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Freedom Now!: Four Hard Bop and Avant-garde Jazz Musicians'
Musical Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement, 1958-1964

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
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Rock, New York City, Religion, Freedom

ABSTRACT

Freedom Now!: Four Hard Bop and Avant-garde Jazz Musicians'
Musical Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement, 1958-1964

by

Lucas Aaron Henry

In this study, I examined musical recordings from the jazz idiom that relate to events or ideas involved in the Civil Rights Movement during the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s. The study focused on the four following musicians' recordings: Charles Mingus, "Fables of Faubus"; Sonny Rollins, *The Freedom Suite*; Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*; and John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*.

The study relies primarily on the aforementioned recordings, critics analysis of those recordings, and events that took place during the Civil Right Movement.

The study concludes that these recordings are not only commentary about ideas and events but historically representative of the movement as well.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. CLAIMING AMERICA'S CULTURE: SONNY ROLLINS, ORRIN KEEPNEWS, AND <i>FREEDOM SUITE</i> 'S RACIAL IMPLICATIONS...	10
3. "NAME ME SOMEONE WHO'S RIDICULOUS": CHARLES MINGUS REACTS TO GOVERNOR ORVAL FAUBUS AND THE LITTLE ROCK DESEGREGATION EPISODE.....	31
4. "MUSIC IS CLASSLESS BUT RACES, KNOWLEDGE, AND LIFE- CONDITIONS ARE NOT: ORNETTE COLEMAN'S <i>FREE JAZZ</i> AS A METAPHOR FOR THE AMBITIONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.....	53
5. CAN I GET A WITNESS?: MUSICAL REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 IN JOHN COLTRANE'S <i>A LOVE SUPREME</i>	77
6. CONCLUSION.....	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105
VITA.....	114

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*¹ in favor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that not only ended a nationwide social policy that had been in effect since the same body ruled in favor of "separate but equal" accommodations for African-Americans in *Plessy v. Ferguson*,² but also jump-started the modern Civil Rights Movement by moving the issue of civil rights out of the regional context, i.e. the Southern states, to the national arena. This was the first major breakthrough for African-American society since the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments following the American Civil War. Progress would not move quickly, however, and it would be another ten years before the United States would see major Civil Rights legislation when Congress, under heavy pressure from the Johnson Administration, passed the Civil Rights Act of

¹ 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

² 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

1964, declaring that discrimination in places of public accommodation and in the workplace was illegal.³

The decade between the Brown decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 saw the introduction of many important players to the movement on both sides of the coin, including Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Orval Faubus, Malcolm X, George Wallace, James Meredith, John and Robert Kennedy, Stokely Carmichael, and a host of others. These individuals would create situations and conflicts that ultimately led to the passage of the 1964 act and later to many other advances in the name of civil rights.

However, these individuals were not the most important pieces to the greater civil rights puzzle; they only provided the framework that required many other elements to complete the picture. These groups were made up of common people-white, black, Asian, Native American, religious, not-so-religious, straight, gay, male, female, celebrity, unknown, Northern, Southern, Western, urban, and rural; in other words, certain individuals of the aforementioned groups who were present in the United States during the Civil Rights movement played a part in its ultimate successes and failures. Without support in all parts of

³ Congress, House, *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 88th Congress, 2nd session, H.R. 7152 (2 July 1964).

the country and from all walks of life, the movement would have had no momentum to carry it to and beyond its goals. On the other hand, had there been no opposition in all parts of the country and from all walks of life, the movement would not have been as strong as it was and likely would have become complacent in its efforts.

This is where the involvement of people in the popular culture become important. Without entertainers, writers, and other celebrities endorsing the efforts of the movement, much support would have likely been lost in sections of the country. The involvement of individuals like Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, Sammy Davis, Ray Charles, and many others expanded the African-American influence across the country.

One of the most outspoken groups of entertainers were the jazz musicians from New York City. For nearly three decades prior to the modern Civil Rights Movement, jazz musicians were constantly flexing their muscles of social commentary. In the 1920s, singers like Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong were singing about the experiences of the poor African-American in places like the South, Chicago, and New York. In the 1930s, the big bands of the swing era were very noticeably segregated, and black and white bands would often enter "cutting contests" (sessions where two

bands would set up bandstands on opposite ends of a ballroom and take turns playing, trying to outplay one another) to determine which was the better band. In 1939, Billie Holiday recorded a song for the Commodore label entitled "Strange Fruit," a song written by a white high school English teacher from New Jersey; the song described the inhumanity of the lynchings that were taking place in the Deep South at the time. And in the 1940s, Duke Ellington would write the first extended jazz piece that was concerned with Civil Rights issues, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, which dealt with the variety of elements that defined the African American experience of the time period.

However, after the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the musicians became much more vocal in their opinions about the subject of civil rights. An entire style of music was created in its stead— Hard Bop, which turned an already aggressive bebop into an angry blues and religious based jazz form. This style would produce some very important musicians who would not only teach an entire generation of jazz musicians (Art Blakey and Charles Mingus) but also continue to perform from the 1950s to the present (Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, and McCoy Tyner). Many of these musicians would be the most

socially vocal of any mainstream performer, be they musical, dramatic, or literary.

The following chapters will discuss the music of four musicians, focusing on one particular piece by each. The first chapter focuses on Sonny Rollins, the "colossus" of jazz saxophone in the 1950s, and his musical commentary about the racial divide between the recording industry and the African-American musicians in jazz through "The Freedom Suite." Second, is the musician who provided perhaps the most noteworthy musical commentary on an event that was a direct result of the Brown decision, the Little Rock desegregation confrontation of 1957: Charles Mingus, with his piece "Fables of Faubus." The third chapter covers the build-up to the mass civil rights demonstrations and protests that began to take place around the country in 1960 and the progression of freedom in jazz from bebop to Avant-garde, culminating with the release of Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*, with comparisons to the inside debates over the album's theories and the missions and theories of the different groups associated with the Civil Rights Movement. The fourth and final chapter will deal with John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, its proximity to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and its representation of progression towards achieving one's goals, be it spiritual, social,

economic, or political. The conclusion of this work will discuss the changing audience of jazz after World War II, the effects that this shift had on bebop, why other forms of popular music played a more central role in the Civil Rights Movement, and why jazz, as a result, is historically representative of the movement.

CHAPTER 2

CLAIMING AMERICA'S CULTURE: SONNY ROLLINS, ORRIN KEEPNEWS, AND *THE FREEDOM SUITE'S* RACIAL IMPLICATIONS

In 1956, Nat Hentoff was fired from his position as assistant editor and reporter at the New York offices of *Down Beat*. The corporate headquarters for the company were in Chicago, and it was very difficult to get quick permission from the home offices to hire anyone. So when Hentoff needed to hire an assistant, he didn't wait for the headquarters to clear his request to hire a lady who appeared to be African-American (but was actually of Egyptian descent). Shortly after, *Down Beat's* president came to New York from his Chicago office and discovered what Hentoff had done; he quickly declared that Hentoff was to be let go, effective immediately, citing insubordination as the reason. Nat left the hallowed halls of the largest and most popular jazz publication of the 20th Century only to become one of the most sought after freelance writers of the 1950s, writing for several different publications until 1958, when he not only went to work writing for *Village*

Voice, but also created *Jazz Review*, his own jazz publication alongside his friend, critic Martin Williams.⁴

This event is an example of the diversity (or lack thereof) on the executive level of jazz music in the 1950s. Not only were the majority of the people involved in jazz criticism white, but many of the executives in the recording industry, be they people from the record labels, the recording studio, the marketing staff, the distributors, etc., were white as well; it seemed that the only African-American people in the industry were the musicians themselves.

This racial divide in the jazz industry was the basis behind Sonny Rollins's "Freedom Suite", taken from the album of the same name. It was one of the first and perhaps one of the boldest statements made by a recording artist about the subject up to that time. However, the recording failed to make a deep impact on the business side of the industry due to the reaction from Rollins's agent in the liner notes to the album, and also from the lack of reaction to the social implications of the piece from the critics of the major publications that Rollins had targeted when he recorded the piece. "Freedom Suite" did, however,

⁴ Nat Hentoff, *Speaking Freely: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 45.

turn some heads when it came to the musicians in the jazz world.

"Jazz is the kind of music one feels and age has nothing to do with it."

--Sonny Rollins, to Henry Kahn, 1958.⁵

Sonny Rollins was born 7 September 1930 in Harlem to parents of Caribbean descent. Both of his parents were from St. Thomas, which would later become the name of one of his most famous compositions (Rumor has it that Sonny had heard his father hum a similar melody when he was very young, and that he held that melody in his memory until he composed the song.). Unlike many other musicians who lived and performed regularly in the New York jazz scene of the 1950s and 1960s, Rollins was born and grew up in New York City; he lived near and was able to hear and mingle with the great jazz musicians of the 1930s and early 1940s, idolizing the likes of Louis Jordan, Bud Powell, Don Redman, and Coleman Hawkins. Also, Rollins was able to begin performing with the great musicians of the late 1940s and early 1950s on the main stage at the relatively young age of 19 years, unlike many others who at that age were only moving to New York and would have to establish

⁵ Henry Kahn, "Sonny Rollins says 'No pianos for me,'" *Melody Maker*, 14 March 1959, 5.

themselves as legitimate musicians before they could hope to share the stage with well-known players.⁶

Rollins's first recordings were as a sideman for Babs Gonzales, Bud Powell, Fats Navarro, J.J. Johnson, and Charlie Parker. His big break, however, came as a sideman for the Miles Davis Quintet, for which he would make four recordings (*Bag's Groove* [1954], *Conception* [1951], *Miles and Horns* [1951, 1953], *Miles Davis and His Orchestra* [1953]) producing such compositions as "Airegin", "Oleo", and "Doxy". Rollins would later join the Clifford Brown/Max Roach combo, recording once before Brown's death (*Clifford Brown and Max Roach at Basin Street* [1956]) and twice with Roach as leader after Brown's death (*Jazz in 3/4 Time* [1957], *Max Roach Plus Four* [1956]). Other important sideman jobs included recordings with Thelonious Monk (*Thelonious Monk Quintet* [1953], *Work* [1953], and *Brilliant Corners* [1956]), The Modern Jazz Quartet (*The Modern Jazz Quartet at Music Inn v.1 & 2* [1958], *The Modern Jazz Quartet with Sonny Rollins* [1953]), Dizzy Gillespie (*Dizzy Gillespie with Sonny Stitt and Sonny Rollins* [1957]), and Art Farmer (*Early Art* [1954]).⁷

⁶ Eric Nisenson, *Open Sky: Sonny Rollins and His World of Improvisation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 16-17.

⁷ Charles Blancq, *Sonny Rollins: The Journey of a Jazzman* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983) 130-32.

In the mid-1950s, Rollins became known as an independent soloist, recording albums such as *Sonny Rollins Plus Four* (1956), *Saxophone Colossus* (1956), *Tenor Madness* (1956), *Way Out West* (1957), *The Freedom Suite* (1958), and *Newk's Time* (1958). The key to Rollins's success was the mastery of a very distinct style of improvisation: melodic development of theme, a unique type of soloing that takes a different shape from the styles that came before. Earlier soloists would play within chord progressions, making the soloistic developments harmonic in nature; Rollins, however, based his soloistic developments around the themes suggested in the composed melody. While other artists were creating their solos around the composition, Rollins was developing the composition around the solos. This was a revolutionary concept for the time, and not only made Rollins a very recognizable saxophonist, but also made him a very popular artist; Sonny's influence can be heard in many of the artists from the next wave in the 1960s, such as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Freddie Hubbard, McCoy Tyner, and others.⁸

Despite his growing popularity, Rollins was his own harshest critic. Even though he had been voted as the Saxophonist of the Year in *Down Beat* magazine, he was very

⁸ Blancq, *Sonny Rollins*, 132-36.

dissatisfied with his playing; in 1959, Rollins completely removed himself from performing and recording so that he could practice and exercise extensively to make himself a better player. During this time, he did not have to work due to royalty checks from previous recordings, so he was able to completely devote his time to his health and his music; it was during this time that he would make his famous journeys onto the Williamsburg Bridge to practice. This sabbatical would not end for two years, when he returned to the performing world with a date at the Jazz Gallery in Harlem.⁹

Upon Rollins's return in 1961, it was very much noted by critics that his sound was harsher than in previous recordings. Rollins had not only been practicing every day, but he had also been listening to the music of the new Avant-garde artists who were springing up around him and began to incorporate their techniques into his own music. In 1962, he would go on to hire Don Cherry and Billy Higgins, two of the original members of Ornette Coleman's first quartet, to record and make live appearances; this arrangement would produce three albums: *Our Man In Jazz*, *What's New?*, and *Stuttgart 1963 Concert*. This, alongside the involvement of John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard

⁹ Blancq, *Sonny Rollins*, 9-11.

(trumpet), and Scott LaFaro (bass) in the new style of music, signaled that the Avant-garde style was a legitimate form of jazz in the 1960s.¹⁰

However, Rollins would again grow tired of his performance quality and leave jazz again for four months in 1968, and then for two years from 1969-1971. Upon returning, Rollins made recordings in several different veins, including *Milestone Jazzstars* [1978] with John Coltrane's former pianist McCoy Tyner, *Easy Living* [1977] with fusion legend George Duke, and *The Cutting Edge* [1974], which featured a traditional jazz combo setting with an unusual addition: bagpipes, played by Rufus Harley. Rollins would take another short sabbatical in 1983 after collapsing from exhaustion but returned after six months; he has been constantly touring ever since and has made several recordings and numerous concert dates in the past 21 years. In 2004, at the age of 73, Rollins received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Grammy Awards Show.¹¹

¹⁰ Blancq, *Sonny Rollins*, 132-36.

¹¹ Bob Blumenthal, "Features: 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award, Sonny Rollins," *GRAMMY Magazine*, 6 February 2004. < http://www.grammy.com/features/2004/0206_rollins.aspx >

"Producing jazz records has been my major preoccupation for more than three decades. It's the way I have for the most part earned my living and gained my creative satisfaction since the early 1950s, when I ruined a perfectly good hobby by transforming myself from a jazz fan into a professional."

--Orrin Keepnews, 1988.¹²

Orrin Keepnews, Rollins's white counterpart when *Freedom Suite* was recorded for Riverside, began his career in jazz after his return from a World War II bomber crew. As he was growing up, he wanted to become a journalist of some sort, but his involvement in the war prohibited his enrollment in an advanced college journalism program. He had attended Columbia in the early 1940s before his participation in the military, and while working for the college newspaper, he was introduced into the world of jazz by writing the paper's reviews of the live big band music that was being played in the city at that time. Upon his return to the States after the war, Keepnews went to work for a small publishing house as an associate editor until he was offered a position as editor for a small jazz magazine, *Record Changer*. Keepnews would stay with this publication until 1952 when, alongside Bill Grauer, he would produce 10 reissues of classic jazz albums for RCA

¹² Orrin Keepnews, *The View From Within: Jazz Writings, 1948-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 3.

Victor. In 1953, Keepnews and Grauer founded their own label, Riverside, in an attempt to produce the type of music that they wanted to record. Riverside would go on to record many of the musicians who were associated with the "hard bop" style of bebop jazz, including music by Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Cannonball Adderly, Johnny Griffin, Wes Montgomery, and Sonny Rollins.

One of the unique aspects about the Riverside label was the way in which liner notes were produced. The frugal Keepnews, not willing to pay current writers and critics from the major jazz publications to write the notes (which was the standard protocol), used his own journalistic talents to write nearly all of the liner notes for the Riverside releases. On one hand, this practice would produce a very personal description of the recording, because the producer was usually present and would witness most, if not all, of the recording session; the producer would also get to know the artists better than the average jazz critic. On the other hand, if the critics were to write the liner notes, there would be a less biased take on the content of the recording.¹³

Riverside would stay in existence until 1964, one year after the death of Bill Grauer. Two years later, Keepnews

¹³ Keepnews, *The View From Within*, 5-7

teamed up with Dick Katz to form the Milestone label, which would record progressive jazz, including music from McCoy Tyner, Lee Konitz, Joe Henderson, Sonny Rollins, and Ron Carter. In 1972, Keepnews was hired by the Fantasy label, which had previously been known for its recordings of West Coast Jazz artists Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan, the controversial comedian Lenny Bruce, and Credence Clearwater Revival; after Keepnews became the supervising jazz editor for the label, Fantasy acquired the catalogs of three significant labels: Riverside and Milestone, which Keepnews had managed for the previous fifteen years, and Prestige, one of the largest record labels during the 1950s and 1960s, which had recorded such artists as Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Stan Getz.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Keepnews continued to work for Fantasy, but also produced reissues for other labels such as BMG and GRP, both record label conglomerates that house the old recordings of Decca, Vocalion, Bluebird, Brunswick, and Victor. He also continues to write liner notes and articles for various recordings and publications.¹⁴ In 2004, Keepnews, along with jazz pianist and NPR's "Piano Jazz" host Marian McPartland, was honored with the Trustees

¹⁴ *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (New York: Grove Dictionaries Inc., 2002). Articles include: "Keepnews, Orrin", "Riverside," "Milestone," "Fantasy."

Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences at the annual Grammy Awards show in the same year that Sonny Rollins received his Lifetime Achievement Award.¹⁵ 46 years before these awards were given, the two men would work together on a project that would raise (or ruffle) eyebrows around the jazz industry.

"I'd like to conquer [the tenor saxophone]. That's a lifetime job, but as long as things go halfway good, I have hopes."

--Sonny Rollins, in an interview with Dom Cerulli, 1958.¹⁶

1957 was a critical year in the young career of Sonny Rollins. The previous year, Rollins had recorded what was his most famous and critically acclaimed album, *Saxophone Colossus*, and had followed it up with two recordings with the renowned and talented Clifford Brown/Max Roach ensemble. Definitely feeling the need to continue his success, he took a major chance that would not only define the sound in which he played before he took his first sabbatical in 1959 but also haunt him for decades after his return.

¹⁵ Dave Helland, "Features: 2004 Trustees Award, Orrin Keepnews," *GRAMMY Magazine*, 4 February 2004.
< http://www.grammy.com/features/2004/0204_keepnews.aspx >

¹⁶ Cerulli, Dom, "Sonny Believes He Can Accomplish Much More Than He Has to Date," *Down Beat*, 10 July 1958, 16.

Rollins always enjoyed playing in situations where he was free to take his improvisations in the directions of the melodic developments that he wanted to make at the time of his solo, regardless of complexity or simplicity. During his tenure with Thelonious Monk's band and Sonny's recording sessions in which Monk sat in on piano, Rollins had been in that type of situation because Monk played so sparsely and with a compact harmonic structure. Monk's chord choices during another person's improvisation would never get in the way of what the featured performer was playing and would often contain one or two notes played so close together that they could fit into any chord, either through primary notes or as extensions of whatever chord the soloist was suggesting. This type of piano accompaniment (or "comping") suited Sonny's playing style very much. However, it was impossible to have someone of Monk's caliber playing with him at all times; not only did he have his own ideas and projects, but Thelonious Monk (or the legions of Monk fans) could play second fiddle to no one for very long.

After several failed attempts to find a pianist who could fit his style, Rollins decided not to play with pianists any more. In an interview just months after he made his decision, he said: "I couldn't seem to find a

[pianist] who would contribute. They got in the way. They played too much. Their chords interrupted my train of thought. I ended up getting bugged at the piano players. And I got this idea that I didn't need a piano."¹⁷ It was also very important to Rollins that he be very identifiable in an age where more and more saxophonists were coming on to the scene. In one of *Down Beat's* "Blindfold Tests", articles in which the columnist plays recordings (sometimes obscure) for a jazz musician who then has to identify the artists, Rollins responded to one of the recordings by Duke Ellington quickly, saying that "...it's very important to have a sound that you can recognize almost immediately."¹⁸ The decision to play without piano (or any other chord producing instrument) allowed him to open up much more with his improvisations, thus giving him room to play more harmonically complex melodic developments and variations in his playing and develop a definitive sound.

Rollins would produce four albums from early 1957 through 1958 that used this lineup, three of which were wildly successful: *Way Out West*, *Night at the Village Vanguard*, and *More From the Vanguard*.¹⁹ The other, however,

¹⁷ Cerulli, Dom, "Sonny Believes," 16.

¹⁸ Leonard Feather, "The Blindfold Test: Rollins in $\frac{3}{4}$ Time," *Down Beat*, 12 December 1959, 39.

¹⁹ Blancq, *Sonny Rollins*, 132-36.

would not receive quite the attention as the other three, even though it was just as musically powerful and inventive. *The Freedom Suite* was perhaps Sonny's most lightly received album between the release of *Saxophone Colossus* in 1956 and his first sabbatical in 1959, and most of the ignorance may have stemmed from things that had nothing to do with music at all.

"*Freedom Suite* opened the door for creative music with a social conscience."

--Bob Blumenthal, describing Sonny Rollins's achievement 46 years after the release of *Freedom Suite*, 2004.²⁰

First of all, before the album was released, Rollins had wished to include a quote on the album's cover that would help the listeners fully understand what had influenced him to compose "The Freedom Suite," the piece that would also lend its name to the title of the album. The quote appeared as follows:

"America is deeply rooted in Negro culture; its colloquialisms, its humor, its music. How ironic that the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own, is being persecuted and

²⁰ Bob Blumenthal, "Features: 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award, Sonny Rollins," *GRAMMY Magazine*, 6 February 2004. < http://www.grammy.com/features/2004/0206_rollins.aspx >

repressed, that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity."²¹

Producer Orrin Keepnews, who always insisted that the performer be allowed as much control in the recording process as possible, reluctantly allowed Rollins to include the quote on the back cover of the album.²² This, along with the title of the album and the fact that "The Freedom Suite" encompassed the entire first side of the album, made the release of *The Freedom Suite* a strong political statement.

In his quote, Rollins states that America's culture has developed from African- American culture. The most obvious example can be found in music, which was mostly influenced after the advent of the recording industry. Before a person could go out and purchase the same recordings in New York, Los Angeles, and everywhere in between, sheet music was the most popular form of music sold in America, with composers such as Stephen Foster, Irving Berlin, and Arthur Sullivan being the top sellers; other types of music in America were very regionalized, the most widely known of which was ragtime, which was heard in

²¹ Sonny Rollins, *The Freedom Suite*, Riverside 258, 1958.

²² Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 50-51.

New Orleans and in various places along the Mississippi River, and old-time (or Hillbilly) music, which was heard in the Southern Appalachians. However, the birth of the recording industry in the early Twentieth Century paved the way for the Dixieland of the 1910s and the Hot Jazz of the 1920s to overtake listeners across America. This ultimately made swing music the most popular music in America during the 1930s, and it could be heard in almost every part of the United States.

Rollins also makes note that humorous style is another of the African-American gifts to American culture. In the early days of the film industry, some of the leading comic actors and actresses were black, including such actors and characters: Farina, Stymie, and Buckwheat from *Our Gang*; Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who was an important counterpart in the Shirley Temple films; Louise Beavers, who played very famous motherly servant roles in films such as *Imitation of Life*; and Stepin Fetchit, the role model for comic black actors until the rise of African-American superstars Sydney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge in the 1950s. In many cases, these actors often stole the

limelight away from the featured white stars who were involved in the film.²³

Another example of African-American influenced humor can be found in the bebop influence of Lenny Bruce, whose in-your-face style of comedy, even though extremely preoccupied with Jewish themes, was reminiscent of the Hard-Bop style of jazz performances of Art Blakey, Clifford Brown, Max Roach, and Rollins. As a result of his comic style, he often performed in the same New York clubs that the jazz musicians were playing and often shared billing with them as well. There are several reviews of his performances alongside the jazz performances and albums in the major jazz publications.

The order in which Rollins organizes the songs on *Freedom Suite* is very important. As previously stated, the title track takes up the entire first side of the album, which would normally pass by unnoticed; however, Rollins did not write any of the other tracks on the album. "Someday I'll Find You," "Will You Still Be Mine," "'Till There Was You," and "Shadow Waltz," (written by Noel Coward, Matt Dennis, Meredith Wilson, and Harry Warren, respectively) were all included on the B side of the album;

²³ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 20-21, 47-52, 62, 39.

interestingly enough, all of these songwriters were white, with most of the songs written for showtunes and made popular in the jazz circuit by vocalists such as Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire, Bing Crosby, and Judy Garland. Coupling this with the opening of Rollins statement that "America is deeply rooted in Negro culture; its colloquialisms, its humor, its music," Rollins is delivering political sarcasm, with the order arrangement reinforcing his belief that the best of American culture is that which comes from African-American society.

Even though he allowed Rollins to include the statement on the cover of the album, Keepnews made comments in the liner notes that took away from Rollins's intentions concerning the social context of the album. In an attempt to reduce the acidity of Rollins's statement, Keepnews claimed that "the reference is to the musical freedom of this unusual combination of composition and improvisation," making the argument that the lack of piano mixed with the imagination of the performers gave them more "freedom" to play in and around the composition in their improvisations, developing the piece as it went along, rather than sticking to one particular style or set of chord changes. In a reference to the meaning which Rollins intended, Keepnews stated that "...this is not a piece about Emmett Till, or

Little Rock, or Harlem or the peculiar election laws of Georgia or Louisiana, no more than it is *about* the artistic freedom of jazz."²⁴ These statements seem to be an attempt at preemptive damage control; one has to keep in mind that Keepnews was not only the producer of *Freedom Suite* but also the head of the label on which the album was released, and that any overtly bad press about a record or an artist can not only hurt the reputation of a record label but also affect future record sales. With the title of the album and Rollins statement on the cover, many markets outside of the New York City area may not have reacted well to the release of the album, and many of the critics could in turn be excessively harsh when reviewing the album.

However, the critics were not. There were actually very few reviews, and most did not even mention the social implications of the record if they even mentioned Sonny's statement at all. *Down Beat* did not review *Freedom Suite* at all. Even in the most complimentary review, which came in Nat Hentoff's and Martin Williams's *Jazz Review*, critic Dick Hadlock mentioned only musical ideas. In the opening paragraph, he stated: "Whether or not *Freedom Suite* is, as annotator Orrin Keepnews claims, 'about freedom as Sonny is equipped to perceive it,' it is an engrossing and, I

²⁴ Sonny Rollins, *The Freedom Suite*, Riverside 258, 1958.

believe, successful effort to fit relatively uninhibited improvisation into a meaningful compositional structure." Later, in the final paragraph, Hadlock once again skirted the social issue that was the root of the composition, saying that "*Freedom Suite* is a successful jazz composition because it *requires* and *generates* spontaneous collective and individual improvisation."²⁵

There may be several reasons that the critics chose either not to mention the social context of "The Freedom Suite" or to even review it at all. One possibility is that Keepnews's liner notes could have served as a warning to the critics, telling them not to talk about that in their writing. As a record producer and label manager, Keepnews helped keep jazz publications afloat by buying advertising space in their publications. Reviews often influence the buying patterns of customers, and a review that sheds light on a subject of racial matters might alienate a specific audience, thus lowering record sales and income for the label. Another reason is that the critics liked Sonny Rollins quite well. After the release of *Saxophone Colossus*, Rollins was perhaps the leading tenor saxophonist in the jazz industry, and they may not

²⁵ Dick Hadlock, "Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite*," *Jazz Review* May 1959, 10-11.

have wanted to see him decline in popularity among the listeners and customers due to a comment about race relations that had nothing to do with his talent as a musician. It is also possible that the critics wanted jazz to not become an open forum for social and political issues, for jazz had not had a deliberate statement about racial issues since the 1939 release of "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday on the Commodore label; almost all of the social commentary from jazz musicians through their music from 1939 to 1958 were made in secondhand fashion, mainly through obscure references in the titles (such as Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige Suite*) and off-the-record comments made by the musicians to journalists. However, *The Freedom Suite* was the first for nearly twenty years to make such a bold statement.

Despite their reasons were for ignoring the implications of *The Freedom Suite*, the critics would not have to wait long for their next example of social commentary from a jazz musician. Many of the other musicians must have taken note, for the next major statement came from perhaps the angriest and most vocally uninhibited man in jazz history, Charles Mingus, the very next year.

CHAPTER 3

"NAME ME SOMEONE WHO'S RIDICULOUS": CHARLES MINGUS REACTS TO GOVERNOR ORVAL FAUBUS AND THE LITTLE ROCK DESEGREGATION EPISODE

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the NAACP on the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, stating that the segregation of public schools in the United States was unconstitutional based on the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.²⁶ Reaction to this judicial legislation was slow, however, with several states in the South, such as Mississippi and Alabama, not desegregating their schools until the 1960s. The *Brown* case was an early event in the Civil Rights Movement, taking place nearly nineteen months before Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, three years before the desegregation incident in Little Rock, six years before the non-violent sit-in movements, eight years before James Meredith's enrollment as the first African-American student at Ole Miss, and ten years before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.²⁷

It was not until September of 1957 that Arkansas governor Orval Faubus would make his fateful decision to

²⁶ 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

²⁷ Congress, House, *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 88th Congress, 2nd session, H.R. 7152 (2 July 1964).

block the integration of nine black students into Central High School in Little Rock. Faubus was torn between appeasing the white Arkansas voters in his upcoming bid for re-election as governor and the progressive socialist values that his father had taught him as he was growing up; however, the desire for political gain won out in the end, and Faubus's last minute decision was arguably the most nationally visible of his long tenure as Arkansas governor.

Meanwhile, in New York City, jazz music was in the midst of one of the most progressive decades of its long history. During World War II, when many of the more famous swing musicians were either participating in the military as soldiers or performers, the up-and-coming musicians were making vast changes to their playing style. Many of the musicians who did not serve were spending their time playing in informal, impromptu jam sessions with younger musicians who were not yet old enough to participate in the military; these jam sessions, especially the ones with far fewer players than a traditional swing band, required the participants to improvise more often and for longer periods of time than previous performing situations, and as the performers grew more accustomed to the style, so did their technical ability on their instruments. By the end of the

war, this new style had a name— "bebop"— and was quickly becoming the jazz medium of choice.

The young champions of the bebop movement— Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach— particularly enjoyed the freedoms that the style allowed them to play with, both improvisationally and harmonically. Before, the large swing bands (fifteen to twenty musicians) relied heavily on sheet music; a majority of the music was written out for the players, with only 16-32 bars (roughly 20-60 seconds) of a tune dedicated to improvisation by one player. Bebop, however, used hardly any sheet music at all; the only written²⁸ part would be the "head", or introductory melody and chord progression that is heard at the beginning and end of the piece. The remainder of the piece was dedicated to improvisation while the rhythm section played inside the given chord progression.

At this time, Charles Mingus was living across the continent in Los Angeles, either playing with the musicians in the area or delivering mail for the U.S. Postal Service. There were very few big bands to play with in Los Angeles during the war, and as in New York City, the local

²⁸ In this case, "written" does not necessarily mean that the composer sat down with pencil and paper to write the music. Instead, it means only that it is predetermined by the composer, and could be taught to the other performers by ear.

musicians were playing in smaller groups out of necessity. Also, perhaps influenced by the recordings and cross-country tours of the more famous New York jazz musicians, the small combo trend continued in Los Angeles after the war ended, and Mingus would play in this format in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. However, due to his educational background, Mingus was not completely satisfied playing spur-of-the-moment improvisational music all of the time.

"This mule could be called stubborn- and lazy/ But in a clever sort of way./ This mule's waiting and planning.../ And working.../ In seclusion-/ For a sacred kind of day."

--Charles Mingus, "This Mule Ain't from Moscow"²⁹

Charles Mingus Jr. was born 22 April 1922 on a United States Army base in Nogales, Arizona. His father, Charles Sr., was a Staff Sergeant in the Quartermaster Corps who joined at the age of thirty-eight after working for the United States Postal Service for several years. Charles Jr. was a product of mixed races, which proved to be a difficult situation for a young man in the 1930s and 1940s; his paternal grandfather was African-American, his paternal grandmother was Swedish, his maternal grandfather was British, and his maternal grandmother was Chinese. Most of

²⁹ Charles Mingus, "This Mule Ain't From Moscow," *Down Beat*, 3 October 1956, 4.

Charles' family had more African-American features, but Charles inherited many features from all of his backgrounds; as a result, whatever group he was associated with, he was always considered an outsider.³⁰

Charles' family moved to the Watts section of Los Angeles shortly after his birth so that Charles, Sr. could find adequate medical attention for his ill wife, Harriett, who passed away in October 1922. Charles was raised by his stepmother, Mamie Carson, who insisted that the Mingus children learn music while they were growing up; Charles's older sisters, Grace and Vivian, learned piano and violin, while Charles picked up trombone and began lessons with a music teacher who turned out to be a quack. After the teacher incorrectly instructed him how to play trombone, Charles switched instruments and teachers, making a wise move to cello. After a few years studying the instrument, he was able to receive a position in the Los Angeles Junior Orchestra, which gave him a vast introduction to the European classical music style and repertoire.³¹

³⁰ Gene Santoro, *Myself When I am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14.

³¹ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 24-26, 31-34.

The environment of the Junior Orchestra, along with the cultural landscape of his neighborhood, created an important racial duality that would greatly affect his political and social opinions later in life. First of all, Charles spent his school-aged years in Watts, a community that had become an overcrowded ghetto-like black residential area. Charles's light skin color, along with his father's middle-class status, made him a target for ostracism by the other children of color in his neighborhood; the local kids treated him more like a white person than a black person. On the other hand, most of the participants in the Los Angeles Junior Orchestra were white; Charles was treated like a black person in this setting. This duality created an identity problem for him as a young teenager.³² The identity problem was resolved when he was urged by two of his friends, Britt Woodman and Buddy Collette (both of whom would also later become professional jazz players), to switch instruments once again, this time to the instrument that would make him famous.

When Charles was sixteen, he began taking bass lessons from Red Callender, a bassist who had previously worked with such artists as Louis Armstrong, Nat "King" Cole, and

³² Santoro, *Myself When I am Real*, 26, 30-31.

Lionel Hampton. Callender helped Charles find a voice and urged him to begin making arrangements for his high school jazz band. This provided a way for Charles to combine both his talents as a bass player and his exposure to the European classical world, and he devoted himself fully. More importantly, this also helped young Charles develop a cultural identity, prompting him to embrace his African-American heritage.³³

In the 1940s, due to his knowledge and love of jazz combined with his amazing technical ability as a classical bassist, Charles began playing bass professionally as a sideman with musicians such as his friend Buddy Collette, Kid Ory, and on tour with Louis Armstrong, until he refused to go on a tour into the segregated Southern states. In 1943, Mingus began to get studio experience, recording with Louis Armstrong, Russell "Illinois" Jacquet, Howard McGhee, and Bob Mosley. In 1945, Charles would conduct his first recording session as a bandleader, first with his childhood friends Britt Woodman and Buddy Collette as well as other local musicians, then later with other players under the name "Charles Mingus Sextet."

³³ Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 10-11; Santoro, *Myself When I am Real*, 37-38

In 1947, Mingus began recording with Lionel Hampton, for whom he made three recordings through 1948; during his tenure with Hampton, he would meet many other notable jazz players, such as Fats Navarro and Joe Comfort. In 1950, he began performing and recording with Red Norvo, which introduced him to vocalists Mel Torme and Ann Miller. This group also took him from Los Angeles to New York City in 1951, and shortly after he was performing as a sideman for such notable bandleaders as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Stan Getz, and many others. During this time, he served as sideman alongside future greats Max Roach, Art Blakey, Kai Winding, Sonny Stitt, Horace Silver, Kenny Clarke, and J.J. Johnson.³⁴

In 1954, Mingus made his first recording under the name "Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop," an endeavor to blend the two styles of music that he had been raised playing and listening to. At first hearing, the music produced by this ensemble most resembles jazz; however, Mingus believed that jazz could be produced with compositional elements that resembled the likes of European classical music. Mingus also believed that it was his responsibility to instill this philosophy in the younger musicians of the day, so he,

³⁴ Priestley, *Mingus*, 248-262.

like Art Blakey through his Jazz Messengers, generally included newer and younger musicians in the Jazz Workshop.³⁵ The idea worked and, with the recording of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" and "Haitian Fight Song" in 1956 and the album *Mingus Ah Um* in 1959, Mingus achieved giant success as a bandleader.³⁶

"I have reason to believe that the telephone lines to the Arkansas executive mansion have been tapped. I suspect the Federal agents. The situation in Little Rock and Arkansas grows more explosive by the hour."

--Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, in a wire to President Dwight Eisenhower, 5 September 1957³⁷

In yet a different section of the country, Orval Faubus was born 7 January 1910 in a cabin on Greasy Creek near the town of Combs in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. Faubus's biographer Roy Reed claims that Orval "lived his youth during the last years of the pioneer idyll... In every respect except for the paradox of the calendar, his was entirely a nineteenth century boyhood."³⁸ To an outsider considering his gubernatorial decision in September 1957 to

³⁵ Whitney Balliett, "Jazz Records," *The New Yorker*, 18 June 1960, 125.

³⁶ Priestley, *Mingus*, 263, 265, 269.

³⁷ "Text of Faubus' Wire to Eisenhower", printed in *The New York Times*, 5 September 1957, 20.

³⁸ Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 53.

block the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, this statement might also be applied to his adult years as well. However, looking closer at his childhood and young adult years, his fateful Central High decision seems rather confusing.

Orval's father, Sam Faubus, was a staunch socialist. Receiving little education, Sam taught himself to read and eventually became a voracious reader. He made very clear the importance of his children's education, making sure that they could not only read well but also speak publicly in a confident fashion; as a result, Orval was required by his father to recite long poems to audiences at an early age. When Orval was twenty-two years old, Sam took him along to debate two local teachers— one Democrat, one Republican— about socialism versus the two major parties, and the two Faubuses, the elder uneducated and the younger having completed only the eighth grade, were able to competently hold their ground, discussing the greed of the major parties, the weakness of the public, and the government's lack of action on unemployment in the then early years of the Great Depression.³⁹

In 1928, at the age of eighteen, Orval became licensed to teach in the public schools of Madison County because

³⁹ Reed, *Faubus*, 38.

teacher licensure did not require a high school diploma in Arkansas at the time. He would continue this career choice for 11 years, teaching in five schools in the Madison County school district.⁴⁰ After running unsuccessfully for the Arkansas House of Representatives on the Democratic ticket in 1936, he won his first elected office, Madison County Circuit Clerk and Recorder in Huntsville, Arkansas two years later. Shortly after, he began his college education at the University of Arkansas, which he never finished. In 1942, Faubus volunteered for the United States Army as a commissioned officer and went to Europe shortly thereafter as an intelligence officer in the United States Army; after the end of the war, Faubus stayed in Europe for an extra year to aid in the demobilization of the European mainland.⁴¹

The war did not harden Faubus to politics as it did for so many others; instead, it heightened Faubus's desire to achieve even higher political office. While fighting and working in Europe, Faubus sent letters not only to his family but also to the local Arkansas newspapers, so that his name could be fresh in the minds of the Arkansas voters when he returned home. He also bought the local newspaper,

⁴⁰ Reed, *Faubus*, 50.

⁴¹ Reed, *Faubus*, 79-80.

the *Madison County Record*, so that he could publish articles in support of other notable Arkansas democrats who were more likely to win state elections. This strategy worked in Faubus's favor. In 1948, Faubus threw his and his paper's support behind Sidney McMath in the gubernatorial race; when McMath won, he appointed Faubus to the Arkansas Highway Commission and later appointed him to his administrative staff in Little Rock.⁴² McMath would remain governor for four years, until Republican Francis Cherry drove him out of office in 1952. Two years later, Faubus would challenge Cherry in a controversial race for the office and win by 6,585 votes.⁴³

Faubus's election happened in the same year that the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling took place.

Desegregation began to take place in the southern border states, such as Oklahoma, Kentucky, Missouri, and even in smaller towns in Arkansas, such as Fayetteville. In fact, the University of Arkansas was the first institution of higher-education in the South to desegregate, doing so in 1948, six years before the Brown ruling. However, in the larger cities in Arkansas, such as Little Rock and Fort

⁴² Reed, *Faubus*, 80-81, 84.

⁴³ Reed, *Faubus*, 124

Smith, desegregation would take place much later, well into Faubus's second term as governor.

As soon as the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown* ruling, Little Rock School Superintendent Virgil T. Blossom began constructing an integration proposal called the Blossom Plan, in which the schools in the larger districts would begin gradual integration in 1957 at the high school level, then filtering down to the junior high level, with all schools being completely integrated by 1963; Blossom and his supporters would spend the three years leading up to that date garnering support for the plan and preparing the communities for desegregation. During the years from 1954 to 1957, Blossom would hold 225 meetings with organizations and civic clubs across the state in order to explain his plan. In the early part of 1957, three large school districts— Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Ozark— desegregated their high schools. After Labor Day, Central High School in Little Rock was to admit seventeen African-American students into their student body.⁴⁴

However, around two months before the beginning of the 1957-58 academic year, some of the local and more influential citizens of Little Rock began to voice their opinions in opposition to the plan, and support was given

⁴⁴ Reed, *Faubus*, 182.

to them from many places across the South. Marvin Griffin, Governor of Georgia, came to Little Rock to speak to citizens who opposed integration and made the argument that the constitution was invalid if states made decisions about their schools based on court decisions and rulings made by the federal government. One of his traveling partners, Roy Harris, made a prophetic statement: "If this happened in Georgia, we'd call out the National Guard."⁴⁵ These speeches raised not only the fervor of segregationist support in Little Rock but also the attention of the rest of the country. Many people from around the country on both sides of the issue began to make plans to come to Little Rock to protest, support, or report on the events when school began session.

Faubus, fearing the worst possible scenario concerning the upcoming protests and demonstrations over the plan, received faulty information from his advisors in regard to the sale of weapons, particularly knives and handguns, from pawn shops in the days leading up to the first day of the 1957-58 school session.⁴⁶ Faubus began to express his concern over this impending violence, but Blossom took the matter to court where Federal Judge Ronald Davies ruled in

⁴⁵ Reed, *Faubus*, 197.

⁴⁶ Reed, *Faubus*, 199, 207.

favor of the superintendent, ordering Central High to be desegregated on the first day of school. On Labor Day, the day before classes began, eight of the students who also feared the potential violence withdrew their applications for Central High, choosing to stay enrolled at Horace Mann High School, the high school created for the black students of Little Rock. That night, Governor Faubus, seeing the gathering crowds around the school (especially those consisting of the citizens who would be voting in his re-election campaign the following fall), ordered the Arkansas National Guard to be deployed to the high school to block the students from entering the building and therefore avoid any potential violence.

The Guard continued to turn the students away from Central High School until 24 September, when President Eisenhower, who had been reluctantly talking with Faubus about the situation from the first day, ordered the Arkansas National Guard to be placed under Federal control, removed them from Little Rock and ordered a division of paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to be deployed to Little Rock and assist in the integration of the remaining nine African-American students. With continuous assistance from the soldiers, the students finished out the school year at

Central High despite continued confrontation from segregation supporters.

"Boo! Nazi Fascist Supremists!/ Boo! Ku Klux Klan!"
--Charles Mingus, "Original Faubus Fables"⁴⁷

The *New York Times* ran reports from Central High in Little Rock on the front pages of its newspapers for well over a month. Mingus, firmly planted in New York City by this time, was well aware of the happenings in Arkansas. A firm believer that school integration was the most effective way for African-Americans to get ahead in life, he was quick to act on the situation and began to include words to a piece that he had been working on. According to Mingus's longtime drummer and right-hand-man Dannie Richmond, the piece did not have a name until the Little Rock desegregation event took place; one night on stage, while the Jazz Workshop was playing through the piece, Mingus all of a sudden began singing words to the melody: "Name me someone who's ridiculous..." From behind the drumset, Dannie responded, yelling "Governor Faubus!" in rhythm with the song; Mingus liked the addition, began to

⁴⁷ Charles Mingus, "Original Faubus Fables," *Mingus Presents Mingus*, Barnaby BR 5012, 1960.

write words to accompany the composition, and titled it "Fables of Faubus."⁴⁸ When the piece was included on the album *Mingus Ah Um* eighteen months later, Mingus's record label, Columbia, requested that the words be left out so as not to eliminate prospective listeners and customers in the South.

The 1959 version of "Fables of Faubus" included instrumentation that was intended to sound dark. Even though Mingus had several musicians at the recording session that produced *Mingus Ah Um*, he chose only to include an alto saxophone, two tenor saxophones, and a trombone in the horn section with piano, bass, and drums in the rhythm section; by not including trumpet or guitar, Mingus made the horn and rhythm sections unbalanced towards the lower end, with five of the six tonal instruments producing notes that sound mostly in the bass clef. Also, with the exception of its solo, the piano only played sparsely throughout the entire piece, leaving the bass and drums as the driving force behind the rhythm section. This darkness resulted in a very effective opening statement; the entire first phrase is delivered by only tenor saxophone and trombone, representing a plantation work song

⁴⁸ Priestley, *Mingus*, 87.

performed by males and is joined later by the rest of the ensemble.

The entire piece is perhaps one of the most sarcastic that Mingus ever wrote and recorded; it is filled with an intended unease that often borders on a grating quality, especially in the alto saxophone melodies and improvisations. At other times, the tenor saxophones and trombone play with a moaning quality that represents anger, anguish, and sadness, sometimes sounding like boos and jeers that were most definitely delivered by the demonstrators and rioters outside of the school in Little Rock. Not only does the piece not sound rich, pretty, or comfortable like many other recordings by other artists produced at the time, but it also does not have a constant style, quickly departing from one to another without transition; during the piano and bass solos, the style changes every four or five sections through the use of double-time tempo.⁴⁹

The next year, Mingus decided to release another version of "Fables of Faubus" on the album *Mingus Presents Mingus*, produced by a much smaller label, Barnaby, which was a subsidiary of Candid. This version would include the

⁴⁹ Charles Mingus, "Fables of Faubus," *Mingus Ah Um*, Columbia CG30628, 1959.

words that originally accompanied the song; even though Mingus's introduction for studio identification (which was included on the final cut) labeled the song as "Fables of Faubus," the song was identified on the album cover as "Original Faubus Fables," obviously as a stab at Columbia. In the introduction, Mingus described Governor Faubus as an "All-American Heel," and was even more descriptive when the song begins. In the work song melody that appears at the beginning of the piece, the tenor saxophone and trombone from the 1959 recording are replaced by Mingus and Richmond singing in unison: "Oh Lord! Don't let them shoot us!/ Oh Lord! Don't let them stab us!/ Oh Lord! Don't let them tar and feather us!/ Oh Lord! No more swastikas!" This last line of the introduction, a later reference to the Nazi party, was highly ironic, given Faubus's socialist upbringing and participation in the European Theater of World War II.

The next section of "Original Fables of Faubus" with words begins with Mingus asking: "Name me someone who's ridiculous," with Richmond yelling in response: "Governor Faubus!" Mingus: "Why is he so sick and ridiculous?" Richmond (yelling): "He won't permit us in his schools!" Mingus: "Then he's a fool!" Mingus's calmness while he is asking Richmond these questions coupled with Richmond's

furious screaming, even though they were blatantly intended to further the idea that Faubus was of questionable character, represents the duality of the conflict at Little Rock in a reverse fashion; at Central High School, the angry half of the crowds were the white protestors, while the non-violent participants were African-American. This is also representative of the contrast of the growing split in black leadership in the Civil Rights movement, which would come to a head in Birmingham in 1963 when the once passive demonstrators began to retaliate against the actions of Police Chief Bull Connor.

Mingus did not only characterize Orval Faubus in these recordings. In the second verse of "Original Faubus Fables," Mingus asks Richmond to "Name me a handful that's ridiculous." Richmond responded by naming many other people, including Winthrop Rockefeller, an Arkansas Republican who tried to convince Faubus to stay out of the integration situation altogether, and President Dwight Eisenhower, whose indecisiveness to act from the Federal level when Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard to block integration only prolonged the crisis for almost a month. Others included in the "handful" were Senator Richard B Russell of South Carolina, who called for Southern resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education*, and

Herbert L. Thomas, an Arkansas citizen who shortly after Federal involvement received publicity with a proposal to suspend further school integration in Little Rock to form a commission that would conduct a long study to find a more effective way to complete the process.⁵⁰

Mingus changed the instrumentation for the recording of "Original Faubus Fables." Going for a lighter and more sarcastic texture than he had previously used in "Fables of Faubus" because the higher pitched horns provided contrast to his and Richmond's voices, Mingus removed the trombone and tenor saxophones to include trumpet, played by Ted Curson, and alto saxophone, played by the up-and-coming young Eric Dolphy, who would later become one of the most important woodwind players in the Avant-garde jazz style.⁵¹

"You haven't been told before that you're phonies... It doesn't make you a connoisseur of the art because you follow it around... A blind man can go to an exhibition of Picasso and Kline, and not even see their works, and comment... 'Wow! They're the swingiest paintings ever, crazy!' Well, so can you."

--Mingus, venting to the crowd at the Five Spot Café, 1960.⁵²

⁵⁰ Reed, *Faubus*, 166, 203, 205-223, 253.

⁵¹ Charles Mingus, "Original Faubus Fables," *Mingus Presents Mingus*, Barnaby BR 5012, 1960.

⁵² Leonard Feather, "The Blindfold Test: Charlie Mingus #2," *Down Beat*, 12 May 1960, 39.

Mingus would continue to compose and record some of the most creative music in jazz history. Not only was his music more complex than most of the music produced by jazz artists from the 1950s through the 1970s, but it was also perhaps the most directly driven by politics and social issues, as well. The titles of his songs include: "Cry for Freedom (Prayer for Passive Resistance)" (1960), "All the Things You Could Be By Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother" (1960), "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me" (1962), "They Trespass the Land of the Sacred Sioux" (1965), and "The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady" (1963). Mingus died of Lou Gehrig's disease 5 January 1979 in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Orval Faubus would remain governor of Arkansas until 1966, when he was defeated by Winthrop Rockefeller. He would make another serious run for governor in 1970, again in 1974, and once more for the sake of opposition against Bill Clinton in 1986. He would remain in politics until his death on 14 December 1994, at the age of 84.

CHAPTER 4

"MUSIC IS CLASSLESS, BUT RACES, KNOWLEDGE, AND LIFE-CONDITIONS ARE NOT"⁵³: ORNETTE COLEMAN'S *FREE JAZZ* AS A METAPHOR FOR THE AMBITIONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Every so often, an individual appears who revolutionizes the group, organization, or society with which that person is associated. In the late 19th Century, the world of journalism encountered William Randolph Hearst, who changed the way every newspaper has been run ever since he made his way into the business. The film industry in Hollywood first encountered Orson Welles in the late 1930s. Baseball witnessed the phenomenon of Jackie Robinson in the 1940s. Popular music embraced Elvis in the 1950s and the Beatles in the 1960s. Recent examples of revolutionary entertainment icons include the likes of Michael Jordan, Bill Gates, Tiger Woods, Madonna, and the team of Mark Burnett and Charlie Parsons, creators of modern "reality television." The same is true for jazz, which has a long list of innovators.

This list includes the following: King Oliver, who developed and popularized Dixieland; Louis Armstrong, whose incredible range and technique revolutionized the Hot Jazz

⁵³ Ornette Coleman, "To Whom it May Concern," *Down Beat*, 1 June 1967.

of the 1920s; Duke Ellington, the most prolific composer in American music and champion of the Swing Era; the team of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, who switched the emphasis from written music to improvisation; Ornette Coleman, who jump-started the Avant-garde style in 1960; and Miles Davis, who steered jazz from an acoustic music to an electronic one in the early 1970s. Each one of these individuals could arguably be considered the greatest innovator in jazz music, given the number of disciples that flocked around their style once they emerged into the center of the jazz world. None, however, were as controversial as Ornette Coleman, who with the release of one record in 1961 literally turned the jazz world on its head and split many of the musicians, critics, and producers into two well defined groups: conventional and progressive.

The emergence of Ornette Coleman and the ensuing controversy is not only important in the jazz world but also reflects the inner controversies of the Civil Rights Movement through the differences that can be found within the various groups and leaders, such as the NAACP, Martin Luther King, Huey Newton, CORE, Stokely Carmichael, and many others that were working towards similar goals but using different techniques to achieve them. Coleman's

energetic frenzy also represents both the type of freedom that the individuals associated with the Civil Rights Movement were seeking as well as the fervence with which these individuals pursued their goals.

"Man, that cat is nuts!"

--Thelonious Monk, a very progressive jazz pianist, upon hearing Coleman for the first time.⁵⁴

Randolph Denard Ornette Coleman was born 9 March 1930 in Fort Worth, Texas to Randolph Coleman, an Army veteran of World War I, construction worker, and cook; and Rosa Coleman, a clerk at a local funeral home. The family was a musical one— Randolph sang in a gospel quartet, Rosa played piano, and all four of the children were urged to study music as children. Ornette's older sister, Trudy Coleman, was a professional singer as well.

Ornette became interested in saxophone when the music teacher in school brought his band to play for the students. When he had saved up enough money to buy an alto saxophone at the age of 14, his family could not afford music lessons, so Ornette proceeded to teach himself to play the instrument using his ear, the family's radio, and

⁵⁴ Julian Adderly, "Cannonball Looks at Ornette Coleman", *Down Beat*, 26 May 1960, 20.

a music book. Because he did not have a teacher to tell him when he was playing correctly or incorrectly, he taught himself the wrong note names for the instrument; therefore, what he thought was "C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C" on his horn was actually "A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A". When he started playing with the school band, he relied on his ear, playing along with what the other altos were playing rather than reading the music that was written on the page (which eventually got him kicked out of the program for inappropriately improvising a jazz-like solo over a march, overshadowing the descant role of the piccolo). Ornette also began to experiment with the different sounds and tones that could be produced on each note, often spending hours discovering the possibilities of one note.⁵⁵

After high school, he began playing with professional bands in the Fort Worth area and touring parts of the southeastern United States. He would be kicked off of bandstands and removed from various groups, usually being accused of not being able to play his horn correctly. After two years of constantly switching bands, Ornette began to independently study theory and develop a unique style of jazz improvisation and composition based on his

⁵⁵ John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992), 25.

sometimes incorrect interpretations of the texts. He not only believed that music could be played without the conventional guidelines or restrictions of traditional jazz and bop, with all members of the ensemble improvising, in a sense, with no set chord changes, no set melody, no time signature, and no set rhythms, but also believed that the outcome could be just as musically rewarding and academically sound as well.

In 1951, Ornette became associated with drummer Ed Blackwell, with whom he shared his musical innovations. Blackwell was receptive to the unique theory, and the two moved to Los Angeles in 1956 to form the American Jazz Quintet with Harold Battiste, Alvin Batiste, and Ellis Marsalis. The group would change members and names over the next two years while Coleman was further developing the unique style, and in 1958, after catching the ear and support of the Modern Jazz Quartet's Percy Heath, recorded *Something Else!!!* with trumpeter Don Cherry, bassist Charlie Haden, and drummer Billy Higgins for the Contemporary label. This recording spawned a recording contract with Atlantic, producing *The Shape of Jazz to Come* and *Change of the Century*, both made in 1959. After these recordings, Coleman and Cherry attended the Modern Jazz Quartet-led Lennox School of Jazz in Massachusetts, from

which they left in November 1959 to join Haden and Higgins in New York City.

Before the quartet moved to New York, controversy surrounding their radical style was already brewing in the heart of the jazz scene. After their arrival and first performance at the Five Spot, New York's premier venue for the most adventurous artists, the controversy exploded. Coleman received polarizing reviews from musicians, fans, and critics alike; it seemed that everyone either deeply loved or profoundly hated his music. Dizzy Gillespie, after hearing the quartet at the Five Spot, asked the members: "Are you cats serious?" Thelonious Monk, when asked about Coleman's radical sound, said: "Man, that cat is nuts." John Lewis of the Modern Jazz Quartet remarked: "He [Coleman] is an extension of Bird [Charlie Parker]." George Hoefer remembered some of the remarks of critics: "'He'll change the entire course of jazz,' 'He's a fake,' 'He's a genius,' 'He swings like HELL,' 'I'm going home and listen to my Benny Goodman trios...'" Leonard Bernstein jumped onstage at a performance, frightening Charlie Haden when he put his ear to the f-hole of his upright bass so that he could get a better listen to the sound.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ George Hoefer, "Caught in the Act," *Down Beat*, 7 January 1960, 40.

In December of 1960, Coleman would produce a recording that deepened the growing controversy. *Free Jazz* employed a double quartet, consisting of Coleman (alto saxophone), Cherry (trumpet), Haden (bass), and Higgins (drums) in one quartet, and Eric Dolphy (bass clarinet), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Scott LaFaro (bass), and longtime friend and collaborator Ed Blackwell (drums) in the other. The two quartets were to "collectively improvise," with the bass players keeping a pulse without suggesting a chord progression or rhythmic motives; the quartets did so for over thirty-seven minutes, the better part of two sides of an LP. This album achieved two things: first, it showed that the form of collective improvisation, which from this point forward was to be called free jazz, could be extended without turning into complete chaos and without becoming stale; second, it employed artists who were already established in the mainstream jazz world (namely Dolphy and Hubbard), which bolstered the argument that the style was a legitimate jazz form because the more conservative musicians could no longer claim that "free" musicians were untested performers that could not get breaks traditionally.

In 1962, Coleman, in a manner much like Sonny Rollins, took a three-year sabbatical from performing and recording

to further develop his style of playing. During this time, he would teach himself how to play two new instruments: trumpet and violin. When he re-emerged onto the scene in 1965, Coleman would regularly perform on these two instruments as well as his saxophone, drawing even more scrutiny from his harshest critics. In 1972, Coleman arranged a large scale collective improvisation that included the London Symphony Orchestra with his jazz quartet in a recording session that produced the album *Skies of America*. Also, in the years following the sabbatical, Coleman would also include his young son, Denard "Denny" Coleman on the drumset; Denny made appearances with Ornette as young as age 8 and has appeared on many of Ornette's albums since.

Ornette Coleman still performs, records, and produces jazz recordings and lives in New York City with his wife.

"The most important thing was for us to play together, all at the same time, without getting in each other's way, and also to have enough room for each player to ad-lib alone—and to follow this idea for the duration of the album."⁵⁷

--Ornette Coleman, to Martin Williams, 1960.

Without the developing music theory and ideology of bebop and hard bop in the fifteen years prior to the

⁵⁷ Martin Williams, in the liner notes to Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*, Atlantic 1364, 1960. Compact Disc.

recording of *Free Jazz*, Ornette Coleman's most important recording would not have nearly as much significance as it does. The recordings, performance practices, and theories of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Clifford Brown, Max Roach, and Charles Mingus were just as important to the story that Coleman presents as Coleman is himself; in a sense, the music of the others built up to the music of Ornette Coleman, and it is arguable that the appearance of this interesting man and his release of the album whose title would become the name of an entire style of jazz was the critical moment in the history of jazz music. The year of Coleman's major impact was also one of the most important years in the Civil Rights Movement, as well, for a number of reasons.

The progression of jazz music through the bebop and hard bop stages closely mirrors the progression of the organization of the Civil Rights Movement. In the early stages of bebop, individuals such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach were quietly changing the way jazz music was produced. When World War II began and many of the local musicians traveled to Europe with the military, the remaining musicians began to practice and perform in smaller groups. Parker, Gillespie, Monk, and Roach, who were veterans of the Swing Era,

enjoyed the smaller ensembles more, and began to develop a new style of performing around those groups; because these groups had fewer performers, it was not as important to compose as much of the pieces as was previously necessary, and each individual had more freedom to play what they wanted. The composed sections became much shorter and the improvised solos became much longer, and the whole experience took on more of a "jam session" feeling. As the players became more comfortable with this format, the songs became more complex, both in theory and in musical technique. Eventually, composed sections were only heard at the beginnings and endings of pieces, and everything else was played in an improvisational fashion around the chord progressions.

The same small changes were being made in the Civil Rights Movement at its beginning, as well. In the late 1940s, the NAACP decided to try to make social changes through court decisions rather than congressional legislation, beginning on the local levels and working their way up. The court battles were led by a young Thurgood Marshall and took place in various parts of the country. The court case strategy culminated in the Supreme Court with the victory in the ruling of *Brown v. Board of*

Education of Topeka, Kansas,⁵⁸ which determined that segregation in public school systems was unconstitutional and that all school systems throughout the country should begin the process of desegregation. Even though nationwide desegregation was not achieved immediately, it was still a landmark victory for the NAACP.

The victory-in-the-courts strategy of the NAACP and the endeavors of the bebop musicians have some very important correlations. First of all, both groups had very broad goals but chose to achieve them in small doses rather than monumental actions. Both also took several years to accomplish these goals. Most importantly, both led to more aggressive forms: for the Civil Rights Movement, public protest; and for bebop jazz, hard bop.

Hard Bop jazz was formed in response to Miles Davis's 1949 album *Birth of the Cool*, which took a step away from the development of Parker and Gillespie, the champions of the bebop movement. Davis had actually risen up in the jazz world through Charlie Parker's group; he would often play in Gillespie's absence but was never technically advanced enough to become a replacement. Because of this shortcoming, when Davis ventured out on his own, he assembled a group of nine instrumentalists (a few more than

⁵⁸ 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

the bebop players preferred) and employed arranger Gil Evans to compose and arrange the music for the group. Because the compositional nature of *Birth of the Cool* contrasted with the improvisational style of bebop, which lent itself to performance rather than recording, Davis's recording was more commercially successful around the country. The album spawned a new style of jazz: "Cool Jazz." The style, which produced artists such as Gerry Mulligan, Stan Getz, Dave Brubeck, and Paul Desmond, was much more popular on the west coast than on the east and also with white listeners more so than blacks.

The New York bebop musicians, unhappy with this new style of music and the audience that it attracted, began to play more aggressively and angrily. At the heart of this early-1950s New York style were two drummers and a pianist who decided that it was their responsibility to take control of their ensembles and drive their music: Art Blakey and Horace Silver, who created the Jazz Messengers in order to educate younger musicians, and Max Roach, who alongside trumpeter Clifford Brown, created the most daring quintet since the emergence of Parker and Gillespie in 1945.

Blakey and Silver came together in New York City in the early 1950s to create music that would belong to a

specific group of people. In an interview with Nat Hentoff shortly before the release of The Jazz Messenger's first album, Horace Silver said: "We're going to be playing tunes that white people can't play— not so it'll sound authentic. Anyway, they won't be comfortable with this music. We're going to play with the beat and the sounds of where we grew up— in black churches, in black neighborhoods."⁵⁹ The style in which they played was very aggressive with much exaggeration of content. Leading melodies and improvisations were played very loud and aggressively with similar energy coming from the rhythm section; swing patterns were played very heavily; straight-metered sections placed extreme emphasis on off-beats and syncopation. Their music also frequently involved religious themes or references, including titles such as "The Preacher," "Moanin," "Confirmation," and "Evidence." Blakey also made it a point to perform with mainly younger musicians, so as to educate them in his philosophy; he emphasizes this point at the beginning of a recorded performance of "Confirmation" at Birdland in the early 1950s when he said, after his introduction, "I'm going to

⁵⁹ Nat Hentoff, *Speaking Freely: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 42.

stay with the youngsters— when these get too old, I'm going to get some younger ones".⁶⁰

Max Roach and Clifford Brown drew on this idea when they formed their famed quartet shortly after but managed to include many of the qualities from the early bebop movement, of which Roach was a veteran. Brown, perhaps the most technically gifted young trumpet player since Louis Armstrong made his majestic appearance in the 1920s, was a direct continuation of the technique and flare produced by Dizzy Gillespie in the mid-1940s, and his performance preparation was rivaled by no other. This talent was perfectly matched by the virtuosic drumming techniques of Max Roach, and the group quickly became the leaders of the Hard Bop style. The pair helped produce a number of important performers, most notably saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who continued the improvisational theories of Brown after his death in a car accident in 1957.⁶¹ Through Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis after his return from the West Coast style, Hard Bop was to become the mainstream of Jazz music until the emergence of the Avant-garde in the 1960s.

⁶⁰ David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music 1955-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 36-40.

⁶¹ Rosenthal, *Hard Bop*, 30-33.

The in-your-face style of performing by the Hard Bop musicians mirrored the actions of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the NAACP, and other African-American organizations in the middle and late 1950s. After the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, these groups became more active, emphasizing the need for direct protest for Civil Rights. In 1955, after Rosa Parks was arrested after her famous incident on the public bus system in Montgomery, Alabama, the Montgomery Improvement Association, led by Martin Luther King Jr., initiated a bus boycott that after nearly 13 months succeeded with the help of the NAACP.⁶² In 1958 and 1959, both CORE and the NAACP began to use small scale sit-in protests in areas bordering the south, including Oklahoma City, St. Louis, Louisville, and Baltimore. However, these protests, like the musical advancements of the Hard Bop musicians, would only be a small foreshadowing of the events that happened in the 1960s.⁶³

Ornette Coleman, already being somewhat known in the late 1950s through small label releases such as *Something Else!!!*, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, and *Tomorrow is the*

⁶² Harry S. Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs: A Memoir of Race and Politics 1944-1994* (New York: Pantheon, 1994) 135.

⁶³ Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 30-32.

Question, would make an impact on the jazz world akin to throwing a five pound stone into a pond with his release of *Free Jazz* in 1960. Even though artists such as Sonny Rollins with his piano-less ensemble, Charles Mingus with his uninhibited compositional style, Miles Davis with his modal theory, and John Coltrane with his "sheets of sound" theory had challenged the ideas of mainstream music, Coleman would shatter all of jazz's preconceived notions. His musical vision was very similar to some ideas that Western "classical" composers like John Cage and Pierre Boulez had used, except that his music, because it falls into the more popular jazz idiom, reached far more listeners and caused far more controversy.

Coleman's style, which involved no set chord changes and no set key signature, was intended to give its performers the most freedom to date in the jazz setting, almost allowing them to play in any fashion at any time with no preconceived idea or style. In his albums from the late 1950s, Coleman had produced music that made smaller adjustments to the jazz form; when listening to them, one can hear some structure: smaller preconceived solo limits, small amounts of form in the music, and some ensemble playing. However, when Coleman signed a record deal with a large label, he decided to make a major statement and

recorded *Free Jazz* on 8 December 1960. The recording was one continuous track that lasted nearly thirty-eight minutes and included something else that was not particularly common in previous jazz recordings: a double quartet.

The ensemble of *Free Jazz* consisted of two complete quartets that could stand alone, and in a sense could if the listener so chooses due to the stereo recording: if the balance is turned all the way to the left, the quartet of Coleman (alto saxophone), Don Cherry (trumpet), Charlie Haden (bass), and Billy Higgins (drums) is heard; if the balance is turned to the right, the quartet made up of players Coleman hired to make the recording, including Eric Dolphy (bass clarinet), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Scott LaFaro (bass), and Ed Blackwell (drums), is heard.

At first listen, the eight musicians sound as if they are all playing and improvising at the same time in different keys and in different styles. However, there is some structure to the piece. In the liner notes included with the album, critic Martin Williams, who was present for the session, states: "[*Free Jazz*] is a continuous free improvisation with only a few, brief pre-set sections. It was done in one 'take' at a single recording session. No one knew how long it would last; two tape machines were

simply kept going and when *Free Jazz* was over, it had taken over 38 minutes— the length of an LP. There was nothing more to play, there were no re-takes, no splices.”⁶⁴

Coleman discussed some melodies and themes, but did not dictate what the members had to play at any specific time, leaving the melodies to happen whenever the group as a collective decided them to happen, which is apparent through the various entries of each member when each melody occurs; in most cases, one of the members will begin the melody, and the others will join as they catch on to what is happening.

Also, each member gets to take an extended solo during the piece, with sections of ensemble horns soloing in the middle of each one. The ensemble soloing is a development of an earlier form taken from the swing era: ensemble accompaniment.⁶⁵ *Free Jazz's* sections differ from accompaniment, however, because there are no set melodies for the horn players to play; each member improvises on a theme or in a style close to that which the primary soloist is playing at the time the “accompaniment” begins, then develops his line in whatever direction he wishes to go.

⁶⁴ Martin Williams, in the liner notes to Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*, Atlantic 1364, 1960. Compact Disc.

⁶⁵ Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, 6th ed. Heidelberg College (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 89-90, 107-112, 129.

This example of ensemble soloing underneath the primary soloist is representative of ways in which different groups, organizations, or individuals conducted their events during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. During these extended improvisations, the horn players who came in to "accompany" the primary soloist would often base what they played loosely on what the soloist was playing; this is best observed in the accompaniment playing of Eric Dolphy. This idea represents the copycat technique that organizations across the country would do when another organization had found a successful protest technique. For example, consider the sit-in movement that exploded across the South just months before Coleman's double quartet recorded *Free Jazz*. On 1 February 1960, four African-American students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College set out to eat at a whites-only lunch counter at the local Woolworth's store. After they were denied service, they remained at the counter for the entire day. The next day, there were thirty young African-Americans present at the counter. The protest continued until the local government leaders could reach an agreement that was suitable for everyone. The success of this protest led to other similar protests, and by April, this form of social protest had affected every state in the

South and had included nearly fifty thousand participants.⁶⁶

In much the same way that the musicians in Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* undertook the idea of accompanying the soloist in a collective improvisation, these groups in not only the Southern states but across the country would take an idea that was introduced by individuals or organizations and apply it to their own situation or practice to achieve their goals.

Another way that *Free Jazz* represented the Civil Rights Movement is in the way that it borrowed from many musical ideas that had happened in the past. One example that has already been discussed is the idea of improvisational ensemble accompaniment that was adopted from the swing era of the 1930s. Another can be found in the development of saxophonist John Coltrane's "sheets of sound" technique, which involves playing blazing streams of notes for a long period of time; before Coltrane introduced this technique with his 1959 recording of *Giant Steps*, players would only play continuous strings of fast notes for a few measures at most. Coltrane, however, took this idea to its extreme, often stringing these passages together for longer than one chorus with the only breaks

⁶⁶ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 33.

occurring so that he could take a quick breath. Another example can be found during solo sections of the basses, the first played by Charlie Haden, in the beginning of which he plays in a style reminiscent of a Bach string sonata or concerto; the second solo, played by Scott LaFaro, is what Martin Williams calls a "Django Reinhardt-like improvisation."⁶⁷ Yet another example is in the improvisational accompaniment of Eric Dolphy, who frequently mimics several styles of jazz performance; not only does he mimic Dizzy Gillespie's use of pedal notes to create the deception of two players, but he also uses a technique that is common throughout the entire history of jazz: vamping, or playing the same figure over and over to create a foundation for the primary voice.⁶⁸ The only difference between Dolphy's vamps and the other styles of vamps is that the textures found in *Free Jazz* do not allow him to provide any foundation whatsoever. All of these borrowings represent the fact that the members of the Civil Rights Movement did not completely forget the practices that were established in the previous decades; even though the movement was bringing in new ideas, they were still using the techniques that had been working for years, such

⁶⁷ Martin Williams, in the liner notes to Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*, Atlantic 1364, 1960. Compact Disc.

⁶⁸ Gridley, *Jazz Styles*, 405.

as advancement through court victories, Freedom Rides, and non-violent protest.

Most historically important, however, was the controversy that was created by the release of *Free Jazz*. Before, Coleman could easily be written off by the mainstream, mainly because he and the members of his regular quartet were outsiders in the New York jazz scene. However, with the addition of Dolphy, Hubbard, and LaFaro, who were all established regulars who had played with many of the jazz giants previous to the recording, this argument became defunct. The mainstream became polarized by the situation. Leading musicians and critics became passionate in their support for or contempt against what Coleman was doing. It became difficult to attend the performances of Coleman at the Five Spot because the small club was full of musicians, writers, and producers who were trying to come to a conclusion about what he was playing. On the supportive side were individuals such as John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Leonard Bernstein (who occasionally sat in with the group on piano), Martin Williams ("This is an exceptional record"⁶⁹, Nat Hentoff ("[Coleman's playing] had

⁶⁹ Martin Williams, in the liner notes to Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*, Atlantic 1364, 1960. Compact Disc.

at its core the the cry and cadence of the human voice"⁷⁰), and John Lewis ("He is an extension of Bird [Charlie Parker]"⁷¹. On the opposing side were individuals such as Charles Mingus ("...I doubt he can even play a C scale in whole notes— tied whole notes, a couple of bars apiece— in tune..."⁷²), Dizzy Gillespie ("Are you cats serious?"⁷³), Ralph Gleason ("I don't know what he his doing. I find no pleasure in it..."⁷⁴) and John Tynan, who had initially supported Coleman but gave the Coleman recording no stars (on a scale of five) in his review of *Free Jazz*. This controversy was a foreshadowing of events to come in the mid-1960s for the Civil Rights Movement after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The movement became polarized around the two ideologies: integrationism, led by Martin Luther King Jr., who continued to support non-violent action; and separatism, led by Stokely Carmichael, who shifted CORE's philosophy from "Freedom Now!" to "Black Power!", and Huey Newton, who supported Black Nationalism

⁷⁰ Hentoff, *Speaking Freely*, 46.

⁷¹ Julian Adderly, "Cannonball Looks at Ornette Coleman", *Down Beat*, 26 May 1960, 20.

⁷² Charles Mingus, "Another View of Coleman," *Down Beat*, 26 May 1960, 21.

⁷³ Adderly, "Cannonball Looks at Ornette Coleman," 20.

⁷⁴ Ralph J. Gleason, "Perspectives," *Down Beat*, 21 January 1960, 44.

and Black Power through his radical group, the Black Panther Party.⁷⁵

Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* is arguably the most radical recording in the history of jazz. It single-handedly spawned a new style of performance and recording and even lent its name to the movement. He would attract a legion of young followers, including Albert Ayler, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Cecil Taylor, and Anthony Braxton, and influenced such established artists as Sonny Rollins, who later performed with three members from *Free Jazz*: Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Billy Higgins; Miles Davis, who would explore the ideas of the Avant-garde with his 1960s quintet, including Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams, all of whom would go on to have illustrious careers after the quartet disbanded; and John Coltrane, who would later record an album similar to *Free Jazz* entitled *Ascension*. Coltrane, however, would record an album in 1964 that would be representative of the Civil Rights Movement, not through specific events, but through philosophy.

⁷⁵ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 57-63; Rhoda Lois Blumberg, *Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984) 117-118.

CHAPTER 5

CAN I GET A WITNESS?: MUSICAL REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 IN JOHN COLTRANE'S *A LOVE SUPREME*

Music does not have to contain words to make a specific statement. Many times, the title of a piece of music can dictate the meaning of the piece in conjunction with the style of the music itself, which was the case in many of the recordings made in the swing era such as "One O'Clock Jump" by Count Basie and "Mood Indigo" by Duke Ellington. Other times, the title of a piece can be the only reference made to the meaning of a piece of music, such as the avant-garde recordings that were made by Ornette Coleman before *Free Jazz*; many times, Coleman's sidemen would complain that the number system that he was using in rehearsal was making them forget which tunes they were working on, so he would assign random names to the tunes to help them remember. However, there are those few pieces of music that are so deeply and intricately crafted that the music absolutely represents the subject that the composer and performers intended.

In 1994, musicologist Ingrid Monson made a defining statement about the nature of jazz improvisation as conversation in her book *Saying Something*, in which she

asserted that jazz musicians could make very specific statements with their instruments without saying any words at all. She argued that when musicians, especially ones who have played together for a considerable amount of time, get together to play they make statements and have "conversations" with one another, which can be seen with the two quintets of Miles Davis and the classic quintet of John Coltrane, each of which played and recorded together for considerable amounts of time.⁷⁶ Often, jazz musicians will play in a particular fashion with one group and in a completely different way with another. Also, Monson claimed that the best musicians, particularly improvisers, are the ones who handle themselves very impressively in interviews, showing that they can have highly intelligent conversations about a wide variety of topics.⁷⁷

In 2001, Dutch historian F.R. Ankersmit, in a work concerning historical representation and the role of memory and aesthetics in history, noted that historical writing exists as a representation of the real events that are no longer available to us to study. He went on to say that "the same is true of the work of art: the statue of a God,

⁷⁶ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane's Music of 1960 Through 1967*, 336-341.

⁷⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11-15, 20-24, 73-74.

of an emperor, the painting of a person, castle, or landscape, all function as substitutes for the absent God, emperor and so on, and they are all made in such a way as to be most successful in functioning as such a substitute."⁷⁸

Such is the case with John Coltrane's album *A Love Supreme*. The entire album represents one continuous thought, and almost every section of the thirty-two minute recording represents Coltrane's wrestling with his twin obsessions of the idea of spirituality and resolution of achieving one's goals. He was not alone in this recording, either; all of his sidemen on the project were just as focused as he was, and the final result was so powerful that it was only performed once after the recording was made. However, spirituality is not the only parallel that can be made concerning *A Love Supreme*.

Coltrane's recording, made in December of 1964, came during a very momentous year for the Civil Rights Movement, as well. For nearly a century after the American Civil War, the country struggled with the idea of civil equality for all Americans regardless of their ethnic or racial background, with several failed attempts at legislation and

⁷⁸ F.R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 11.

long periods of waiting time by the Federal Government for ideal conditions for appropriate governmental action. After nearly a decade of relentless persuasion by the NAACP and other African-American civil rights groups, the Federal Government, under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson and several senators and representatives, passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, perhaps the most sweeping legislation concerning Civil Rights in U.S. history.

"I think the majority of musicians are interested in truth... they've got to be because a musical thing is a truth. If you play and make a statement, a musical statement, and it's a valid statement, that's a truth right there in itself..."

--John Coltrane, in an interview with August Blume, 1959⁷⁹

John William Coltrane was born 23 September 1926 in the small town of Hamlet in Richmond County, North Carolina, to John R. Coltrane, a tailor, and Alice Blair Coltrane. His mother's side of the family was large and, with Alice's father being the town's African Methodist Episcopalian minister, very well respected; John's father's side of the family was smaller, and after his death in 1939, played a very insignificant role in the younger John's upbringing.

⁷⁹ August Blume, "An Interview With John Coltrane," *Jazz Review*, January 1959, 25.

In order to be closer to the rest of the Blair family, the Coltrane family moved from Hamlet to High Point in Guilford County, near Greensboro, North Carolina in 1926 just months after John's birth. John had no siblings and only one cousin who was near his age; Alice's sister Bettie, married to Goler Lyerly, had a daughter named Mary who was born in 1927, and John and Mary would grow up like siblings (John later named one of his more famous tunes, "Cousin Mary," after her). John would stay in High Point until after his graduation from high school at the age of sixteen, staying in a boarding house during his senior year after his mother moved to Philadelphia.⁸⁰

It was in High Point that John's musical education would begin. He received his first horn shortly after his father died; many attributed John's drop in grades to depression after this event, but others believe that it was because John had begun to spend all of his free time practicing music. He participated in the junior high school instrumental ensemble (which did not have enough instruments to actually be called a band), but it was in the town's community band that Coltrane received most of his playing experience. John began on alto horn, a brass

⁸⁰ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 18-19.

instrument much like the euphonium but smaller, but was quickly switched to clarinet by Warren Steele, the band's leader. Around this time, John began having many of his friends over to have beginner's jam sessions in addition to the playing experience in school. In the fall of 1940, after hearing Lester Young for the first time, John decided to switch to saxophone, beginning with alto. By the time of his graduation from high school, John was definitely interested in pursuing a career in music, participating in many of the school's musical groups, including choir and band, as well as some independently formed dance bands that played at many of the school's functions.⁸¹

After graduation, John moved to Philadelphia to be with his mother, aunt, and cousin Mary. Shortly after arriving, he began taking music classes at the Leo Ornstein School of Music and performing with many of the local Philadelphia musicians. John would continue on this path until he entered the United States Navy just before the end of World War II.

John began his service with the Navy on 6 August 1945, just eight days before V-J Day, the Japanese surrender. After completing his boot camp training, he was stationed

⁸¹ Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), 24-25; Porter, *John Coltrane*, 25-34.

at Pearl Harbor, which was then under the command of Admiral Chester Nimitz, who had been the Navy's commanding officer in World War II's Pacific Theater. There, John began performing with a Navy band known as the Melody Masters, but because African-American sailors were not allowed to pursue military music full-time, he was required to do so on his leisure time. The group did do a great deal of performing and was considered among the finest military ensembles on the island. He continued playing with the ensemble until his discharge on 25 July 1946.⁸²

Upon his return to Philadelphia, Coltrane almost immediately began performing and touring with acts such as Joe Webb, the King Kolax Band, Jimmy Heath, the Howard McGhee Big Band, and Eddie Vinson. In 1949, John began touring with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band, which would be his longest and most successful endeavor in the late 1940s and early 1950s. After leaving the Gillespie Band in 1951, John began freelancing around Philadelphia until he joined the band of one of his early heroes, Johnny Hodges, in 1954.⁸³

1955 would prove to be an important year for Coltrane. In the summer of 1954, John was introduced to Naima

⁸² Porter, *John Coltrane*, 40.

⁸³ Cole, *John Coltrane*, 208-11.

(Juanita) Austin by his good friend from Philadelphia, McCoy Tyner; they were married the next year in October 1955. Also in 1955, John became acquainted with trumpeter Miles Davis and began touring and recording with the Miles Davis Quintet in September, an engagement that would last until April 1960.

During this time, John was also making his own recordings, including *Coltrane*, which was recorded in 1957 but not issued until 1959, and *Giant Steps*, recorded and issued in 1959. Also during this time, he recorded many of his own compositions as a sideman with other widely known musicians, such as bassist Paul Chambers ("Just for the Love" and "Nita") and pianist Red Garland ("Bass Blues" and "Traneing In"); Coltrane also appeared as sideman with many other influential musicians, such as Thelonious Monk, Art Blakey, Mal Waldron, Sonny Clark, Milt Jackson, and the new avant-garde and free jazz trumpeter Don Cherry, who had become famous as the right-hand-man of Ornette Coleman. It was also at this time that many of the critics writing about jazz began taking notice of him, calling him the "essence of Charlie Parker."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Ira Gitler, "'Trane on Track," *Down Beat*, 16 October 1958, 17.

In April 1960, John left the Davis Quintet to start his own career as a bandleader; as a result, he quickly became extremely popular, passing Sonny Rollins in the *Down Beat* Reader's and Critics Polls for "Favorite Tenor Saxophonist" in 1960. He would go on to record such albums as *Blue Trane*, *A Love Supreme*, *Ascension*, *My Favorite Things*, and *Expression* (posthumous).⁸⁵

John Coltrane died on 17 July 1967 of hepatocellular carcinoma, or liver cancer. He was survived by his second wife, Alice, his ex-wife Naima, his sons John Jr., Oran, and Ravi, daughter Sheila, step-daughter Syeeda, and his cousin Mary.⁸⁶

"I heard many things in what Trane was doing. I heard the cry and wail of the pain that this society imposes on people and especially black folks."

--Max Roach, undated radio interview⁸⁷

The Civil Rights Movement was not a fast moving machine. An early benchmark for the movement occurred with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*⁸⁸ Supreme Court decision, but had roots that went back over a century;

⁸⁵ Cole, *John Coltrane*, 227-39.

⁸⁶ Porter, *John Coltrane*, 291.

⁸⁷ Quoted in: Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (New York: Viking Press, 2002), 76.

⁸⁸ 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

earlier events in the movement included the publication of David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens*⁸⁹ of the *World*, the speeches and actions of Frederick Douglas, Harriett Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Toms' Cabin*,⁹⁰ the Emancipation Proclamation, the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, several Civil Rights legislations in Congress, the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the poetry of Langston Hughes, and the recording of "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. The decision of *Brown*, though, provided a stimulus large enough to jumpstart a national movement.

One year later, the arrest of Rosa Parks and the subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott provided the country with its first media frenzy surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. In 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus would give the movement's proponents yet another reason to appeal nationally for support by blocking desegregation in Little Rock's Central High School. Three years later, in the vein of the "freedom rides" and lunch counter sit-ins led by the African-American protest group CORE, young black college students began to conduct their own sit-ins in Greensboro,

⁸⁹ David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000)

⁹⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

North Carolina, further south than CORE had dared to sit-in before. In 1962, James Meredith, with the help of the Kennedy Administration, defied Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett's repeated orders to maintain segregation in his state's schools of higher education by enrolling at Ole Miss after several failed attempts. And in the following year, the Kennedy Administration had to similarly respond to a situation at the University of Alabama when Governor George Wallace blocked the enrollment of Vivian Malone and James Hood.

However, after all of this public protest and nonviolent resistance, the United States government had failed to produce any effective legislation concerning civil rights after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Congress did pass a Civil Rights Act in 1957, but the Southern Democrats in the Senate successfully filibustered to remove the most progressive section of the bill, which would have given the Federal Attorney General, rather than the state's attorneys, the power to prosecute civil rights offenders in Federal courts rather than in state courts.⁹¹ The bill passed with three other significantly less important

⁹¹ Congress, House, *Civil Rights Act of 1957*, 85th Congress, 1st session, H.R. 6127 (3 January 1957).

sections that only created commissions and divisions to promote civil rights in the government.

Another attempt to enact the defeated section occurred in 1960, but the Southern Democrats, remembering their success through the use of filibuster in 1957, not only killed that section of the bill, but with the help of poor Republican planning, defeated the entire bill proposed to the Senate. It was not until 1964 that the Senate, with the help of Democratic presidents Kennedy and Johnson, key Republicans and Democrats in Congress, the national television media, and the wide publicity of Martin Luther King Jr., would be able to pass an effective Civil Rights bill.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has been the most far reaching civil rights bill passed to date.⁹² There were two major sections included in the bill, the first making discrimination against any person in any place of public accommodation illegal, the second making discrimination in the workplace illegal as well. The Supreme Court upheld this ruling in the case of *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States* later in 1964,⁹³ when the court applied the law to

⁹² Congress, House, *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 88th Congress, 2nd session, H.R. 7152 (2 July 1964).

⁹³ 379 U.S. 241 (1964).

interstate commerce, effectively making the act a truly national law.

"DEAR LISTENER: ALL PRAISE BE TO GOD TO WHOM ALL PRAISE IS DUE. Let us pursue him in the righteous path. Yes it is true: 'seek and ye shall find.' Only through him can we know the most wondrous bequeathal."

--John Coltrane, liner notes to *A Love Supreme*, December 1964⁹⁴

Unlike his previous 1963 releases of recordings such as "Alabama", written about the lynching of four young black girls in 1963, and "Afro Blue", written by Mongo Santamaria, John Coltrane did not intend his release of *A Love Supreme* to be interpreted on a political level. Instead, he wished it to be an example of spiritual progress and persistence. *A Love Supreme* is not only the title of the recording, but also the title of a long psalm published in the album's liner notes that was the basis for the saxophone melody in the fourth part of the album. Coltrane has been quoted as saying that he believed in all religions, and the album was not intended to belong to any particular sect or any particular religion.

However, given the social and political climate of the time of its recording and release, *A Love Supreme* most

⁹⁴ John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, Impulse AS-77, 1965, reissued 2002.

definitely comes across as a socially and politically charged recording. Because of his comments about believing in all religions, Coltrane showed his beliefs in the wholeness of humanity, which was one of the values at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Also, Coltrane's methodical message of spiritual sojourn and his lengthy delivery (thirty-two minutes and forty-five seconds) of the recording more than represent the path of the Civil Rights Movement from its roots in the mid-Nineteenth Century to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 over a century later.

Coltrane's message of determination in *A Love Supreme* is not limited to only the pursuance of God; it can be applied to any given person's struggle to achieve whatever goal it is that they are searching for, be it spirituality, social or political advancement, economic stability or gain, education, etc. The fact that his writing, recording, and release of this particular album in such a short period of time after the passage of a legislative act that generations of dedicated African-Americans had been working so patiently and diligently to achieve only makes the linkage of the album to the Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that much more apparent. Whether or not Coltrane intended it to be so, this

association is warranted, in hindsight, because of the social and political climate of the time.

A Love Supreme was written in four parts: "Acknowledgment," "Resolution," "Pursuance," and "Psalm," with the last two combined into one continuous section. Coltrane is joined on the recording by his longtime partners, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass, and Elvin Jones on drums. This particular personnel makes Coltrane the primary voice in the ensemble, even though the other performers get more than enough opportunity to make their voices heard; in a traditional sense (of which *A Love Supreme* has some qualities), the piano, bass, and drums make up the rhythm section, with piano providing the harmonic structure, bass providing temporal foundation, and drums providing rhythmic style to the piece, thus leaving the horn player the role of delivering the melody. Another of the traditional bebop qualities of the piece is that all of the members get opportunities to improvise solos in each of the first three sections.

However, the non-traditional aspects of the piece far outweigh the traditional. Coltrane had Elvin Jones make use of two orchestral percussion instruments that very rarely make appearances in jazz performances or recordings: the Chinese gong, heard at the very beginning of

"Acknowledgment", surprisingly provides an unnerving clarity that symbolizes the stimulus and moment of acknowledgment at the beginning of the quest for higher spirituality; and tympani, which along with numerous suspended cymbal rolls can be heard under most of "Psalm", gives the entire section an ethereal and relaxing feel, representing the serenity of experiencing God.

Theory played a very important role in the recording, as well. Unlike most other bop or quartet settings, the first and last sections, intended to be the most pensive of the four, have very basic chord progressions that revolve around one or two chords, which can be heard primarily in the bass; the only digressions from this progression can be heard in the accompaniment of the piano. This simplicity, removing Coltrane's necessity to think about difficult chord changes while he is playing, allowed him more room to think about different tones and timbres, thus letting him emulate speech with his instrument, or "speak" to his listener with sounds rather than words. In the years leading up to this period in his career, critics had often spoken about Coltrane's ability to "speak"; in 1960, an unnamed writer for *Variety* said that Coltrane's playing "might raise the dead" or "manage to get a living reaction

out of the sober railbirds."⁹⁵ In "Acknowledgement," the primary rhythmic motive is found in the cadence of the phrase "a love supreme", which can be heard in the beginning and at other times throughout in the rhythm of Garrison's bass, during a long section near the end where Coltrane repeats the rhythm with different notes in all registers of the horn, and in a verbal chant by all of the musicians through overdubbing at the very end of the piece; biographer Lewis Porter asserted that this use of rhythmic motive by the two instruments and voices in high, middle, and low registers symbolized the presence of God in all places.⁹⁶ This idea of "speaking" is also especially apparent in "Psalm", where Coltrane's melody is rhythmically based on the text of his poem, included in the liner notes of the album.

On the other hand, the second and third sections, "Resolution" and "Pursuance", have much more complex chord progressions. This is important because these parts, unlike "Acknowledgement" and "Psalm", which represent mental thoughts exclusively, represent the combination of thought and physical action; "Resolution", with its medium walking tempo, symbolizes the individual's initial decision

⁹⁵ "Jazz Gallery, N.Y." *Variety*, 25 May 1960, 66.

⁹⁶ Porter, *John Coltrane*, 242.

to act upon his realization that he should be closer to God, while the fervent tempo and chordal development of "Pursuance", together with the intense introductory drum solo and the explosive saxophone entrance and subsequent solo, characterizes the intensity of which Coltrane believes that one should pursue in achieving this goal.

Even though Coltrane intended this piece to represent his own personal quest to achieve proximity to God, *A Love Supreme* meant many different things to many people around the country after its release. The album was played on many campuses across the country, and Billboard made note of the effect that Coltrane was having on young people across the country in 1964 just a few months before *A Love Supreme* was recorded, naming him as one of the "Top Artists on Campus"; it is very probable that this album, which would go on to be not only his highest selling album, but also one of the top grossing jazz albums of all time alongside Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* and Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*.⁹⁷ Other jazz musicians were taking note of his accomplishments as well, especially in social context. With this recording, the listener can substitute just about anything that requires struggle to acquire for Coltrane's notion of God, and many often did with Coltrane's playing

⁹⁷ Kahn, *A Love Supreme*, 73.

in general. For example, Max Roach noted in an undated radio interview: "I heard many things in what Trane was doing. I heard the cry and wail of pain that this society imposes on people and especially black folks." Cannonball Adderly, one of the leading alto saxophonists of the 1950s and 1960s said that "...as of now, jazz is still quite colored... You can certainly tell Stan Getz is white, as contrasted with, say, John Coltrane."⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Both quotes found in Kahn, *A Love Supreme*, 76.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Charles Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane are only four jazz musicians who chose to make social commentary about the events that happened or were closely related to the Civil Rights Movement. In the cases of Mingus and Rollins, the selected recordings were not the most widely recognized of pieces from their greater repertoire; on the other hand, the recordings selected for Coleman and Coltrane are the ones that are noted as defining their careers and have been called their masterpieces.

However, these recordings should not be construed as the only or even the most important jazz recordings to be associated with civil rights. There were a host of others who made African-American society the basis of recordings during this time period as well. Some that have already been mentioned with some detail are Art Blakey, Horace Silver, and Don Cherry. Others include recordings made by such individuals as Ray Charles, Oscar Brown Jr., Max Roach, Cannonball Adderly, and Charlie Parker. There were also ensembles, such as the Modern Jazz Quartet and the Art

Ensemble of Chicago, that made important recordings as well.

Ray Charles was important to the Civil Rights Movement for two reasons. First of all, he consistently bridged more musical genres than nearly any other African-American musician of his time. He was well educated in the practice and theory of the standard Western classical repertoire at a school for the blind. During the 1950s, Charles would become famous for his combination of jazz, blues, and gospel, thus creating a new form of music: rhythm and blues, a style that would later spawn Motown, funk, and soul, with Charles becoming one of the leaders of the latter movement. He would also create successful country music as well, being one of the few African-American musicians to succeed in that genre. Charles would also go on to be an important rock musician as well. Second, Charles was also widely recognized around the country, a privilege that even the most successful of the jazz musicians of the time did not get to enjoy.

It was through these attributes that Charles was able to send his message. In "his earliest recordings, such as "I've Got A Woman," Charles was able to portray a lifestyle that much of national media during the Civil Rights Movement did not address; the interpersonal habits of poor

urban African-Americans that did not involve social protest or demonstration. "Georgia On My Mind" is yet another important civil rights-related recording because of geographic reasons. With all of the negative press that states in the Deep South region were getting during these years, it was very meaningful for a black individual to discuss the endearment that he had for the region that was his home. It is a succinct explanation for why so many African-Americans remained in the region during such taxing social and economic conditions.

Oscar Brown, Jr. was native to Chicago and has lived there all of his life. Unlike many of the other individuals listed in this work, Brown has never primarily supported himself through music. He helped pay his way through school by performing in local stage productions in Chicago. After his college graduation, he hosted a radio program broadcast out of Chicago named *The Negro Newsfront*, which ran for nearly three years in the 1950s. In 1960, he began writing songs, producing text for Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now!*, and his own *Sin and Soul*, which included much social commentary towards the Civil Rights Movement with songs like "Bid 'Em In," which simulated a slave auction; "Signifyin' Monkey," which puts a modern spin on a centuries old folk tale from Africa; "Brown

Baby," which professes the beauty of black children; and a rendition of "Afro Blue," a song written by Mongo Santemaria and later made popular by John Coltrane that makes a connection between African dance rhythms and the rhythms that dominated the dance rhythms of blues, jazz, soul, and rock and roll. Brown would also make forays into professional politics, playwriting, and screen acting. He still lives, performs, writes, and speaks regularly in Chicago.

One of the most important figures in jazz history is Charlie Parker. He and a handful of musicians in the mid-1940s revolutionized the musical form, not only reduced the size of the ensemble but also changed the emphasis from composition to improvisation, giving the performers much more freedom than they previously had in the swing era to create their own musical ideas and apply them to any tune that they were playing. But in terms of the Civil Rights Movement, Charlie Parker is much more important because of the shift in the function of the music. In the swing age of the 1930s and 1940s, the primary function of the jazz ensemble was to provide means for the audience to dance; during this time, tempo and rhythmic danceability, instead of subject matter, was the most important aspect of the music, and this was perhaps the main reason that the swing

style lacked music of deep social commentary. Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Kenny Clarke changed all of this by creating music that demanded to be listened to. Parker was a musician who required full attention, and his listeners received a much larger thrill by sitting and listening rather than dancing to his music. In the years after the rise of bebop, the epicenter of jazz in Manhattan shifted from Harlem to Greenwich Village, with Bird being the primary vehicle for this migration; the Village was full of smaller, more intimate cafes and clubs, and Parker was able to make more emotional and intellectual statements in these settings than in the larger ballrooms required for the swing bands. As the interest in bebop followed Parker to the coffee houses and bars, so did the other jazz musicians of the time, and the new venue and more attentive and encouraging audience provided them ample, if not majestic, room for creative expression. Without this shift, it is possible that the recordings discussed in this endeavor would not have even been made.

Also, there are many other forms of music that served as backdrops for the Civil Rights Movement, especially during the 1960s. Historian Brian Ward claims that jazz and jazz musicians provided much of the music for the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s, but

that Rhythm and Blues, Soul, Folk, and Funk musicians provided much of the music for the later part of the movement that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, with much of their material being influenced by the work of the earlier jazz masters from Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington to Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

This shift in representation can be attributed to two events: mass media's influence on American culture and the musical preference of the younger participants in the movement in the 1960s. First of all, in the mid to late 1950s, popular music shifted towards a more marketable and radio friendly style of music. In the years just following World War II, jazz vocalists became very popular around the country. Artists such as Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald, who had been supporting artists under the big band leaders before the war, began to headline and sell out performance halls and auditoriums as marquis artists. Their music was very radio friendly; not only did their songs contain words, but most of them were three to five minutes or less, making them much more likely to be marketable because shorter songs make advertising more feasible. Ten years later, in the late 1950s, many commercial radio stations shifted to meet the tastes of younger listeners, and performers such as Elvis, Chuck

Berry, Little Richard, and Ray Charles fit the mold established by the crooners in previous years. It was evident by this time that jazz was declining in influence.

It was also very important for leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to cater to the preferences of the youth of the movement because they would be the individuals that provided the numbers and energy of the movement. As jazz was declining in popularity, rhythm and blues, soul, and folk were gaining. At the 1963 March on Washington that was led by Martin Luther King Jr., there were no jazz artists included on the musical program; instead, the event featured southern gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, blues singer Josh White, soprano Marian Anderson, and folk artists Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Bob Dylan.⁹⁹ By 1970, jazz had almost completely ceded its popularity to rock, Motown, and funk.

Part of what made jazz music representative of the Civil Rights Movement is also what made it distance itself from the youth of the country during that time period. When Charlie Parker shifted the function of jazz and moved it from the dancehall to the small nightclub, he alienated many listeners. According to Eric Hobsbawm, swing bands were "designed for the least intellectual or expert, the

⁹⁹ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 304.

least prepared. Privileged or experienced citizens as well as others";¹⁰⁰ this was not the case for Parker's bebop, which was designed for the most experienced listeners. In order to comprehend what Parker and the others who followed in his footsteps were playing, one had to be at least knowledgeable of the style and the history of the music. Many of the youths who made up the bulk of the Civil Rights Movement were not in this group, so they ended up listening and following the likes of the soul, rock, gospel, folk, and funk musicians that appeared in jazz's wake.

Many of the established jazz artists began to change their styles in the late 1960s and early 1970s to accommodate this shift as well. Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Joseph Zawinul, and a host of others began to use electronic instruments and ensembles that more resembled Sly Stone's group than the traditional jazz ensemble. Other established jazz artists who were not willing to make the switch to electronic music either quit playing or, like Maynard Ferguson or Ornette Coleman, took extended tours in Europe, where their traditional style was still popular. Other jazz artists, such as Dexter Gordon, moved to Europe altogether.

¹⁰⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1960) 263.

As a result, the most remembered musical voices from the Civil Rights Movement are Joan Baez, James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, The Temptations, Aretha Franklin, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, and a host of other rock, soul, funk, blues, and folk musicians. This, however, is the result of the generational evolution of music. Had the Civil Rights Movement reached its peak in the 1930s or 1940s, jazz would have been the central musical theme of the movement. On the other hand, if the movement had reached its peak within the last fifteen years, Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Tupac Shakur, or a host of similar rap artists would have been the musicians central to the movement.

These arguments all support the idea of historical representation of the Civil Rights Movement in the jazz music from this time. Just because the music by Rollins, Mingus, Coleman, and Coltrane may not have been as influential as other genres of music during this time, it does not mean that the statements made by these artists are any less powerful or representative of the sentiments of many African-Americans at the time.

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