means to revive memories of years of slavery. For Ellison, during the early days of slavery, even the most alienated slaves

[21] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London & New York: Verso, 1993: p.76

were always attached and connected with the dominant American culture. He writes that the "enslaved really thought of themselves as *men* who had been unjustly enslaved."[22] According to Ellison, the obvious response to the question of "what are you going to be when you grow up?" would most probably have been "a coachman, a teamster, a cook, the best damned steward on the Mississippi, the best jockey in Kentucky, a butler, a farmer, a stud, or, hopefully, a free man!" as there was always social mobility in the slave community, even though it was dependent on the dominant white institutional and sociological terms of power.[23] A slave was allowed to establish some degree of power within the limitations imposed upon him. Thus, for Ellison, "[a] slave was, to the extent that he was a *musician*, one who expressed himself in music, a man who realized himself in the world of sound."[24] Thus, in the art form, the slave songs and spirituals should be stamped with African influences on American culture as a whole, which indicates that there was a mutually influential relationship, an exchange of cultures between blacks and whites. This Baraka and Ellison's views of these early descriptions of African American music reflects a continuing debate over how it is to be interpreted.

I will now turn to W.E.B. Du Bois and his representation of what he called sorrow songs, or spirituals to further expand my discussion of the process of the Americanization. W.E.B. Du Bois was the first black intellectual to locate African American music as an essential theme of black cultural importance and integrity. In his book, *The Souls of the Black Folk* (1903), he introduces each chapter with a portion of a slave song. He directly addresses the structure of the American society and its dilemma: "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."[25] He coins the

[22] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People". *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.250
[23] ibid p.254
[24] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People". *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.254
[25] W.E.B. Du Bois, (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Dover Publications, 1994. p.v

concept "double consciousness" which means particular complications occurring from African Americans' adaptation to the American identity: "One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warning ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[26]

What is significant about the Du Bois text is its distinctive approach to black music – spirituals as the driving force or inspiration behind African American Culture. For Du Bois the meaning of these songs is apparent: "sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins."[27] Du Bois locates black spirituals not only as a crucial element for the definition of an African American aesthetic but also as a central dimension of American culture as a whole. It was these spirituals or "sorrow songs," as he referred to them, which Du Bois presented as the transcendent representation of African American self-consciousness within the context of American history. Moreover, Du Bois believes that these songs, which resonated with the contradictory impulses of hope and sorrow, embodied both the historical consciousness and the experience of African Americans within the New World. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness also referred to the dual state of African American consciousness, which he believed was simultaneously a part of American consciousness and history and yet not entirely American. It was the combination of being both an American and a Negro and therefore remained a consciousness split in two.

It is important that Du Bois intentionally constructs and places black culture at the centre of the American culture in his text. The political striving he talks about is the

[26] ibid p.2
[27] ibid p.162

struggle for citizenship and national belonging. This use of the spirituals in his book should be related to the tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This group, nine singers and a pianist, all former slaves, who were elegant in dress and manner, and performed their slave songs and spirituals in churches and on concert halls, inspired Du Bois, as he recounts in his book, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (1924): "[s]till the world listened only half credulously until the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang the slave songs 'so deeply into the world's heart that it can never wholly forget them'."[28] However, it is important to point out that Du Bois picked the arranged version of these songs as they are orchestrated by the treasurer of Fisk University, George L. White, to put them into the heart of American culture. Du Bois describes the process of the arrangement of the slave songs by honouring White whose "life-work was to let those Negroes sing to the world as they had sung to them."[29] Moreover, this process is a cross-cultural interaction because, while White "taught [his students] to sing", in the mean time, they "taught him to sing, and… the glory of the Jubilee songs passed into [White's] soul."[30] Therefore, Du Bois celebrates the hybridity of African American songs with European American methods, which he calls a word of warning to be given "to this Nation in blood-brotherhood."[31] He employs slave songs as a sign of development, which can be seen in different historical periods: "The songs are indeed the shifting of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development… [t]he first is African music, the second Afro-American, while the third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land."[32]

[28] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*, Boston: the Stratford Co., 1924. p.276
[29] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), p.156
[30] ibid p.156
[31] ibid p.163
[32] ibid p.159

He also maintains:

> And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song – the rhythmic cry of the slave – stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but not-withstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.[33]

According to Du Bois, spirituals provide recognition to the African American populace as they are considered as a "wonderful gift of the black man to America."[34] The fact that Du Bois wanted the sorrow songs and the slave songs to be recognized as authentic sources for the national music of America owes to his celebration of "the destabilization of racial categories of black and white."[35] Moreover, although, Du Bois celebrates the impact of the slave songs on American music, he distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic in African American musical culture. For him, the difference is based, in Eric Porter's terms, "less on African American uses of European forms than on white appropriation and marketing of black forms."[36] As Du Bois states in the final chapter of *The Soul of Black Folk*:

> [T]he songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe." Side by side, too, with the growth has gone the debasements and imitations – the Negro "minstrel" songs, many of the "gospel" hymns, and some of the contemporary "coon" songs, – a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies.[37]

Therefore, Du Bois is very careful to categorize "sorrow songs" as those that maintain the purity of the slave experience. As Radano affirms "For Du Bois, the Fisk song-texts were both a marker of a profound moment of change and a harbinger of the new black

[33] ibid p.156
[34] ibid p.280
[35] Roland Radano, "Soul Texts & the Blackness of Folk", *Modernism/Modernity* 2.1 (1995), p.86-89
[36] Eric Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (2002), Berkley: University of California Press, 2002. p.4
[37] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), p.159

civilization, of a fully realized consciousness of vast critical potential, clearly distinguished from, and more powerful than, the separate and pure semi-consciousness of an uncompleted black folk."[38] In other words, it is not that the Fisk versions are watered down and less authentic, but that they represent the authentic spirit as it develops. Radano also writes that spirituals are very important to white Americans because they comprise "the alter ego of the white self, representing the supplement or the missing link of American national identity."[39]

Thus, for Du Bois, it is essential that the cross-cultural give and take between black and white Americans constructs the American national songs and culture rather than reproduce the mimicry of the black melodies. Like the success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Antonin Dvorak's symphony *From the New World* of 1893 can also be applied as recognition of the spirituals by the whole American Nation. Antonin Dvorak, the Czech composer who came to live and work in United States to establish American classical music, thrust Negro music into the centre of what was the serious music establishment in United States. He made a determined statement in an interview for *New York Herald* (1893): "I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States."[40] Du Bois certainly recognises the political importance of folk culture as an increasing sphere of influence on high culture. Thus, his representation of African American music is a symbol of continual development of blacks in the United States. By employing "sorrow songs" as the true folk songs of America, he attempts to bridge

[38] Roland Radano, "Soul Texts & the Blackness of Folk", *Modernism/Modernity* 2.1 (1995), p.74
[39] Roland Radano, "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Songs". *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996), p.522
[40] Antonin Dvorak, "Real Value of Negro Melodies", *New York Herald* (1893).

the gap between African and European Americans as this can only be realised, according to Du Bois, through the acknowledgement of the black culture by European Americans.

The term "double-consciousness" which Du Bois argues in *The Souls of the Black Folk* is also "the founding experience of blacks in the West is itself expressed in the double value of these songs which are always both American and black."[41] Therefore the questions of whether those spirituals are used as a mark of African American or American cultural identity finds an answer: those spirituals have double values, as they are representative for both Negro and American culture and identity as a whole. They are distinguished as a source of the African American consciousness and, at the same time, they are the main vernacular culture for the whole American nation. They are employed simultaneously as a vernacular and modern cultural expression for black and white Americans. Du Bois asks in *The Souls of Black Folk*: "Are not these gifts worth the giving? …"Would America have been America without her Negro people?"[42] For the response, he says: the 'gift' given to America from African Americans should be accepted in order to integrate the black culture with white culture and society.

[41] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (1995), p.91
[42] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), p.163

But if you was to ask me
How de blues they come to be,
Says if you was to ask me
How de blues they come to be –
You wouldn't need to ask me:
Just look at me and see![43]

III. The People of the Blues: The Snowball Effect of the Blues Aesthetic

When W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, he discussed the spirituals as the main and vernacular source of American music, yet, he did not mention the blues in this work, or in fact in any of his later writings. In this part of my paper, I will try to shed light on the significance of Du Bois' choice in dismissing the implications of the blues for the socio-cultural conditions of African Americans. While we may take into account a most unlikely explanation, such as that Du Bois was not aware of the blues, I think that Du Bois had primarily failed to acknowledge the potential of the blues. In other words, while he realized the political importance of African American vernacular culture as an increasing sphere of influence on high culture, he could not foresee the

[43] Langston Hughes, quoted in Kevin Young. Ed. *Blues Poems*. New York & Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, p.17

possible cultural and political implications that the blues, an American vernacular culture, would have on high culture.

Du Bois associated the spirituals with the establishment and development of American music, African American melodies, rhythms and musical structure were supposed to be combined with Western musical elements and embody the two-ness of the Negroes in that they were simultaneously African American and American. However, there was no indication (other than Harlem Renaissance writers during 1920s, which I will be dealing in a minute), like the Fisk Jubilee Singers and Antonin Dvorak, which triggered Du Bois to observe that the blues, with its musical structure and melodies, would supply the potential vernacular source and origin for American music.

Another explanation as has always been recognised by the critics is that Du Bois' adopted the black middle class's and black elite's negative response to the blues. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. writes in his important book *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995) about the black communities between 1890 and 1915: "the black population was still largely made up of the unskilled working class, whose social values and behaviours embarrassed many among the black elite and the emerging middle class."[44]

Thus, Du Bois and the black middle class refused the blues because of its socio-cultural status. What Du Bois and other upper-class African Americans wanted was an appreciation from white America of the significance of the sorrow songs as a vernacular source for the American music, but the blues with its European musical elements did

[44] Samuel Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 89

gain great recognition from the wider American public. Du Bois employs the sorrow songs not only as evidence of the humanity of the slaves, but also as a signature that defines the very originality of American culture. However, it was the blues which gave birth to jazz, which is recognized as the original national music of America.

In 1915, the black elite constituted approximately four percent of the black community, while the middle class blacks, including "teachers, most of the artisans, clerical workers, salaried employees, and a number of small businessmen," constituted twenty percent of the black community.[45] By the end of the same year, the black elite and the working class groups had already established high-status organizations that excluded blacks of the lowest class. Therefore, there was a cultural and a class division between the middle and the lower classes. The middle class believed to some extent that "the growth of racism could be attributed to black failure to adhere to white bourgeois standards of economic individualism, self denial and good taste."[46] The values and the opinions of the member of the black middle class were reflected in one of Cleveland's black newspapers *The Advocate* in 1915: "Don't think black – nor act black. Every slight, every seeming insult, every failure which some of us meet is attributed directly to the color of our skins. We never think of our *Inefficiency*, *Inconstancy*, lack of initiative or numerous other faults which are everywhere apparent to students of the race problem."[47]

Du Bois held a complicated position on the spirituals. His views were shaped on one side by his racial pride and on the other by his efforts to bring middle-class respectability to the "sorrow songs." One of the reasons why Du bois rejected the blues might be explained by his attempts to bring serious musical elements to the black folk

[45] Kenneth L. Kusker. *Ghetto Takes Shape*. Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1978, p. 105
[46] Kenneth L. Kusker. *Ghetto Takes Shape*. Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1978, p.106
[47] Originally published in *The Advocate*, Cleveland, September, 18, 1915. I quoted in Kenneth L. Kusker. *Ghetto Takes Shape*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978, p. 107

materials as he did for the spirituals. The blues simply did not project the type of "cultured" image that Du Bois desired. He favoured black artists who "embraced white Western traditions and the professionally trained arrangers of folk music, who could make music more "respectable," rather than the untutored people who created the music."[48]

Like Du Bois, Alain Locke was well acquainted with European culture and his choice of writers mirrored his racial pride balanced by his middle-class values. Locke, as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance of the 20s, followed Du Bois in seeing the spirituals as the "most characteristic product of Negro genius to date."[49] He stated: "I think we would be agree that the spirituals symbolize, as nothing else can do, our racial past. They are as well the taproot of our folk music."[50] The spirituals are beloved forms of music for the black elites and they hold traces of the history of African Americans' past, as Du Bois and Locke emphasised in their writings. Even though Locke found that African American folk expression was important to form a high musical establishment, he ignored the blues and its unsophisticated world.

However, several new African American intellectuals and writers, such as Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and Zora Neale Hurston had no desire to separate their art from the mundane African American culture. For instance, Langston Hughes' first book of poems, *The Weary Blues* (1926), was an outcome of his plunging into the world of the black populace, using cabarets and the blues. However, during the 1920s the Harlem

[48] Steven C. Tracey. *Langston Hughes & the Blues*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.21

[49] Alain Locke. (1936) *The Negro & His Music & Negro Art: Past & Present*. New York: Arno Press, 1969, p. 18

[50] Alain Locke. "Spirituals" Jeffry C. Stewart. Ed. *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art & Culture*. New York: Garland, 1983, p. 123

Renaissance writers were also criticised by Du Bois for celebrating the "primitive" qualities of lower-class blacks. The primitivism, here, was often illustrated through African American vernacular forms of speech, dance and music, originating in the vibrant and sensual interiors of bars and clubs. Du Bois believed that lower-class blacks and their values reinforced negative stereotypes of African Americans. For Du Bois, black art had a specific political purpose. Respectable art by educated African Americans would offer the best way to weaken white racist stereotypes. Moreover, the powerful black intellectuals, including Locke and Du Bois, believed that literature was the most effective means which helped to dispel white racist notions that African Americans were morally and cognitively subhuman.

For Langston Hughes, unlike Du Bois and other his contemporaries, lower-class blacks' primitivism connected with primal life forces. Hughes struggled to present a new African American cultural identity by employing the blues form into his poems. He embraced a new black consciousness by blending African American vernacular and folk customs of rural migrants and the sophisticated urban creations of educated blacks.

Hughes was of middle class origins, and acknowledged the continuing contradiction between black middle class and the unprivileged blacks through his own life experience. He wrote in his first autobiography *Big Sea: An Autobiography* (1940): "My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro." He continued: "My father had a great concept of all poor people. He thought it was their own fault that they were poor."[51] Hughes became aware of how much the black middle class contrasted with the lower-class blacks and their values through his relationship with his father, but

[51] Langston Hughes. (1940) *Big Sea: An Autobiography*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, p.56

he did not want to turn his back on the black lower class and their values.

He was inspired by the rich musical climate of the lower class blacks, which enabled him to begin to produce his own blues-based poems. His approach of incorporating folk materials into his poems was associated with the traditionalist intellectuals like Du Bois and Locke, who used the spirituals as a vernacular source. However, Hughes's blues poetry aimed to alter the relationship between elite African Americans and the lower class blacks. He powerfully defended the blues and its non-elite social world. Hughes, on the one hand, did not deny the significance of the spirituals as a vernacular source for the United States. On the other hand, he realized the newer vernacular forms emerging from the urbanizing black working class. In his essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes writes:

> Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced among his own group put upon him, a great field of unused materials ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with their 'white' culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work."[52]

Indeed, some of the "unused materials" that Hughes referred here are obviously lower-class African Americans' vernacular speech and music.

In a letter to Carl Van Vechten published in *Vanity Fair* (1925) Hughes depicted the blues as "being very sad, sadder even than the spirituals, because their sadness is not softened with tears, but hardened with laughter, the absurd, incongruous laughter of a sadness without even a god to appeal to."[53] Here, he defined a blues aesthetic by claiming that its lyrics and structure do not induce sadness so much as they help one rid

[52] Langston Huges. "The Negro Artist & the Racial Mountain." *Nation*, June 23, 1926, p.693
[53] Quoted in Steven C. Tracey. *Langston Hughes & the Blues*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.155

himself/herself of sad feelings by means of facing them with humour. He was aware that the blues is a comedy stamped in misery and a misery stamped in comedy.

"Nobody knows who made up the songs called the blues," Hughes wrote in *The First Book of Jazz* (1955), "but their twelve bar, three line form has since become a standard pattern in American music."[54] As a musical idiom, Hughes pointed out, the blues is a recognizable genre of American and especially African American cultural expression. He recognized that the blues was the product of its time, place and, eventually, the socio-cultural conditions. Thus, it contained elements that were ultimately African American and American: cultural, social and historical. Thus, it was not immoral to use those elements that the blues employed unlike the other members of the black elites. In his review of W.C. Handy's *Blues: An Anthology* in *Opportunity* (1926) he argued that: "The folk blues are pictures of the life from which they come, of the levees, of the back alleys of dissolute streets, the red light districts and the cabarets of those with not even a God to look to."[55]

Moreover, he recognized a blues aesthetic not only in musical contexts but also in its visual or literary incarnations. For Hughes, the blues could have embodiments outside of musical contexts. Hughes remarked frequently on the distinction between the spirituals and the blues. He wrote in his article "Songs Called the Blues" (1941):

> The spirituals are group songs, but the blues are songs you sing alone. The spirituals are religious songs, born in camp meetings and remote plantation districts. But the blues are *city* songs rising from the crowded streets of big towns, or beating against the lonely walls of bed-rooms where you can't sleep at night. The spirituals are escape songs, looking toward heaven, tomorrow, and God. But the blues are today songs, here and now, broke and broken-hearted,

[54] Langston Hughes. (1955) *The First Book of Jazz*. New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1982. p. 21-23
[55] Langston Hughes. "Review of Blues: An Anthology by W.C. Handy", *Opportunity*, August 1926, p.258

when you're troubled in mind and don't know what to do, and nobody cares.[56]

In contrast to many later music critics and scholars, Hughes preferred not to make connections between the spirituals and the blues. Rather, he tried to emphasize the new musical form, which came out of the crowded streets of big towns. Despite the fact that he regarded the blues (either in 1926 or 1941) as typically urban and characterized it as the performance of a sole individual, Hughes insisted on labelling the blues as folk music rather than a popular commercialised musical style. He simply stressed that the blues was a fresh and an unmarked vernacular form of African Americans ready to be studied. Even though, he gave equal importance to the spirituals and the blues, he was merely trying to get the black middle class to listen to the blues. He remarked:

> The blues and the spirituals are two great Negro gifts to American music… The real Negro Blues are as fine as any folk music we have, and I'm hoping that the day will come when famous concert singers like Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson will include a group of blues on their programs as well as the spirituals which they now sing so effectively.[57]

Hughes intentionally depicted the blues in the city. He wanted to highlight the existence of the new vernacular form; the blues even though, the lower-class origin of the blues went against middle-class propriety. His developments as a poet and a writer basically originated from the black masses. The critical debate over Hughes' poems was also about his use of the blues and its low-life incidents as poetic subject matter. Paul Allen Anderson writes in his book *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (2001): "Hughes's interpretation of the blues grants no redeeming glimpse at a transfigured future. The contrast with Du Bois's dialectical and ultimately utopian interpretation of "the sorrow songs" as a catalyst to social transformation is striking."[58] He maintained a more favourable position toward the vernacular, basing many of his

[56] Langston Hughes. "Songs Called the Blues". Ed. Steven C. Tracey. *Write me a Few of Your Lines: A Blues Reader.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999. p.391
[57] ibid p.392
[58] Paul Allen Anderson. *Deep River: Music & Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001. p.183

poems on the blues, and transformed the lower-class black oral tradition into a vital and viable written form.

Hughes attempted to use the recourses of authentic folk and folk based materials (including recorded blues songs in the 1920s) in his works (predominantly in his blues poems of the 1920s and 1930s) because they were part of the city and the people who were being altered by the city and also its commercialism. Hughes simply wanted to demonstrate their beauty for the middle-class audience. Tracy argues that "it was his sincere love of the blues and his pride in the African-American past, in African-American creativity, and in the "low-down folks" that spurred Hughes to employ the blues tradition in depicting the secular side of the soul of his people."[59]

Hughes's approach to the blues and the blues aesthetic was influential on Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, whose contributions to the blues aesthetic will be discussed later in this paper. Before I turn to Ellison and Murray, I would like to return to Amiri Baraka's approach to the blues.

Baraka's *Blues People* is one of the earliest books, which deals with the sociological, historical and cultural aspects of the blues. Baraka also finds it significant to highlight the difference between the spirituals and the blues: "The blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spirituals issued from, but with blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the "Jordan" of the song much more intensely a *human* accomplishment."[60] According to Baraka, the basic difference between the spirituals and the blues is the representation of the experiences of African Americans in

[59] Steven C. Tracey. *Langston Hughes & the Blues*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.141
[60] Amiri Baraka, (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.63

the white society. He classifies the spirituals as communal songs about God and labour, featuring a slave view of freedom as a state "that could be only be reached through death."[61] The blues, in contrast, detail "the life of the individual and his individual trials and successes on the earth."[62]

Baraka defined the blues as a form of protest. He situated the blues in a context of the economic function in the American social order. A major element in Baraka's study of the blues is his neo-Marxist approach to the music.[63] For instance, he conceived of the blues as a response to the economic, social and material changes in African American life, and highlights the determined oppositional elements in the blues as it was changed and reshaped by its connection with the white society and constitutions.

Baraka gives a great deal of political significance to country blues, and sees the music symbolising the separateness of African Americans from the mainstream of American culture: "Primitive blues had been almost a conscious expression of the Negro's *individuality* and equally important, his *separateness*"[64] whereas the classic blues represents a sense of status and place in the American cultural life for African Americans: "[Classic blues] represented a clearly definable step by the Negro back into mainstream of American society"[65] and "the professionalism of classic blues moved it to a certain extent out of lives of Negroes."[66] He rejects the idea of urbanization, commercialization and professionalism of the blues because, for Baraka, by those

[61] ibid p.63
[62] ibid p.64
[63] Jerry Gafio Watts. *Amiri Baraka: The Politics & Art of a Black Intellectual*. New York: New York University Press, 2001, p.119
[64] Amiri Baraka, (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.86
[65] ibid p.86
[66] Amiri Baraka, (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.87

processes "the meanings which existed in blues *only for Negroes* grew less pointed."[67] Baraka characterises classic blues as a form of entertainment. He strengthens his point by writing: "An idea of theatre had come to the blues, and this movement toward performance turned some of the emotional climate of the Negro's life into artifact and entertainment."[68] Classic blues became the music that "could be used to entertain others *formally*", thus, the ability of the blues, to represent the authentic elements of the life of African Americans, vanished.[69]

The flaw in Baraka's thesis derives from his insistence that the black culture and the mainstream American culture are separate. He observed that African American music was changed by the influence of the mainstream American culture, but there was acculturation between these two cultures, and only their synthesis could construct what we call today American music and culture. Baraka clearly confused the terms "acculturation" and "assimilation."[70] It is not erroneous if one writes that African Americans are culturally different than white Americans. However, the difference was and will remain the continuing process of the acculturation of blacks and whites, rather than being a fixed process of assimilation, as Baraka asserts. Nevertheless, Baraka claimed that African Americans have isolated their authentic cultural identities by being commercialised and urbanised in order to achieve white American's recognition and appreciation. This middle class "did not even want to be 'accepted' as *themselves*, they wanted any self which the mainstream dictated, and the mainstream *always* dictated. And this black middle class, in turn, tried always to dictate that self, or this image of a

[67] ibid p.87
[68] ibid p.88
[69] ibid p.82
[70] Jerry Gafio Watts. *Amiri Baraka: The Politics & Art of a Black Intellectual*. New York: New York University Press, 2001, p.121

whiter Negro, to the poorer, blacker Negroes."[71]

However, although, middle class blacks often refused black folk music (the blues) in favour of European music they never denied their racial identities. Jerry Gafio Watts writes in *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001): "Privileged blacks were often trying to identify with "white culture" while maintaining their allegiances to racial uplift and the broader ethnic group."[72] For instance, as I discussed earlier Du Bois and Locke preserved and safeguarded the strong ethnic and racial sympathies for their non-Europeanised ethnic identities by using the spirituals as vernacular source of American music.

Therefore, Baraka is rather simplistic in his understanding of the black cultural influence on American culture. He believes that the black people's cultural integration to white American society is a moral failure, which means a denial of African American cultural authenticity. It is true that the values of the black middle class and the connotations of the blues did not merge, but this does not suggest that black middle class refused their African American identity and heritage. While they rejected the blues and its unsophisticated social values, they did attempt to employ the spirituals as a black form of expression at the heart of the whole American culture.

In contrary to Hughes' idea that the blues is a folk expression, Baraka preferred to divide the blues into two categories: as a folk expression and as a commercialised musical form. Even though, Baraka too was committed to folk materials (the country blues) like Hughes, he refused much of the music recorded by the record companies,

[71] Amiri Baraka, (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, p.130
[72] Jerry Gafio Watts. *Amiri Baraka: The Politics & Art of a Black Intellectual*. New York: New York University Press, 2001, p.121

because, for him, that process isolated the folk elements and their unique values from the African American identity. The deficiencies in Baraka's rejection of commercial blues as non-authentic can be seen by at this point going back briefly to a famous account of the beginnings of the classic or commercial blues by W.C. Handy, often called the Father of the Blues. Because he was the first musician to ever make a written transcription of the blues as the standard form of the blues (12-bar blues). The irony here is that Handy as an African American musician was interested in the blues because of its potential to become a commercial musical form in the early 1900s. The most famous of Handy's compositions are "Memphis Blues" (1912) and "St. Louis Blues" (1914). In his autobiography *Father of the Blues* (1941), Handy claims that he first heard the blues in 1903 when he was waiting in railroad station:

> A lean, loose-jointed Negro had commended plunking a guitar beside me while I slept. His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars. The effect was unforgettable. His song, too, stuck me instantly… The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard.[73]

Handy was a musician who depended on the formal musical tradition. He could not familiarise himself with this "weird music" which was unlike any other kinds of music he had ever heard; as he remarked "the blues did not come from books."[74] He hesitated to use low folk forms in his music until a revelation occurred when he came to Cleveland for a dance program and one of the audience requested that his orchestra play some of their native music.

> The dancers went wild. Dollars, quarters, halves – the shower grew heavier and continued so long I strained my neck to get a better look. Therefore before the boys lay more money than my nine musicians were being paid for the entire engagement. Then I saw the beauty of the primitive music. They had the stuff the

[73] W.C. Handy. (1941) *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*. New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1969, p.74
[74] ibid p.76

people wanted. It touched the spot.[75]

Thus, financial gain was a primary reason in encouraging Handy to use authentic elements as he started to produce his version of the blues, which, as he remarked, made him not only a blues composer but also "an *American* composer."[76] What Handy did was to combine his knowledge about the Western musical formulations with the black authentic elements of the rural blues. And significantly, it is this combination that made him "an *American* composer."

Handy not only preferred to use the authentic elements of the blues in his music, but also applied African American vernacular speech to his compositions as lyrics: "In the lyric I decided to use Negro phraseology and dialect. I felt then, as I feel now, that this often implies more than well-chosen English can briefly express."[77] It is also remarkable that he intentionally decided to use African American dialects in his lyrics for financial gain. That way, he received attention not only from African American musicians and listeners but also from the larger American society.

I wrote that Hughes assumes that the blues, either country or urban, is a folk expression. For Baraka, though, the authentic elements of the blues vanish in the process of popularization and commercialization. One should always consider the complex network of connections, which binds African Americans to the larger society or vice versa. Moreover, African American blues artists on the streets were a major influence on black and white musicians and listeners. The point is that the blues, from the very beginning and certainly from the beginning of the recorded blues, was larger part of the

[75] ibid p.77
[76] W.C. Handy. (1941) *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*. New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1969, p.77
[77] ibid p.120

urbanisation, commercialisation and popularisation as it was in the case of Handy. Thus, the distinction made between the authenticity of country and classic blues, made by Baraka, is quite simplistic.

The label "individuality" which is attached to the blues signified a movement: the singer is alone with his/her songs, but he/she is not separated from the larger society, as Baraka stated. The white and black cultures have always been connected and influenced by each other and this relationship created what we now call the American culture. This was a living process, and still is. The blues is changed and reshaped by the external and the internal interactions with other cultures in the larger globe. Moreover, the popularization and the commercialization of the blues was an inevitable and predictable process. This is one of the results of the political and economical structure of the larger globe. The music and the cultural industry could not be outside the global effect of the commercial society. In other words, the altering social and economical structure unavoidably affected the form and the development of the blues. It is pointless to expect those blues singers and other musicians who use the elements of the blues to stand outside of the new political and economical order. They could not become static and produce continually the oldest and archaic form of the blues. The progression of the blues gave birth to new musical forms and genres such as jazz, soul and rock, (all of them are commercial and popular in some extent) while the blues itself survived to this day.

I now turn to Ellison's criticism of Baraka's *Blues People* and his commentary on the blues. His suggestions will guide me in my investigation of the authenticity of the modern forms of the blues. In his review of *Blues People*, Ellison criticises Baraka's lack of attention to the aesthetic and ritual elements of the blues. He also rejects

Baraka's class analysis as well as his characterisation of the blues as a form of protest: "For the blues are not primarily concerned with civil rights or obvious political protest; they are an art form and thus a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice."[78] His discomfort with Baraka's study of the blues leads Ellison to conclude: "The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues."[79] According to Ellison, the blues mostly deals with problems such as poverty, racial oppression, migration, and personal disasters and thus, they served to ease pain and let out frustration and misery, to affirm life and restore optimism. Like Hughes, Ellison saw that though many blues lyrics reflect loneliness and sorrow, they assert a humorous and defiant reaction to life's troubles. The different experiences of African American individuals turn into an art form, which influence broader American culture. Ellison defines blues in a manner that captures its contradictory nature (tragic/comic) and aesthetic. He writes:

> The blues speak to us simultaneously of the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition, and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined those modes. This has been the heritage of a people who for hundreds of years could not celebrate birth or dignify death and whose need to live despite the dehumanizing pressures of slavery developed an endless capacity for laughing at their painful experiences. This is a group experience shared by many Negroes, and any effective study of the blues would treat them first as poetry and as ritual.[80]

Ellison is also very critical of Baraka's knowledge of the blues and his simplistic linking of social status and racial purity with the blues. He writes: "One would get the impression that there was a rigid correlation between color, education, income and the Negro's preference in music."[81] According to Ellison, the cultural integration is

[78] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People" *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.257

[79] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People" *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.249
[80] ibid p.256
[81] ibid p.252

necessary for African American because the technique, the technical ability to perform, which was taught by European Americans, is "the key to creative freedom."[82]

He rejects Baraka's distinction between country blues and classic blues. According to him, one should consider classic blues as both a form of entertainment and of folklore. He explains:

> When they were sung professionally in theatres, they were entertainment; when danced to in the form of recordings or used as a means of transmitting verses and their wisdom, they were folklore. There are levels of time and function involved here, and the blues which might be used in one place as entertainment… might be put to a ritual use in another.[83]

Thus, classic blues, on the one hand, is a form of entertainment. On the other hand, because it is linked with dance in the African American tradition and the ritual (transformative) basis of music, the blues is also folkloric and authentic. The link he builds up with the country and urban blues is thus very similar to Hughes' ideas of the continuing authenticity of all kinds of the blues. The authenticity remains, even though the blues is commercialised, because when black people buy the blues' records and dance with the blues music a cultural transformation takes place and that process leads to the transformation of the blues.

Ellison articulated the blues' wider significance best when he described the blues quality of fellow novelist Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945). In an essay called "Richard Wright's Blues" (1945), Ellison defined the blues not so much in musical terms but more broadly as "an impulse" in African American cultural life "to keep the painful details and episodes of brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by

[82] ibid p.255
[83] Ralph Ellison, "Blues People" *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.252

squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism"[84] The blues impulse, then, conveys a heroic, survivalist sensibility towards the cold, hard, low-down facts of African American life but expressing it in a tragicomic sense of lyricism.

Baraka and Ellison had contrasting ideas: Baraka, on the one hand, analysed the blues as a site of African American resistance and a historical repository of black struggle. In other words, he distinguished the blues as a sign of blacks' status as the cultural outsider in America. On the other hand, Ellison analysed the blues and the blues oriented jazz as an indication of African Americans' primary American identity. Ellison criticised Baraka's lack of attention to ritual elements of the blues. He applied to the blues a connotation that it is collectively expressed through art, and, thus, it is universal. The aesthetic elements of the blues are thus an influence on the whole American nation.

Albert Murray, too, focuses upon the transformative (the ritual) power of the blues. According to Murray, the blues is not essentially melancholic or depressing. Rather, the blues is best defined as music that arises to beat away the blues with rituals of purification, ecstasy, and celebration. Even when the lyrics are despondent and sorrowful, the music is often intended to highlight irony and audience participation. Although many blues performers such as Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, and Bessie Smith often worked in the vaudeville entertainers, dance halls, and night clubs as entertainers, "they were at the same time fulfilling a central role in a ceremony that was at once a purification rite and a celebration the festive earthiness of which was tantamount to a fertility ritual."[85]

Murray refused the idea that the blues directly reproduces its socio-political context. He insists that social historians put too much importance on the literal meaning of the blues'

[84] Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues" *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ed. Ralph Ellison, p.256-57
[85] Albert Murray. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1976, p.17

lyrics that suggest suffering or social critique. To a certain extent, one should treat the existential or metaphysical aspects of the blues rather than its political implications. In the blues, there is a ritualistic stylisation of experience that addresses the material conditions of life without speaking directly of them. The "primary emphasis is placed upon aesthetics not ethics. What is good in such circumstances is the beautiful, without which there can be no good time. What counts is elegance (not only in the music and the dance movement but in the survival technology inherent in the underlying ritual as well)."[86] Thus, wherever the blues are performed, even in the recordings, the aesthetic elements of the African American life are transformed. And with that transformation the blues singer embodies the past and the future of his/her audience like a high priest in the temple one "whose performance is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay", but to do so by evoking "an ambience of Dionysian revelry in the process."[87] Albert Murray applies the blues as a "central source for an indigenous American", and like Ellison, he criticises the scholars who consider the blues as a form of protest.[88] He rather takes the blues as a form of art and a key metaphor for the American culture, throughout which African American experience is diffused.

I have been demonstrating the influence of Hughes Ellison and Hughes knew each other since 1936 when Ellison moved to New York. Hughes started to write about the tragic-comic elements of the blues in 1926 which was ten years before he knew Ellison. He started to publish his blues-based poems and kept writing about the blues and its structural and lyrical formation. Ellison took the idea of the tragic-comic elements of the blues and turned it into an aesthetic formulation which is influential to the culture of America. Murray and Ellison were close friends since the academic year of 1947 – 1948

[86] ibid p.42
[87] Albert Murray. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1976, p.17 & p.68
[88] Albert Murray. (1973) *The Hero & the Blues*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995, p.78

at New York University, and this friendship continued until Ellison died in 1994. Even though they did not work together and spent most of their lives separately, they continued to communicate and exchanged their ideas with the letters. There is obviously a historical and an intellectual link between Hughes, Ellison and Murray. The idea of the aesthetic of the blues started with Hughes as a small snowball, it improved with the ideas of Ellison and Murray, and turn into a huge snowball that is what we know today as the blues aesthetic. They demonstrate how the blues developed as part of the response to the African American experience of oppression, but then as a musical and cultural form associated with not only the African American experience but an artistic and cultural life and identity of the whole American nation.

Besides the blues associated with the lower class blacks and their unsophisticated social world, as I dealt earlier, the blues was also considered sinful, or the devil's music and people were always being discouraged from listening to the blues by the black churches. To rescue the blues and its negative representation, some researchers associated the blues with the sacred forms of black expression, the spirituals, in 1970s. For instance, according to James H. Cone, the blues is the secular version of the spirituals, which he calls the blues as "secular spirituals."[89]

He maintains in his book *The Spirituals & the Blues: An Interpretation* (1972) that because not all African Americans might accept the divine promises of the Holy Bible as a satisfactory answer to the circumstance of the black existence, they prefer to sing secular songs as a solution to the dilemma of black suffering and psychological

[89] See also Rod Gruver "The Blues as a Secular Religion" (1970). *Write me a Few of your Lines: A Blues Reader*. Ed. Steve C Tracey. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999 p.222-31

adjustment to continue to exist in America.[90] He remarked in his conclusion: "We must view them [the blues and the spirituals] as two artistic expression of the same black experience."[91]

However, it is not necessary to agree with Cone's essentialist invocation of a single metaphysical reality of black experience to gain from his definition a key insight into why the blues were condemned as the Devil's music: it is because they draw upon and integrate sacred consciousness and thus, cause a serious threat to religious attitudes. As a theologian, Cone merely demonstrates the blues with his theological perspectives which are originated in a pervading ideological concern of religious-political principles. He employs his beliefs and theological viewpoints to rescue the blues from its negative representation.

IV. The Representation of Modern Jazz and the Theory of African American Music

1. The conflict of the Old and New Guard: Bebop and the Future of Jazz

[90] James H. Cone. (1972) *The Spirituals & the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: Orbis Books, 2003, p.97
[91] ibid p.130

Many scholars describe bebop as an aesthetic movement related to post-war US society. Pancho Savery claims that bebop music was part of the new attitude, one that challenged the status quo.

> When Bebop began in the 1940s, America was in a similar position to what it had been in the 1920s. A war had been fought to free the world (again) for democracy; and once again, African Americans had participated and had assumed that this "loyal" participation would result in new rights and new levels of respect. When, once again, this did not appear to be happening, a new militancy developed in the African American community. Bebop was part of this attitude.[92]

Amriri Baraka is one of the first writers to represent bebop in the context of "the sense of resentment" that African Americans felt during the World War II, when they still could not gain equal rights in the United States, even though many African Americans fought against Nazis and their fascist ideologies in Europe.[93] For instance, in a 1942 letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, James G. Thompson called for a Double V Campaign to achieve two victories: over the Axis powers in World War II and over racial prejudice in the United States. Eric Lott describes how bebop's "aesthetic of speed and displacement" reflects the political demand of the "Double V" campaign – victory abroad and victory at home – and the militant aspirations of its working-class audience in 1940s.[94] Bebop musicians were not self-conscious politicians or militants directly involved with the radical movements in the U.S during the 1940s. However, the bebop movement was clearly rooted "in social and cultural contexts that nurtured its positioning as an oppositional or subversive discourse."[95] As Lott claims, bebop was intimately related to the African American militancy because "militancy and music were

[92] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, & *Sonny's Blues,*" p.170-171 in *Understanding Others: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies and the Teaching of Literature*, eds. Joseph Trimmer and Tilly Warnock Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992, p.165-176.
[93] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963), New York: Perennial, 2002, p.181-182.
[94] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style" (1993) in *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995), eds. Krin Gabbard, Durham & London: Duke University Press, p.246.
[95] Joe Parish, *The Color of Jazz: Race & Representation in Postwar American Culture* (1997), p.11.

under-girded by the same social facts; the music attempted to resolve the style that militancy fought out in the streets."[96]

Furthermore, just one year after the Double V campaign, the "Zoot-Suit" riot between soldiers and Mexican American youths, recognized because of the zoot suits they favoured, took place in early June 1943 in Los Angeles and occurred elsewhere in that year. The zoot-suit was also associated with African American urban youth when it appeared on the scene in 1940s. For example the zoot-suit was worn by Malcolm X in New York, and in his autobiography he recounted the importance of his first zoot-suit and proposed that the style had racial connotations as the preferred choice of being a hip black men and entertainers.[97] Reflecting the bebop subculture, many bebop musicians represent themselves as an artist not an entertainer by wearing a zoot-suit. Douglas Henry Daniels marks that there are similarities between zoot suiters and beboppers as they "both were a rebellion against accepted dress and musical styles and, moreover, they sometimes went beyond fashion and entertainment statements, embodying an intellectualized political position."[98]

Savery argues that "in African American culture, bebop is as significant as the Harlem Renaissance," being "a revolt against the way African American music had been taken over, and diluted, by whites."[99] Thus, bebop music was created for economic reasons as well. Before World War 2, the jazz-oriented swing bands occupied most of the music industry and white jazz musicians, Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman, were given the

[96] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," (1993), p.246.
[97] Malcolm X & Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (1964), New York: Ballantine Books, p.52-53.
[98] Douglas Henry Daniels, "Los Angeles Zoot: Race "Riot," the Pachuco, & Black Music Culture," *Journal of African American History*, January, 2002, p.99
[99] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, & *Sonny's Blues,*" p.170

name “The King of Jazz” and “The King of Swing.” Further, many African American musicians were paid much lower salaries than their white counterparts. Therefore the evolution from old jazz to bebop was also in part due to the need to create a music that would be too complicated for white musicians to duplicate and to gain financial reward from. As Grover Sales puts it, “Bebop was a natural by-product of this smouldering resentment against white copycats getting rich off black music.” [100] Moreover, Baraka writes that bebop music and style represented as “anti-assimilationist” challenge not only to the mainstream US society and its political and economical contractions but also to African American middle class and their values.[101] Thus, there was also a conflict between respectable African American people and middle-class black hipsters on the certain subject.

When the bebop musicians brought their harmonic extensions, breakneck tempos and polyrhythmic structures to the world of jazz, there was a splintering of the jazz audiences and critical establishment. The general gap between swing and bebop was in large part a dispute between these groups that were simply looking for different things in music. The established audience, including Ellison, was looking for familiar rhythms and melodies for purposes of dance, nostalgia and ritualistic fulfilment. The newer audience was looking for bold experiments in harmony and fresh approaches time and tempo for purposes of the new aesthetic accomplishment. There was an established division between the entertainment orientation of swing and the artistic orientation of bebop.

[100] Grover Sales, p.131, quoted in T.J. Anderson, III, “Body & Soul: Kaufman’s Golden Sardine,” *African American Review*, Vol.34, No.2, 2000, p.329-246.
[101] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963), p.181.

During the bebop era, many beboppers criticized African American musicians who seemed to them to reinforce the minstrel and plantation image of black people, because they acted the way white people wanted. Beboppers tried to play jazz without losing self-respect as it was used to be in the past, and refused to accept the primitivist stereotypes, to which they were expected to conform.[102] Because the new music challenged both the entertainment industry and the public, and as the musicians became artists rather than entertainers, bebop was recognized as "the first authentically modern phase in jazz" tradition[103]

Louis Armstrong was merely considered as part of the old guard who needed to be swept out with the new musical evolution. He was seen as "Uncle Tom" and "the white man's nigger."[104] Thus there is an antipathy felt toward Armstrong and his stage performance by the bebop generation. For instance, in his autobiography Dizzy Gillespie writes:

> Louis Armstrong couldn't hear what we are doing. Pops wasn't schooled enough musically to hear the changes and harmonics we played… I criticized Louis for other things, such as his "plantation image." We didn't appreciate that about Louis Armstrong, and if anybody asked me about a certain public image of him, handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism, I never hesitated to say I didn't like it. I didn't want the white man to expect me to allow the same things Louis Armstrong did.[105]

Moreover, Armstrong himself disliked and spoke negatively of bebop music. He said:

> … them rebop boys, they're great technicians. Mistake – that's all rebop is. Man, you gotta be a technician to know when you make them… New York and 52nd street – that's what messed up jazz. Them cats play too much – a whole of notes,

[102] Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere: The Challenge of Bebop" (1999), *American Music*, Vol.17, No.4, p.428.
[103] Mark S. Harvey, "Jazz & Modernism: Changing Conceptions of Innovation & Tradition" (1991) in *Essays on the History & Meanings of Jazz*, eds. Reginald T. Buckner & Steven Weiland, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p.134.
[104] Richard N. Albert, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's Sonny's Blues" (1984) in *College Literature*, Vol.11, No.2, p. 180.
[105] Dizzy Gillespie & Al Fraser, *Dizzy: To be or Not to Bop/The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie*, New York: Quartet Books, 1982, p.386.

> weird notes… most of the so-called modern music I heard in 1918. That stuff means nothing. You've got to carry the melody.[106]

This raises the larger question of the relationship between modernism and bebop. I said before that bebop is given credit for having transformed jazz from popular dance music to experimental art music. It was, and still is, commonplace to find a division in the jazz world, as there is a split between the entertainment orientation of swing and the artistic orientation of bebop. However, Bernard Genron suggests that there were similar debates between swing modernists and New Orleans revivalists. They wanted "to make it possible, indeed to make it seem very natural, to refer to jazz as an single commas inside double 'art" music and to construe certain genres of jazz as "modernistic," "experimental," "formally complex," and "avant-garde," even before bebop made its appearance."[107] Thus, the construction of bebop in high cultural terms – either in 1920s or 1940s – made it easier to rescue jazz from its negative representation as it was often associated with primitivism and lower cultural vales. Indeed, the music was perceived as a "vulgar" and "low" popular form (rarely as an art) because of its strong link to African American culture, community, and its connection to African heritage.

Bebop, because of its heavy emphasis on solo improvisation, reflected African Americans' desire to wrench jazz away from the polished sterility of the pre-composed music of swing bands, and steer it vigorously back towards its African American origins. It marked a self-conscious shift away from jazz as entertainment music to jazz as artistic and political statement.

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[106] Louis Armstorng & Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong: In his Own Words/Selected Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.216-17.
[107] Bernard Gennron, ""Moldy Figs" & Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)" in *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995), eds. Krin Gabbard, Durham & London: Duke University Press, p.33-34.

However, Baraka's and other African American's construction of the bebop movement overstressed the rupture between the jazz of pre-World War II and post-World War II periods. Jazz (especially bebop), in Baraka's argument, can only function as form of resistance and as a protest against the racial injustice of American society. Baraka assumed that American culture was oppressive and that African American music could only be a form of resistance and protest. Thus, the creation of bebop led to a divide in the world of jazz, just as bebop, According to Baraka, bebop should be seen as a rebellion against the white control of swing.

For instance, According to Ralph Ellison, jazz represents a national style. In fact, for him, almost all American culture is "jazz-shaped". Therefore, jazz is more than a musical entertainment and appearance. Ellison considers jazz to be not a purely black creation but it is rather a hybrid and a mixture of heterogeneous dialogues from the folk tradition of black and white Americans. Moreover, Ralph Ellison, in his essay "On Bird, Bird Watching, and Jazz" (1962), suggests that bebop generation's refusal of the traditional entertainer's role, which came from the minstrel tradition, was understandable. Nevertheless by choosing Louis Armstrong and his music as an example, "they confused artistic quality with question of personal conduct."[108] Ellison continues:

> By rejecting Armstrong they thought to rid themselves of the entertainer's role. And by way of getting rid of the role they demanded, in the name of their racial identity, a purity of status which by definition is impossible for the performing artist. The result was a grim comedy of racial manners; with the musicians employing a calculated surliness and rudeness …and the white audiences were shocked at first but learned quickly to accept such treatment as evidence of "artistic" temperament. Then comes a comic reversal. Today the white audience expects the rudeness as part of the entertainment.[109]

[108] Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird Watching, and Jazz" (1962) in *Shadow & Act* (1964), New York: Vintage Books, p.225.
[109] ibid p.225.

Ellison also compares Armstrong to Parker. Parker, according to him, never deals with the slip from tragic to comic mode that Armstrong, a self-conscious clown rather than a sell-out, achieves.[110] Moreover, Armstrong is mentioned in the beginning of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), where the narrator relates himself to Armstrong: "Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible"[111] Here, Armstrong's image serves as a metaphor, which represents the invisibility of the narrator. In the novel, the narrator, who has just come from the South, struggles to bring revolution for African American community for the equal rights. However, although he finds his identity as an African American, he ends up in a basement and refers to a particular Armstrong recording of "(What Did I Do to be so) Black and Blue" (1929) which puts a challenging emphasis explores on race such as "My only sin is in my skin/What did I do to be so back and blue?"[112]

There is an intriguing story behind "Black and Blue." The song was written by Andy Razaf and Fats Waller for the Broadway musical *Chocolates'* in 1929. During the rehearsal, Dutch Schultz, one of the well known Jewish gangsters in New York, asked Razaf to add to the musical a final tune, "something with a little "colored girl" singing how tough it is being "colored"."[113] Although Razaf himself did not know Dutchman personally he was definitely acquainted with his reputation as a murderous mobster. Razaf told the story to his partner Fats Waller and, eventually they composed the song with these new criteria in mind. During the musical, Edith Wilson first sang the song

[110] Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird Watching, and Jazz" (1962), p.227.
[111] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952), New York: Penguin Books, p.11.
[112] Louis Armstrong, *Satch Plays Fats: A Tribute to the Immortal Fats* Waller, Colombia Records, Great Jazz Composer Series, 1955.
[113] Barry Singer, *Black & Blue: The Life & Lyrics of Andy Razaf* (1992), New York: Schirmer Books, p.217.

and as Razaf started singing, there was loud laughter in the audience.[114] Indeed, the most important thing about "Black and Blue" lies in its lyrics, especially in the following part: "I'm white inside, it don't help my case/Cause I can't hide what is on my face." With these lyrics, in Barry Singer's words, Razaf's "Black and Blues" "resolutely fractured the repressed traditions of black entertainment expression" in the United States.[115] Over the years, many scholars have referred to the song as America's first "racial protest song."[116]

For my purposes, though, Armstrong's performance of the song is more crucial. Armstrong most recently recorded "Black and Blue" in a 1955 tribute album to Fats Waller. As I suggested earlier, that was the years Armstrong's facial expression was criticized by many bebop musicians. However, there is a dramatic use of irony in the song, wherein the image of Armstrong is clearly contrasted with the signifying effect of the lyrics in the song. Here, the narrator in Ellison's *Invisible Man* realizes that Armstrong was making a subtle social critique of the U.S. race environment by being invisible behind his minstrel type of facial expression. Unlike the unnamed narrator's assumption in *Invisible Man*, Armstrong was aware that he was invisible while he was ironically begging for a recognition of the humanity of African American people with his minstrel type of performance style.

Armstrong played "Black and Blue" in front of Kwame Nkrumah, the prime minister of Ghana. During the 1950s, the U.S. State Department sent jazz musicians – including bebopper Dizzy Gillespie – abroad to demonstrate American democracy in action. Louis Armstrong was one of the musicians in the State Department tour. During his visit in

[114] Barry Singer, *Black & Blue: The Life & Lyrics of Andy Razaf* (1992), p.218.
[115] ibid p.218.
[116] ibid p.218.

Ghana, Armstrong performed at the Old Polo Ground, where almost one thousand hundred people showed up for the concert including the country's leader Kwame Nkrumah and many of the ministers in the Ghanaian cabinet. Throughout his stay in Ghana, Armstrong was overwhelmed with the empathy he felt for the Ghanaian people.[117] During the performance, Armstrong suddenly stopped playing in the middle of a song and said: "I know it now. I came from here, way back. At least my people did. Now I know this is my country too."[118] For Garry Giddens (one of the biographers of Louis Armstrong), the significance of these words were clear: "After all, my ancestors came from here and I still have African blood in me."[119] Moreover, Armstrong performed "Black and Blue"? in that concert as well. Penny M. Von Eschen suggests that: "It was perhaps Armstrong's sympathy with the struggles of black people in a state slowly marking its way out of colonialism that inspired him to play Fats Waller's "Black and Blue."[120] As Armstrong sang "Black and Blue," the prime minister had tears in his eyes.[121] There is a great irony here. Louis Armstrong performed "Black and Blue" in his most criticized stage pose with the "handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism," (or in Ellison's words in his "*make-believe* role of clown,") while he was representing American democracy in abroad.[122]

Bebop has been examined by many scholars as an isolated phenomenon of popular culture or 'high art music' rather than viewed as part of African American artistic tradition, which took its roots from a continuous innovation of other African American

[117] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (2004), London: Harvard University Press, p.60.
[118] Robert Raymond, *Black Star in the Wind* (1960), London: MacGibbon & Kee, p.241.
[119] Garry Giddins, *Satchmo* (1988), New york: Doubleday, p.159-60.
[120] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (2004), p.61-62.
[121] Garry Giddins, *Satchmo* (1988), p.159.
[122] Dizzy Gillespie & Al Fraser, *Dizzy: To be or Not to Bop/The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie*, p.386.

cultural expressions such as the blues, ragtime, New Orleans dance music and swing.[123] For instance, French critic Hugue Panassié was one of the writers who rejected the very idea of bebop as part of the jazz tradition. Indeed, by not considering bebop as part of the jazz tradition, the critics also refused the very idea of bebop being a part of the African American vernacular tradition.[124] Amiri Baraka was one of the first writers to take a different stance, by claiming "In jazz tradition, no reliance on European tradition or theory will help at all."[125] As I explained earlier, bebop, as a rejection of the status quo, was a sharp break in the jazz history. However, bebop is still part of the African American vernacular tradition and one should conceive of bebop according to the "standards of judgment and aesthetic excellence that depend on" African American culture in order to produce applicable critical commentary about it.[126] Scott DeVeaux reminds us, for instance, that Parker and Gillespie themselves also began their careers playing improvisations in the swing bands.[127] Here, the significance of Louis Armstrong should be emphasized again. Armstrong was one of the important innovators in the jazz tradition as along with the contribution of his unique improvisational style on a recording session of *Hot Five* he introduced scat singing, which is vocalizing as employed by many jazz singers who create the equivalent of an instrumental solo using only the voice,. According to the legend , he dropped the lyric sheet while singing during his recording of "Heebie Jeebies" in 1926.[128] Armstrong's scat singing influenced not only singers like Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, but also the singing of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker during the rise of bebop in New York.

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[123] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social & Musical History* ((1997), London: Picador, p.3.
[124] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*, (1995), p.138-142.
[125] Amiri Baraka, "Jazz & the White Critic" (1963) im *Black Music* (1967), Nwe York: Quill, p.20. See also Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, & Black Music Inquiry" (2002), *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol.22, p.49-70.
[126] İbid p.20.
[127] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social & Musical History* (1997), p.7.
[128] Louis Armstrong, Best of *Hot 5 & Hot 7 Recordings* (2002), Sonny Music.

2. The Signifiyin(g) African American Culture: The Theory of African American Music

Henry Louis Gates argued in *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988) that "Signifyin(g)" (the parenthetical 'g' is for differentiating the concept from the standard English one "Signifying"), narrative strategies that comment on tradition and revise enduring "tropes," in the manner of West African oral culture, dominate African American literary tradition. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. applies to music Gates' theory of African American literary criticism.[129] In his *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995). Floyd proposed similar vernacular theory of African American music, one that insisted on the "compelling cultural and musical continuity… between all the musical genres of the black cultural experience."[130]

Musical Signifyin(g) is a complicated theory which is simply not reproducing the existed sound or making a new version of the song. To give an example, Dick Hebdige writes in his book, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (1987), the importance of "versioning" in the reggae musical tradition which is to modify the structure of an existing song by playing a new solo with different instruments, using a different tempos and key or chord sequence, and using a different arrangement. As he remarks: "Versioning" is at the heart not only of reggae but *all* Afro-American and Caribbean musics: jazz, blues, rap, r&b, reggae, calypso, soca, salsa, Afro-Cuban an so

[129] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (1988)*
[130] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.10.

on."[131] However, musical Signifyin(g) is not the equivalent of the performing of *variations* on pre-existing sound or the re-working of pre-existing song, but as Floyd states "while it is all of these, what makes it different from simple borrowing, varying, or reworking is its transformation of such material by using it rhetorically or figuratively – through troping, in other words – by trifling with, teasing, or censuring it some way." [132] Therefore, when Charlie Parker plays the "Woody Woodpecker" theme in the middle of the improvisation, he simple not produces a new version of the pre-existing song but Signifies (comments) "on other figures, on the performances themselves, on other performances of the same piece, and on other and completely different works of music."[133] Furthermore, musical genres also Signify (comment) on other musical genres and on all the forces of the moment: economical, political, musical, and relationship between the audience and the performers. For instance, according to Floyd:

> [R]agtime Signifies on European and early Euro-American dance music, including the march; blues on the ballad; spirituals on the hymn; jazz on blues and ragtime; gospel on the hymn, the spiritual, and the blues; rhythm and blues and rock; funk on soul; rap on funk; bebop on swing, ragtime rhythms and blues. And the Negro spirituals were Signifyin(g) tropes in their day; with the slave community using their texts to Signify on other ideas, through indirection, in the superstitious communication so necessary in slave culture.[134]

Thus, here, if I give you the Parker example again, playing the "Woody Woodpecker" theme, he may not only Signifies on other performance or the performances themselves but also he may be Signifyin(g) on the madness of the moment or on American mass culture in general by using Signifyin(g) as a way of "saying one thing and meaning another."[135] Moreover, jazz performers may also Signify on one or another and his/her own previous performance such as when Ella Fitzgerald introduces "Tisket, a Tasket" in

[131] Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (1987), p.12.
[132] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.55.
[133] ibid. p.55
[134] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.55
[135] Gena Dagel Caponi ed., Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture, p.23.

a concert she is Signifyin(g) on her first hit record.[136] To give more significant example, *Mingus Ah Um* (1959), one of the most well known albums by Charles Mingus, is an extended tribute to ancestors with Signifying(g) on early African American traditions, cultural practices and musical genres. In "Better Get Hit in Yo' Soul" Mingus clearly Signifies on gospel singing and preaching of the sort that he has heard as a child in the African American church, as well as on blues, soul, New Orleans style jazz and so on. Besides, in "Open Letter to Duke," Bird Calls," "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" (which is later re-recorded under the name of "Theme for Lester Young") and "Jelly Roll" he simply Signifies on his musical influences: the music of Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Jelly Roll Morton. As Floyd remarks "Signifyin(g) is a way of being in both places at the same time."[137] Musical Signifyin(g), according to Floyd, is also "troping": "the transformation of pre-existing musical material by trifling with it, teasing it, or censuring it. Musical Signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of pre-existing material as a means of demonstrating *respect for* of or *poking fun* example at a musical style [as it is in either in Mingus' tribute to his beloved musicians or Parker's humoristic reference to "Woody Woodpecker" theme], progress, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanism."[138] In Dizzy Gillespie's autobiography *Dizzy: To be or not to Bop* (1979), Gillespie mentions that he owed much of his playing to Roy Eldridge, who influenced his playing from Louis Armstrong. But he explains that although he barely listens to Louis Armstrong he still knows where Roy Elbridge's musical inspiration comes from. Furthermore, in another part of his autobiography, he clarifies why he has no difficulties to accept the fact that younger generation's

[136] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.22.
[137] ibid, p.56.
[138] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.8.

preference of playing akin to other musicians' style rather than like him: "It's just progressing all the time. So I never mind a guy, a trumpet player, who doesn't play like me and wants to play like Clifford Brown, because I know he's playing like me anyway."[139] Gillespie was aware that younger trumpet players would carry his influence forward, taking up from his playing what they could and modifying it to their own purposes. At any given moment of performing, while Gillespie was Signifying(g) on King Oliver (Armstrong's inspiration), Louis Armstrong and Roy Elbridge he also responded to all the forces of the moment – economical, political and other source of music – and Signifyin(g) on the very moment as well (the performance itself.)

Moreover, Gillespie also mentions in the autobiography that he went to the Methodist church where he has got the first idea of the rhythm and harmony. He writes: "Like most black musicians, much of my early inspiration, especially with rhythm and harmonies, came from the church [where] everybody would be shouting and fainting and stomping… People like James Brown and Aretha Franklin owe everything to that Sanctified beat."[140] Here, if I quote Ralph Ellison, he inscribes in his essay "Remembering Jimmy" (1958), in which he tribute to the blues singer Jimmy Rushing, that "Jazz and the blues did not fit into the scheme of things as spelled out by our two main institutions, the church and the school, but they gave to attitudes which found no place in these and helped to give our lives some semblance of wholeness. Jazz and the public jazz dance was a third institution in our lives, and a vital one."[141] Here, Ellison, even though, he does not mention the organic bond between these "institutions" as we can distinguish it from Gillespie's instance all of these "tropes" are linked to each other

[139] Dizzy Gillespie & Al Fraser, *Dizzy: To be or Not to Bop/The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie*, p.486-489.
[140] Dizzy Gillespie & Al Fraser, *Dizzy: To be or Not to Bop/The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie*, p.31.
[141] Ralph Ellison, "Remembering Jimmy" (1962), p.243.

one or another (at least the African American church and music) and they are the part of cultural continuity of African American culture with Signifyin(g) on each other and on other ideas. Floyd coins the term "Call-Response" (the master trope or trope of tropes, but it should not confused with call and response) which includes all the essential elements of the dialogical and conventional nature of African American music including "the Signifyin(g), troping practices; calls, cries, whoops, and hollers; call-and-response, elision, pendular and blue thirds, musical expressions, vocal imitations by instruments, and parlando; multimeter, crossrhythms, and interlocking rhythms; and all the rest."[142] What Floyd calls for is total contribution of the listeners in music by the African American communal context as he offers the phase "Dance, Drum, and Song" which also refers to cultural continuity of African traditions in African American community.[143] Within Call-Response, the community of knowledge required for the deepest understanding of the music and the aim of the musicians (references, honourees or humorous acts) because "the most complete musico-aesthetic experience requires that listeners possess the knowledge, perceptual skills, emotional histories, and cultural perspectives appropriate to various genres" which is similar to jazz in which jazz musicians reference to similar/other/previous musical performances and compositions, and performers with troping practices ("trifling with it, teasing it, or censuring it" and so on) within their improvisations and compositions in a manner recognisable only to the jazz audience.[144] Further, the response of musicians is always crucial to whenever a particular musical idea is developed in the African American musical tradition. Here, Floyd coins another phrase "Good Critics" or "Self-Criticism" which requires listeners' response and participation to the performance with full understanding of culture, of

[142] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.60 & 96.
[143] Ibid, p.6.
[144] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.229.

course, “in case of African American music, with the process of Call-Response.”[145] If the listeners are unsuccessful to contribute to the jazz performance or do not succeed to read its required knowledge they will fail as critics. The “self-criticism” is an act of “discovering, distinguishing, and explaining cultural and musical value” in works of African American music.[146] But this criticism must be taken place during the act of performing rather than placing after the performance. The “self-criticising” process only works spontaneously, Floyd warns us, where musicians sing and play in contact with their cultural base.[147] Further, it can not function the same way when a group of audience manners is governed by the traditions of the Western Concert Hall. Here, I should quote John Gennari: [jazz] has challenged the norms of audience, shunning formal behavioural codes and audience passivity in favour of active, spontaneous response through vocal and bodily participation.”[148] This self-criticising process comprises a body of listener comments such as ““Oh yeah,” “Say it,” “He’s cookin’,” and “That’s bad.”[149] For instance, in Dinah Washington’s famous album *Dinah Jams* (1954), which was taped live in front of a studio audience with Clifford Brown and Max Roach Quintet, we can hear profound response and comment to Signifyin(g) process from the listeners with hand clapping, stomping, finger clicking, laughing out load and shouting (such as oh, yeah) to specifically given references to early performers (during the performance Washington most possibly Signifies on other names such as her musical influences Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith and the very moment. One can clearly distinguish Dizzy Gillespie’s sound in Clifford Brown’s solos on George Gershwin’s “Summertime.” In this particular performance “Good Critics” easily

[145] ibid, p.229.
[146] ibid,59.
[147] Ibid,60.
[148] John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," p.450.
[149] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (1995), p.59.

reminded the reference (call) and gave profound response and comment through out the performance. Moreover, the listener of the album *must* criticise the record as a whole (should not separate the performance and the audience) and *must* judge or enjoy the act of performance with not only musicians' talent/skill/capacity of playing and soloing (calling for response) but also the act of the audience commenting (responding to the musical event) as well. Then, the "Good Critics" also, even though he/she has not been present at the performance, *must* able to distinguish the difference between the noise (of the listeners), (the noise can also be part of the performance which I will be dealing in a minute) and the response/comment of the spectators and more essentially understand the self-criticising process as Albert Murray puts: "in the survival technology inherent in the underlying ritual as well."[150] As Scott De Veaux remarks: "The jazz tradition as we know it could not exist without recording technology… For better of worse, the history of jazz is history of recordings."[151] Although, Floyd did not mention the cultural transformation of African American culture via listening to the jazz recordings a good critic can still be an outsider viewer of the performance and even though he/she could not be there, part of the performance, commented on the moment, and the act of performance, a good critic can still appreciate and achieve an understanding what was happened there through listening. Henry Louis Gates defines the African American vernacular as "the church songs, blues, ballads, sermons, and stories… that are part of the oral, not primarily the literate (or written down) tradition of black expression."[152] He continues: "call/response patterns of many kinds; group creation; and a percussive, often dance-beat orientation not only in musical forms but in rhythm of a tale or rhyme…

[150] Albert Murray, The Stomping the Blues, p.42.
[151] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social & Musical History* ((1997), London: Picador, p.36.
[152] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (1988)*, p.4.

[I]mprovisation is a highly prized aspect of vernacular performance."[153] Thus, jazz as vernaculars is not a music which is just based on musical notations of harmonies, melodies and rhythms, but while it is all of these, it is also a part of an oral tradition that is requested an understanding of African American tradition, cultural memory and in Floyd's phase "Call-Response." And jazz improvisation is brought together all these notions together.

Joachim E. Berendt remarks in his book, *The Jazz Book,* that many jazz musicians (except free jazz musicians) improvise on a given harmonic structure which is exactly the same in European concert music.[154] For example, what Johann Sebastian Bach did when playing "a chaconne or an air" he improvised "on the harmonics on which the melody was based, or embellished the given melody" and that is exactly the same improvisational approach what Coleman Hawkins did in his famous "Body and Soul" (1939). However, it does not mean that Berendt pays no attention to the significance of African American cultural memory by pointing out the similarities in improvisational methods of jazz and classical music. He is aware that European concert musical performances today are judged according to authenticity, i.e. whether a piece of music is played as the composer "meant to be" which is irrelevant to the idea of modern jazz improvisation.[155] Because the art of jazz improvisation can not be judged what the composer meant to do but what actuality performer did. Berendt explains:

> [W]hat was once created by improvising is linked to the man who created it. It cannot be separated from him, notated, and given to a second or third musician to play. If this happens, it loses its character, and nothing remains but the naked formula of notes.[156]

[153] ibid, p.4.
[154] Joachim E. Berendt, *The Jazz Book: F*rom Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond, (1992) p.145.
[155] Joachim E. Berendt, *The Jazz Book: F*rom Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond, (1992) p.147.
[156] ibid, p,150.

In 1940s bebop era, performer/performing becomes much more significant than the composer and the composition itself. Thus, unlike in classical musical tradition, every time there is a jam session or a concert jazz musician recreate a new piece while playing the specific composition. Moreover, even the musician performs his/her own composition the process of Signifyin(g) is inevitably taken place. Because every musician has his/her own voice/sound that makes the composition unique within the performance. With the bebop period, the jazz audience was looking for Charlie Parker's own sound within the composition unlike in classical tradition. They were looking for Charlie Parker himself as a performer and an improviser. Once he died there is no point to listen Parker's composition from another jazz musician. Because what other musicians do would be another performance unlike Parker's, even though he played the same compositions. That is why jazz is 20th century music and why we need to record all those performance within the commercial society. Unlike in classical tradition there is no point someone other than Parker to play the compositions of Parker. It is eventually always becomes another composition.

V. Conclusion

To conclude, jazz performance is a significant site of conflict between African and Euro American literary representations. Because of its indisputable importance to jazz, "live performance"--that is, musicians working in front of an audience on the street, in a club or theatre, at a celebration, or anywhere else--figures prominently in the literary uses and depictions of jazz and jazz musicians by both African and Euro Americans. A

comparison of these uses and depictions, however, reveals significant differences between the two kinds of texts. Jazz, it has been argued in many scholarly articles, is assumed that the only true American art form and the only place where democracy actually works. One the one hand, if this is truly the case, then it is so because jazz contains "some key to a fuller freedom of self-realization," as Ralph Ellison puts it in his essay.[157] On the other hand, Ellison sustained, "there is in [jazz] a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself, for true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group." [158] Thus, jazz echoes the tensions that lie at the heart of the American experience: the tension between the individual and the community, black and white, freedom and oppression, the Old World (both Africa and Europe) and the New World, innovation and tradition, harmony and dissonance, resistance and compromise. Jazz, then, is in many ways should be a metaphor for the place where it is called the United States.

African American music, (either jazz or the blues), has always-double connotations – DuBois's concept of double consciousness, highlighting not only the spiritual but also the blues' and jazz's multivalent meanings, and they are part of the same tradition. African American music has transcended its ethnic, racial, and national distinctiveness (whether constructed or otherwise), having been adopted and adapted by musicians across the globe. At the same time, black music as constituting an empowering mode of expression for African Americans and other Afro-diasporic musicians contending with the Americas' long history of cultural, social, and racial strife.

[157] Ralph Ellison, "Charlie Christian Story" (1962), p.258.
[158] Ralph Ellison, "Remembering Jimmy" (1962), p.236.

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