

OUTSIDE AND INSIDE: REPRESENTATIONS OF INTERRACIALISM
AND AMERICAN IDENTITY IN WHITE JAZZ AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This dissertation explores concepts of race, national identity, and gender formation in fifteen autobiographies published by white male American jazz musicians— that is, jazz autobiographies written by male subjects who self-identified, and were identified by their collaborators and by the general public, as white—between 1939 and 2001. A central concern within these autobiographies is the search for authentication within a musical form that has been intrinsically linked to African American musical and cultural forms and practices. A key feature of this quest for authentication is the immersion experience, through which the white male musician seeks immersion in African American musical and cultural spheres as a requirement of his jazz education, and later of his status as a professional musician.

In this respect, these accounts reinforce the notion of jazz as one of the few spheres within American society in which cultural authority has been historically granted to African Americans, and in which white musicians, as Burton W. Peretti suggests, “innovated and rebelled by willingly becoming musically subordinate to a socially and culturally subordinated group” (96–97). Through their descriptions of this process, these autobiographers reveal that the playing of jazz created and necessitated interracial and interethnic mingling to a degree rarely seen in the mainstream society out of which these stories emerge. Yet discussions of race in these texts seldom move beyond its specific impact on these musicians’ lives and careers; rarely do white jazz autobiographers attempt a more reflective analysis of race in the United States, nor do they seem willing to

acknowledge the benefits that their whiteness conferred upon them in respect to career opportunities and economic security. For these reasons, white jazz autobiography provides a fertile source for considering both the possibilities and limitations of culture—and of individual cultural producers—within 20th-century US society to disrupt, challenge, or circumvent dominant legal and social practice.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Dedication | iv |
| Acknowledgments | v |
| Table of Contents | vi |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Reading White Autobiography..... | 8 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 12 |
| Who’s Left Out..... | 35 |
| Selected Review of Previous Scholarship..... | 38 |
| Chapter Outline..... | 40 |
| Chapter 1: The Authenticating Collaborator of White Jazz Autobiography | 44 |
| Authenticating Prefaces, Forewords, and Introductions..... | 50 |
| Intertextual Insertions in the Autobiographies of Eddie Condon and Benny Goodman..... | 62 |
| The Authenticating Collaborator in Mezz Mezzrow’s <i>Really the Blues</i> | 89 |
| Chapter 2: White Student, Black Teacher: Negotiating Race in the Learning of Jazz | |
| Introduction: Explanations of Jazz Learning: From the Practical to the Sublime..... | 96 |
| Early Music Experiences..... | 105 |
| Descriptions of Jazz Learning..... | 125 |
| Private Studies With African American Teachers..... | 139 |
| Explorations in Black Musical Worlds..... | 158 |
| Interracial Jam Sessions..... | 167 |
| Triumphs and Tensions Within Interracial Alliances..... | 176 |
| Chapter 3: Representations of Identity in Jewish Jazz Autobiography..... | 195 |
| An Unending Search for Identity: Artie Shaw’s <i>The Trouble with Cinderella</i> | 200 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Black and Jewish Blues: Mezz Mezzrow's <i>Really the Blues</i> | 223 |
| Beyond Horatio Alger: Benny Goodman's <i>The Kingdom of Swing</i> | 248 |
| Ambivalence and Borscht Belt Humour: Max Kaminsky's <i>Jazz Band: My Life in Jazz</i> | 270 |
| Chapter 4: Soldiers for Uncle Sam?: Depictions of Military Service in White Jazz | |
| Autobiography..... | 296 |
| Not Fit for Service: Accounts of 4-F Classification..... | 303 |
| From Those Who Served: Pride, Cynicism, and Despair..... | 312 |
| The Brief Army Career of the Young Chet Baker..... | 313 |
| “I Couldn’t Believe that I Might Die with These People I Hated”: Art Pepper’s Army Experience, 1944–1946..... | 318 |
| Bud Freeman: Artist and Soldier..... | 324 |
| Bob Wilber: Left Wing at Fort Dix..... | 327 |
| Artie Shaw’s Navy “Rangers”..... | 329 |
| Honour and Dishonour: Post-War Images of Max Kaminsky and Artie Shaw..... | 347 |
| Conclusion..... | 359 |
| Bibliography | 372 |

Introduction

In his monumental social and musical history of bebop, Scott DeVeaux suggests that “the usual narratives for jazz history remain largely suprapersonal”—that is, that even as “jazz writing” focuses on the lives of individual musicians, “beneath the surface of anecdotes, the real agents of change are abstractions to which individual will is subordinated” (28). Although DeVeaux grants the benefits of this approach, noting that historical trends “are often larger than individuals,” he believes that “telling history this way sacrifices the complexity and ambiguity of lives lived in a particular historical moment” (28). For this reason, he explains, in his own study he has chosen to highlight the individuals who contributed to the shaping and development of the musical form that came to be known as bebop: “My concern in this book is to understand bebop as a result of the decision these musicians made” (28).¹

With only slight revisions, DeVeaux’s observations may serve as a concise explanation of this study’s decision to focus on jazz autobiography as a way to uncover aspects of jazz history through “the complexity and ambiguity of lives lived in . . . particular historical moment[s].” This is not to deny, of course, the inherent limitations of the autobiographical form; rather, this study proposes, following Daniel Stein, to adopt “a theoretical lens through which jazz autobiography can be read productively, without

¹ DeVeaux also distinguishes his study from “the ‘Great Man’ school of historical writing,” which he believes also subordinates “individual will” to “lofty abstractions” (28).

either accepting the basic ‘untruth’ of autobiographical narrative, as poststructuralist critics might advocate, or damning the texts to the status of simple eye-witness accounts” (174).² (A more detailed explanation of my approach to the autobiographical texts under discussion in this study will follow later in the introduction.)

From 1926, with the publication of Paul Whiteman’s *Jazz*, to the end of the 20th century, more than sixty US jazz musicians published their autobiographies and memoirs; taken together, this body of work offers valuable first-hand accounts of jazz from the music’s infancy to the present day, allowing important insights into changing musical, cultural, and social landscapes that inextricably tie the history of jazz to the history of the United States in the 20th century. While many of these autobiographies were published by trade presses, in the 1980s and 1990s university presses greatly accelerated the publication of jazz autobiographies, clearly hoping to preserve the life stories of aging musicians whose careers represented a wide range of jazz history, including the early music of New Orleans and Chicago, big band swing, and bebop.

Although many of the earliest jazz autobiographies—those published between the 1920s and 1950s—attracted considerable public interest and were reviewed in jazz

² My approach to this study has also been strongly influenced by two key studies on jazz improvisation—Paul E. Berliner’s *Thinking In Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994) and Ingrid Monson’s *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (1996)—both of which argue that an insider perspective is essential for understanding the process of jazz learning and improvisatory jazz performance. In his response to this approach, Ajay Heble suggests that “the best writing on jazz has to involve a rather tricky balancing act, a complex set of negotiations between on the one hand the teaching of critical theory . . . and, on the other, a recognition of the value and importance of documenting insider perspectives. . . . Just as it would . . . be inappropriate to ignore what musicians have said about their own craft, so too it would be foolish simply to take what they say at face value” (91).

magazines and general-interest publications, it is only in the last three decades that scholars began to consider jazz autobiography a legitimate source for critical investigation. Since the 1980s a number of studies have been published; among these, some have used jazz autobiography as a way to explore various aspects of the autobiographical form itself; others have applied the methodologies of literary theory in their readings of particular autobiographical texts; others have used jazz autobiography to illuminate historical discourses around race, gender, and politics in 20th century American life. In addition to the few scholars who made jazz autobiography the subject of their study, many others—including ethnomusicologists, cultural and social historians, and literary scholars—have increasingly utilized jazz autobiography as primary source material for investigating broader themes within American history and cultural and literary studies.

It is worth noting that these studies have concentrated much of their attention on autobiographies written by African American jazz musicians, although selected texts by white jazz autobiographers, including Paul Whiteman (1926), Benny Goodman (1939), Mezz Mezzrow (1946), Artie Shaw (1952), and Art Pepper (1979), garnered considerable notice and some scholarly interest at and since the time of publication. For the most part, studies that have referred to white jazz autobiographies have tended to consider them within the context of a particular historical moment, such as the Swing Era, or a particular jazz style, such as 1920s Chicago jazz or bebop. That the focus of critical attention should have been on texts written by African American jazz musicians is hardly surprising, of course, nor that the majority (by a significant margin) of jazz autobiographers are black: it

is, after all, commonly understood that the various styles of music that came to be known as “jazz” evolved from African American musical and cultural traditions, and African American jazz musicians are widely acknowledged to be among its most prominent practitioners, innovators, and composers.

Yet as this study proposes to demonstrate, a focus on autobiographies by so-called “white” US jazz musicians enables new perspectives on contested aspects of race, ethnicity, nation, and gender within various jazz communities at critical periods of the music’s development over the 20th century. The term “white,” of course, as well as other parameters that guide this study, requires further explanation. In the context of this study, white jazz autobiographers are those who self-identified, and were identified by their collaborators and by their audiences, as white. The significance of their self-identification as white will be taken up in detail throughout this study, especially in relation to those autobiographers who, due to the fluidity of legal and social definitions of whiteness in the United States over the course of the 20th century, spent much of their childhoods inhabiting “not-quite-white” identities (Brodkin 60). (An outline of seminal texts within whiteness studies that inform my interpretations will follow below.) This dissertation focuses on fifteen of these autobiographies published between 1939 and 2001; all of the autobiographers are men, and all of them are instrumentalists. As white male jazz musicians living in a nation whose legal and social boundaries were constantly being redrawn and revised along lines of race, gender, and class, they experienced a greater share of opportunities for playing and recording, travel, housing, and education than did their African American counterparts.

Despite these advantages, however, white jazz autobiographers reveal a keen awareness of their position as outsiders in respect to African American music and culture. In this respect, then, their narratives are more inclined to highlight their sense of what they lack, rather than to acknowledge the privileges they enjoyed as white Americans; much of their energy is consumed with illustrating their desire to repair this lack by cultivating the knowledge and skills that they identify as characteristic of African American musical and cultural forms. From their position as outsiders, white jazz autobiographers, in narratives that encompass a wide range of 20th-century US jazz history, reveal a common search for authentication within African American music and culture. A key feature of this quest for authentication is the immersion experience, through which the white male jazz musician seeks to immerse himself in African American musical and cultural spheres as a requirement of his jazz education, and later of his status as a professional musician.

These accounts of immersion reinforce the notion of jazz as one of the few spheres within American society in which cultural authority has been historically granted to African Americans, and in which white musicians, as Burton W. Peretti suggests, “innovated and rebelled by willingly becoming musically subordinate to a socially and culturally subordinated group” (96–97). Through their descriptions of this process, white jazz autobiographers reveal that the playing of jazz created and necessitated interracial and interethnic mingling to a degree rarely seen in the mainstream society out of which these stories emerge. Yet these accounts also reveal the sharp boundaries that marked interracialism in the jazz worlds they describe; in this respect, these autobiographies

provide a fertile source for considering the limitations of culture—and of individual cultural producers—to disrupt, challenge, or circumvent entrenched notions of racial difference and separation.

In addition, white jazz autobiographers also reveal a deep concern with claiming versions of masculinity that have been shaped by their immersion experiences. In their accounts of themselves as young white men learning jazz from and alongside African American men, they illustrate a process by which they don masculine identities in emulation of the black musicians who are their idols and teachers. Manifestations of this impulse may be seen in their descriptions of listening to and learning to play jazz, descriptions in which they convey a physical as well as an emotional attraction to African American men; this impulse is also evident in their technical descriptions of playing their instruments, as well as in their descriptions of relationships with women, in which they are more likely to reveal misogynistic, rather than respectful, attitudes. In all of these respects, white jazz autobiographers fit into a long and well-documented tradition of white fascination with black masculinity. Their depictions of the jazz communities in which they live and work as “highly homosocial environment[s]” is consistent with that of mainstream jazz historiography, and in that sense is hardly surprising (Peretti 125). Nonetheless, as will be elaborated upon below, there are important distinctions to be made between Norman Mailer’s image of the white Negro hipster, for example, or Eric Lott’s white Negro minstrel figure, and the various depictions of white male attraction to and immersion in black masculine culture revealed in these autobiographies.

First, though, I will begin with a brief introduction to the autobiographers under discussion here. All of them were born within the first three decades of the 20th century, yet they reveal a remarkable diversity in respect to their particular socioeconomic, geographical, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Bob Wilber and Charlie Barnet came from wealthy East Coast families; Mezz Mezzrow from a respectable middle-class Jewish family on Chicago's Northwest Side. Many others, however, came from working-class or lower-middle-class immigrant families who experienced considerable hardship even before the Great Depression; a number of them—including Benny Goodman, Max Kaminsky, Art Hodes, Artie Shaw—were making important contributions to their family's finances through their income as professional musicians from the time they were teenagers.

Many of these jazz autobiographers grew up in or near one of the urban centers of jazz—Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles; those who were not set out in search of these jazz meccas at a young age.³ Their descriptions of this process of discovery help to illuminate the ethos of a particular city's jazz culture; as well, they provide important insights into the emergence and development of particular jazz styles. Wingy Manone brings us inside the early jazz of New Orleans; Bud Freeman, Benny Goodman, Art Hodes, Max Kaminsky, Mezz Mezzrow, and Eddie Condon inside the flourishing

³ Among the autobiographers, only Wingy Manone was born in New Orleans; Bud Freeman, Art Hodes, Benny Goodman, and Mezzrow were all born in Chicago or in one of its suburbs. Eddie Condon and Woody Herman grew up in the Midwest; Chet Baker and Art Pepper in California. Artie Shaw, Charlie Barnet, and Steve Jordan were born in New York City; Bob Wilber grew up in Scarsdale, N.Y. John LaPorta in Philadelphia; Don Asher and Max Kaminsky in Massachusetts.

Chicago jazz scene of the 1920s. The Swing Era of the 1930s and 1940s, during which jazz became the most popular music in America, is represented in the autobiographies of bandleaders Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Charlie Barnet, and Woody Herman; West Coast musicians Chet Baker and Art Pepper illustrate jazz's development from swing through bebop to cool; Steve Jordan offers a personal history of the guitar's unique function as a rhythm instrument in jazz. Don Asher and John LaPorta are representative of the eclectic, stylistically wide-ranging jazz musician of the swing, bebop, and hard bop eras.

I) Reading White Jazz Autobiography

Studies on jazz have frequently used oral histories in order to document important aspects of the music's social and musicological history. Archives containing recorded and transcribed interviews with jazz musicians, as well as interviews in music journals, on radio and on television have been key sources for jazz historians and critics. An underlying assumption of this study is that published autobiography as a genre presents a version of a life which is not necessarily more insightful or revealing than the oral histories or interviews mentioned above, but which comes with its own particular characteristics that are worth taking into consideration.

The process of writing and editing an autobiographical text for publication, I would suggest, allows greater opportunity for creating and shaping an autobiographical subject than is typically possible with interviews conducted for oral history archives or for transcription for print sources, such as music journals or general-interest newspapers

and magazines. Granted, many of the jazz autobiographies in this study indeed originated as lengthy interview sessions with a collaborator or amanuensis, and yet the process of transforming interviews into narratives requires a considerable reorganization or amendment of the raw materials; through this process the autobiographer and/or collaborator or editor has the opportunity to decide what stories to tell and what stories to leave out. In this respect, then, these autobiographies will be analyzed as constructed representations of jazz lives; the aim of this study is not simply to judge the “truth” or accuracy of these texts as historical documents, but more importantly to try to understand the motivations underlying a particular construction of a life.

A vivid glimpse into this process of construction may be seen in the work of Don Asher, who is both a white jazz autobiographer (*Notes from a Battered Grand*) and also a collaborator, with African American pianist, Hampton Hawes, on Hawes’ autobiography, *Raise Up Off Me*.⁴ In his introduction to *Raise Up Off Me*, Gary Giddins refers to an essay by Asher in which he revealed some details about his collaboration with Hawes, which involved many tape-recorded sessions before Asher produced a “preliminary draft of the book” (v). Asher describes a process of negotiation with Hawes: while Asher was concerned with giving an accurate account of Hawes’ speech patterns, Hawes complained that Asher was representing his speech as “deliberate minority group talk,” insisting that

⁴ Asher, who made his living for many years as the house pianist at the hungry i in San Francisco, also published several works of fiction as well as essays for publications such as *Harper’s*. Not surprisingly, both his autobiography and collaboration with Hawes show a degree of narrative skill beyond that generally found in the jazz autobiographies under consideration here. In 1975, *Raise Up Off Me* was awarded the prestigious ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for music writing.

“I didn’t mean for you to transcribe stuff directly. . . . it’s not dignified enough” (vi).

According to Giddins, this intense negotiation continued “for two weeks before Asher embarked on a second draft,” which Giddins judges a notable success: “The care put into making the narrative flow, the attention to nuance and rhythmic immediacy, is evident on every page of the finished work. *Raise Up Off Me* is a major contribution to the literature of jazz” (vi).⁵

An example of Hawes’ rich, simile-driven speech may be found in the following description, in which the pianist recounts what he learned from Charlie Parker:

I had learned from Bird how to stay loose and relaxed on up tempos, and found out that at very slow tempos the beat has to swell: It’s like taking a mouthful of good wine, swishing it around, savoring it before you let it go down; the swallow is that beat finally dropping. (34)

Hawes expands on his concept of “time” in his description of Chuck Thompson, who played drums in his first trio: “[H]is time was natural as a heartbeat pumping pure, fresh blood into a tune, his rolls so even it was like hearing a crowd roar during a big play at a football game on the radio with the volume turned down” (35).

It would be almost twenty years before Asher’s own autobiography was published, but in the meantime he apparently had not forgotten the black speech cadences he had learned in his collaborative experience with Hampton Hawes. In a passage in *Notes From a Battered Grand* in which Asher details his own immersion experience in a

⁵ The racial dynamic at work in this collaboration between Hawes and Asher clearly deserves more detailed scrutiny.

black jazz club in Boston during the early 1950s, he offers the following description of learning the intricacies of jazz “time”:

I was discovering what “time” meant—the *quality* of the beat, . . . and learning to function at very fast and very slow tempos. At slow tempos the beat has to swell, Lucius told me, and passed on a concept a West Coast bopper had laid on him: “It’s like taking yourself a mouthful of good wine, swishing it around, savoring it before you let it go down; the swallow is that beat finally dropping. . . . But the supreme lesson I was beginning to absorb . . . is that “time should be as natural as a heartbeat pumping pure, fresh blood into a tune” (103, emphasis in original).

Asher here borrows two quotes that originated with Hampton Hawes and applies them to his own experience about learning to play jazz. While Hawes attributes the first idea about tempo to Charlie Parker, and the analogy between “time” and a heartbeat to his drummer, Asher integrates them both into his own observations about his progress as a jazz pianist; moreover, he does so without naming Hawes directly, but rather with the descriptor “West Coast bopper,” of which Hawes was undoubtedly a leading example. I am certainly not claiming that all jazz autobiographies are constructed to such an elaborate degree; nonetheless, the above example serves to emphasize the cautionary approach that this study adopts with respect to the “literal” veracity of these jazz texts.

II) Theoretical Framework

My analysis of white jazz autobiography is informed by a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary body of scholarship. These include studies on jazz published since the late 1980s by cultural and social historians who have examined 20th-century jazz in its various manifestations for the ways it has reflected, anticipated, or dissented from the attitudes of the mainstream US society from which it emerged. Ogren (1989), Peretti (1992), and Kenney (1993) examine the attitudes of musicians, critics, audiences, politicians, and intellectuals to jazz in the early decades of the 20th century; Stowe (1994) and Erenberg (1998) propose readings of jazz during the Swing Era of the 1930s and 1940s as reflective of the populist, democratic impulse of the New Deal period; Tucker (2000) offers a counter-narrative to the all-male big bands of the Swing Era, uncovering the history of hundreds of “all-girl” bands during WWII whose stories had been virtually obliterated from swing and jazz historiography. Von Eschen (2004) examines the US State Department sponsored jazz tours of the 1950s through the 1970s for the ways in which jazz was promoted as a model of American democracy and pluralism, and also for the ways in which jazz musicians both supported and challenged official government policies.

This dissertation is also informed by seminal works on jazz by ethnomusicologists Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996), whose studies provided the first in-depth accounts of jazz improvisation as described by its practitioners. Monson (2007) and DeVaux (1997) also combine their training as ethnomusicologists with their work as jazz historians; Monson’s study focuses on jazz and the civil rights era, while DeVaux’s provides a

musical and social history of bebop during the 1930s and 1940s. Saul (2003) offers a view on jazz and the civil rights movement from his perspective as a literary scholar. The topic of Chapter 1—the role of the collaborator of white jazz autobiography—is informed by the work on slave narratives by literary theorist and African American scholar Robert Stepto (1979). I have also made extensive use of the many published biographies of the white musicians under examination in this study, especially for their references to interviews, essays, and articles concerning these autobiographers that help to illuminate particular aspects of the autobiographical representation within the jazz autobiographies themselves.

Specific texts from the field of critical race and whiteness studies have also guided my interpretations of white jazz autobiography: these include studies that focus on (1) the historically fluid and mutable concepts of race, ethnicity, and whiteness in the United States (Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2005; Brodtkin 1998; Raeburn 2009); (2) the white fascination with African Americans and their culture (Lott 1993; Monson 1995; Tate 2003); (3) white privilege as a legacy of socially and legally constructed white hegemony in the United States (Lipsitz 1998; Rothenberg et al., 2012; Brodtkin 1998). Although some of these studies reside outside the immediate historical and cultural circumstances that frame the lives and careers of the white jazz autobiographers, they offer valuable context against which to interpret (and sometimes distinguish) the particular expressions of whiteness, white fascination with blackness, and white privilege that emerge from these autobiographies. The following brief essay attempts to situate these various concerns of whiteness studies in terms of their significance to this project.

Historical Concepts of Race and Whiteness in the United States

In *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, historian Matthew Jacobson traces the extensive re-imaginings of whiteness beginning in the mid-1800s, when large numbers of Southern and Eastern European immigrants began to arrive on American shores and to challenge the previously “unambiguous boundaries” of the term “white” that had provided the foundation for 18th and early 19th century immigration and naturalization laws (7). During the first part of the 20th century, terms such as “‘Mediterranean,’ ‘Hebrew,’ ‘Iberic,’ or ‘Slavic’” served to make “racial distinctions” between groups who “represented a kind of provisional or probationary whiteness.”⁶ Over time, however, a gradual emphasis on “race as *color*” served to “erode the once-salient ‘differences’ among the white races” (95, emphasis in original). As Eric Goldstein explains, “By the early 1940s, . . . [a]s the term ‘race’ came to be applied more exclusively to peoples of color, concepts like ‘ethnicity,’ pioneered by Jewish scholars in the 1920s to refer to European descent groups, were finally introduced more broadly to the American public” (Goldstein 193).⁷

Several of the white jazz autobiographers in this study were second- or third-generation Americans whose families had arrived in the United States during one of the

⁶ Race and labour historian David Roediger prefers the term “inbetween peoples”—a term he attributes to John Higham and Robert Orsi—suggesting that “[n]ew immigrants often existed between nonwhiteness and full inclusion as whites, not just between black and white” (Roediger 13).

⁷ For an excellent account of the historical development of the terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic” in the US, see also Roediger 21–34.

waves of European immigration described by Jacobson. For these individuals, whiteness was not an identity they were born with, but rather one that they grew into as de jure and de facto definitions of whiteness in the United States shifted to include them. The historical scholarship on whiteness, for example, helps to clarify the shifting racial and ethnic identities of the four Jewish jazz autobiographers who form the particular focus of Chapter 3, as do the histories and literary studies of the racialization of Jews in 19th and 20th-century American legislative, political, and cultural life by Goldstein (2006), Alexander (2001), and Melnick (1999). (A more detailed examination of these studies will follow in Chapter 3.)

Bruce Raeburn's essay, "Stars of David and Sons of Sicily: Constellations Beyond the Canon in Early New Orleans Jazz"—in which Raeburn focuses on the contribution of Jewish and Italian musicians in that city from the end of the nineteenth through the first decades of the twentieth century—offers valuable background for contextualizing trumpeter Wingy Manone's account of his early jazz experiences in New Orleans. In part Raeburn's essay is a response to Michael Paul Rogin's study, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, in which Rogin suggests that "racial 'cross-dressing' enabled Jewish immigrants such as Al Jolson to become 'white,' and therefore 'American,' via blackface" (Raeburn 124); by contrast, Raeburn stresses the development of "neighborhood-based jazz scenes" in New Orleans in order to "explore an alternative model by which Jews and Italian-Americans (as well as Latinos and Afro-French Creoles) were able to create 'American' identities for themselves by assimilation to black vernacular musical practices through jazz" (124). Beyond its specific insights

regarding attitudes toward race and ethnicity in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, Raeburn's thesis also offers a more general pathway for considering the immersion experiences of many other white jazz autobiographers of recent European descent; that is, that through their immersion in African American musical forms they became, not so much white or black, but rather Americanized.

Although Raeburn argues for "the centrality of black influence on the development of jazz," he believes that "it is important to grasp the broad scope of the music's appeal from the outset in order to appreciate its power as a force for breaking down conventional modes of thought regarding race, ethnicity, and music" (124). In his view, "localized attitudes and conventions" within early New Orleans jazz community permitted a process whereby musicians of a wide range of racial and ethnic identities "transcended, shed, and exchanged ethnic musical practices to embrace a common American vernacular" (125). Raeburn complicates the tendency of much of standard jazz historiography to trace jazz's development in New Orleans to distinct and definable African and European influences, suggesting instead that "musical behavior within this early jazz community was not determined by ethnic affiliation and tradition but by self-directed . . . individuals . . . who were responding to new conditions and opportunities" (125). Raeburn's essay provides valuable historical and regional context for interpreting Wingy Manone's description of his jazz education in New Orleans and Bob Wilber's account of his private music lessons with Sidney Bechet.

In a similar way, William Kenney focuses on Eddie Condon's Irish American heritage as a way of interpreting his distinctive jazz personality. In "Eddie Condon in

Illinois: The Roots of a ‘Jazz Personality,’” Kenney traces the source of Condon’s disdain for propriety and middle-class values to his Irish Catholic upbringing in the staunchly conservative (and Protestant) American Midwest at the height of Prohibition. According to Kenney, “the tensions between the Irish and the older Anglo-Saxon elements in the Midwest” encouraged Condon to embrace “a particular manifestation “of the jazz life, an image of unbridled liberty, dissipation, and a fast-paced hedonism that prayed only that the party would never end” (260).

White Fascination with African Americans

Two influential studies from the mid-1990s, Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993) and Ingrid Monson’s “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse” (1995), provide historical perspective by which to consider white jazz autobiographers’ fascination with and attraction to African Americans—particularly African American men—and their culture. Although Lott and Monson are concerned with the implications of white obsession with blackness at notably different moments of American history—Lott’s focus is on minstrelsy in the antebellum North, Monson’s on jazz in the period following the Second World War—each one casts a long historical glance on this phenomenon, outlining its presence in American culture from minstrelsy to the present day.⁸ As this study will attempt to illustrate, while many elements of the

⁸ Monson observes that the concept of hipness “and African American music as cultural critique has, of course, detached itself . . . from the particular historical context of bebop .

phenomenon of fascination and obsession identified by Lott and Monson may be seen in the accounts of white jazz autobiographers, there are also, I will argue, important differences. A summary of their positions, however, will help to clarify the distinctions I wish to make.

According to Lott, in antebellum minstrelsy there was both a “drawing up and crossing of racial boundaries. Minstrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed . . . what my title loosely terms ‘love and theft’” (6). The “form of blackface acts”—that is, the process by which white performers donned blackface and attempted to imitate the speech, gestures, and cultural forms of African Americans—was, in Lott’s view, “a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of ‘blackness’ and demonstrates the permeability of the color line” (6). A notable component of Lott’s argument is the ambivalence of the response of “white performers of minstrelsy and their audiences” to “black people and their cultural practices” (6). Among the contrasting responses Lott proposes are “love and theft,” “fascination and a self-protective derision” (6), “panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure” (7), and “fear of and fascination with the black male” (25);

. . . [and] inspired several generations of white liberal youth to adopt both the stylistic markers of hipness . . . and the socially conscious attitude that hipness has been presumed to signify” (Monson 1995, 398). Lott also positions “white male fascination” with blackness (54) within present-day American life, arguing that the minstrel show “arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies which underlies racial dread to our own day” (Lott 4). And in his “Afterword to the 20th-Anniversary Edition” of *Love and Theft*, Lott recalls that “[f]airly soon” after the book’s initial printing, “‘love and theft’ became a kind of shorthand for the dialectic of white racial attraction and repulsion, cultural expropriation born of cross-racial desire, that first arose in public commercial terms in the antebellum minstrel show but is plain today wherever you look” (248).

so intense are these feelings of “white racial dread,” Lott suggests, that minstrelsy was only able to express them “through ridicule and racist lampoon” (4).

Among these responses, some undoubtedly resonate with the attitudes expressed by white jazz autobiographers, whose “desire to try on the accents of ‘blackness’ and to challenge the barriers of segregation within and beyond the jazz world—thereby “demonstrat[ing] the permeability of the color line”—is a recurring theme of their accounts. Expressions of “love,” “pleasure,” and “fascination with the black male” are also readily available in their descriptions of their immersion experiences, as they learn to play jazz and experience a range of social and cultural experiences in the company of African American men; certainly anxiety may be seen to underlie their desire to perform up to the expectations of black musicians who were their mentors. Yet many other descriptions Lott suggests to characterize minstrel performance—notably “ridicule and racist lampoon,” “dread,” “self-protective derision,” “panic” and “terror”—seem in striking contrast to the attitudes as well as the tone of these autobiographers. One might argue that their genuine feelings—or, in Lott’s words, “the “‘racial’ impulses, reckonings, and unconscious reactions that lie so deep in most Caucasians as to feel inevitable and indeed natural” (11)—would be unlikely to reveal themselves in autobiographical form, or at least not explicitly. The autobiographical impulse of many autobiographers to present themselves in the best possible view for public consumption (I am not claiming that they all share this concern) would reasonably censor expressions of overt racism or ridicule, if they did exist. Nonetheless, it is the performance of minstrelsy that Lott is observing, and therefore a comparison with the construction or performance of an

autobiographical subject seems appropriate. By these standards, then, I would argue that earnestness and sincerity, rather than “ridicule and racist lampoon,” distinguish accounts of “racial feeling” (Lott 18) by white jazz autobiographers, and that these feelings are most evident as they describe their attempts to imitate and absorb the musical techniques and performance practices of black jazz musicians.

In “The Problem with White Hipness,” Monson explains her decision to explore white hipness in the jazz world following the Second World War because of the response she got from musicians she interviewed for her study, *Saying Something*; these musicians, Monson writes, “were extremely critical of presumptions outsiders made about them and their supposedly hip lifestyles” (396).⁹ Both she and Lott are concerned with the perpetuation of racist stereotyping and thinking and the commodification of black cultural forms that takes place when white people desire and perform (that is, imitate and emulate) their *perceptions* of black people and black cultural forms. Monson’s overriding purpose, then, is to highlight “the historical legacy that informs the African cultural tendency to reduce African American cultural values to caricature” (421). Although she acknowledges the “well-meaning” intentions of white Americans who have embraced a hip aesthetic, she warns that

To the extent that [they] have confused the most “transgressive” aspects of African American culture with its true character, they fall into the trap of

⁹ An important source in Monson’s investigation of hipness is Leroi Jones’s [Amiri Baraka’s] *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, in which Jones traces the origins of the hip aesthetic in jazz to particular musical and extramusical aspects of bebop, including, for example, the clothing, speech, and presumed drug and sexual habits of its practitioners.

viewing blackness as absence. Whether conceived as an absence of morality or of bourgeois pretensions, this view of blackness, paradoxically, buys into the historical legacy of primitivism and its concomitant exoticism of the “Other.” (Monson 1995, 398)

Similarly, Lott notes the danger inherent in “the position favoring minstrelsy as a people’s culture,” for even as it “celebrates the minstrel show’s folk authenticity, its elevation of black types and black culture through blackface to a place in the national mythology . . . it regularly slips into an indulgence of racist typing” (31).

Lott and Monson also highlight the centrality of gender in the performance and descriptions of white fascination with blackness. Lott emphasizes the erotic and specifically homoerotic performance of “the minstrel man”: “Bold swagger, irrepressible desire, sheer bodily display: in a real sense the minstrel man *was* the penis . . .” (26). Later he describes “the cultural negotiation” that took place in minstrelsy, noting that it “depended on encounters between a white man and a black man” in which a “certain dynamic of masculinity or, conversely, ‘unmanning’ seems to have been at work here” (51). Here Lott is concerned not only with the “homosocial relationships” within minstrelsy, but also with its homosexual and homoerotic elements, suggesting that “there is evidence that performers and audiences also found in blackface something closer to a homoerotic charge” (55). He describes the “dangerous power” of the black male body, a power that “was remarked [upon] by nearly all observers of the minstrel phenomenon”, concluding that fear of the power of the black male combined with “homosexual fantasies, or at the very least envy, of black men” (120, 126).

Furthermore, in Lott's analysis of blackface minstrels' immersion in black cultural practices (including music and dance), he identifies their appropriation of black masculinity as a principal expression of their "cultural theft." "What appears in fact to have been appropriated," he states,

were certain kinds of masculinity. To put on the cultural forms of "blackness" was to engage in a complex affair of manly mimicry. . . . To wear or even enjoy blackface was literally, for a time, to become black, to inherit the cool, virility, humility, abandon, or *gaité de coeur* that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood. (54)

Similarly, Monson insists that in order to understand the racial and gendered aspects of hipness in the context of jazz (specifically bebop) following the Second World War, one must understand its essential connection to "the sartorial display and bearing of black men. The image of hip," in other words, "was consequently weighted in gender as well as race" (1995, 401). More specifically, she argues that for both white musicians and white audiences, the attraction of bebop was in large part "a conflation of the music with a style of black masculinity" (402).

Not surprisingly, for both Monson and Lott (as well as for many other contemporary critics) the figure of "the white Negro" holds particular resonance, representing as it does the complexity and ambiguity inherent in the white attraction to and appropriation of black masculinity and African American cultural forms more generally. Although Lott first considers the term in a historical context, as he describes "the responses of the first minstrel performers to the allure of black men," he sees

Norman Mailer's provocative essay, "The White Negro" (1957), as simply "the twentieth-century reinvention of these homosocial and homosexual fascinations" (56).¹⁰ For Monson, whose purpose in her essay is to illustrate the dangers inherent in the attitudes and claims of white hipness, Mailer's essay represents the "prurient extremes" of "the gendered character of white identification with black music" (1995, 403).

Just as Lott's minstrel characters feel both desire and scorn for the black characters they impersonate, Mailer describes a mixture of attraction and condescension that drew white avant-garde intellectuals and artists in the period following WWII to the figure of the black male hipster; in Mailer's depiction, this figure lacks intellectual or rational capability but instead seeks physical (especially sexual) release from his life as a subjugated being within a racist and "partially totalitarian society" (Mailer 278). Faced with "a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger," Mailer writes, "the Negro had stayed alive and begun to grow by following the need of his body where he could" (279). It is this primitivism and abandonment of intellect to which Mailer claims to be so attracted, and he finds it in every African American he encounters, even the individual black men whom he names as friends, and whose "survival" has depended on mastering "the art of the primitive" (279).

As with Lott's depiction of minstrel performers, certain aspects of Mailer's account of the white hipster's attraction to the black male are recognizable within those of

¹⁰ For other essays on contemporary examples of the white Negro and other manifestations of white commodification of black culture, see also Greg Tate's edited collection, *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture* (2003).

the autobiographers under discussion in this study. Like Mailer and many other young white males of his generation, many white jazz autobiographers attempted to emulate an urban black cultural aesthetic, even expressing, like Mailer, a longing to be black themselves: “So there was a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man’s code to fit their facts,” Mailer writes. “The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro” (279).

Yet there are also critical differences between Mailer’s portrait and those found in these autobiographies, differences that a brief look at two passages from “The White Negro” may serve to illustrate. The first passage contains Mailer’s infamous simile of “jazz as orgasm” and his contention that African Americans have given up intellectual pursuits to focus entirely on physical gratification. In his description, “the Negro”—it is clear that he is referring specifically to the black male—lives

for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, . . . it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, “I feel this, and now you do too.” (279)

It is likely that no passage from Mailer's essay has provoked as much furious backlash as this one; many leading African American writers, including Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, and jazz critics such as Nat Hentoff, responded with indignation and outrage to the reduction of the black man to his supposed sexual prowess (Saul 68–71). In Baldwin's famous response, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," he described his "fury that so antique a vision of the blacks should, at this late hour . . . be stepping off the A train. . . . Why malign the sorely menaced sexuality of Negroes in order to justify the white man's own sexual panic? (180–81).¹¹

That this passage has generated such passion and acrimony is hardly surprising, nor my claim that its portrait of hyper-sexualized black masculinity is more extreme than any of the homosocial or even homoerotic passages to be found in white jazz autobiography. Yet another passage from Mailer's essay, quieter and less extravagant in some respects, in my view does as much or more to illustrate the considerable distance separating his attitude toward African American men from those expressed within white jazz autobiography.

As in the earlier-quoted passage, in this second passage Mailer also stresses the black man's intellectual limitations, limitations he compensates for by his superior instinct, by his ability to sense, rather than to know. Yet perhaps because Mailer writes this passage as if the situation and characters he describes have a foundation in reality (unlike the first, which is so obviously fantastical), the result is even more shocking and

¹¹ James Baldwin. "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," 171–90. For an analysis of various responses to "The White Negro," see Scott Saul, 63–72.

disturbing. In this passage, Mailer describes a conversation he overheard at a party he was attending with “a Negro friend” and “a white girl who was a few years out of college.” Although Mailer’s “Negro friend” “could not read or write, he had an extraordinary ear and a fine sense of mimicry,” qualities which he uses to detect shortcomings in the girl’s argument (286–87). As a result of his illiteracy, Mailer explains, his friend could not possibly understand “anything about the merits and demerits of the argument, . . . and so he eschewed any attempt to obey the precision or lack of precision in the girl’s language, and instead sensed her character (and the values of her social type) by swinging with the nuances of her voice” (287).

By contrast with Mailer’s demeaning view of the intellectual capacity of black Americans, white jazz autobiographers stress the intellectual depth of the jazz musicians who are their teachers and mentors. Furthermore, as much as they express admiration for the “feeling” aspects of jazz performance, they acknowledge the need to learn the techniques and methodologies of jazz improvisation and performance—that is, they stress the discipline and hard work that jazz requires of its practitioners, and they look to African American musicians (almost all of them men) as models for this work ethic. In Scott Saul’s analysis of “The White Negro,” he remarks that one of the chief criticisms of Mailer’s portrait of jazz was precisely his failure to acknowledge the work in being a jazz musician. This failure, for example, irked Ralph Ellison, who remarked that “most Negroes can spot a paper-thin ‘white Negro’ every time simply because those who masquerade missed what others were forced to pick up along the way: discipline—a discipline which these heavy thinkers would not undergo even if . . . it would make of

them the freest of spirits, the wisest of men and the most sublime of heroes” (qtd. in Saul 69).¹²

In her essay on white hipness, Monson contrasts Mailer’s portrayal of African American men with that of Mezz Mezzrow, undoubtedly the most famous white Negro jazz musician and one of the autobiographers under discussion in this study. In Monson’s view, Mezzrow’s depiction of African Americans in his autobiography illustrates what she describes (by way of James Baldwin) as the proximity of “[a]dmiration and the reinforcement of stereotype” (402). Although she claims not to doubt “either [Mezzrow’s] sincerity or the appeal that the masculine style of African American musicians held in his imagination,” she argues that he “mythologized these qualities in a manner that sometimes partook of what Andrew Ross has called a ‘romantic version of racism’” (403). Even so, Monson contrasts Mezzrow’s mythologizing, which she describes as “relatively benign,” with those expressed by Mailer, concluding that “Mezzrow and Mailer occupy contrasting points along a spectrum of gendered white hip identification with African American culture” (404). Monson’s evaluation, with which I am in agreement, may be extended as a way to assess the autobiographies under discussion in this study; that is, if we take Mezzrow’s attitude to be benign in comparison with Mailer’s, then I would suggest that Mezzrow’s tendency to produce stereotypical and primitivist depictions of African Americans in his autobiography is at the extreme end of what we will find among white jazz autobiographers. By extending Monson’s comparison

¹² In “The Problem with White Hipness,” Monson also stresses the intelligence of the bebop musicians, contrasting their integrity and work ethic with Mailer’s emphasis on “the hip African American” as “existentialist/hedonist” (415).

in this way, I would argue that Mailer's depiction of black culture is far removed from the general spirit of such depictions by white jazz autobiographers, even as the latter express, to varying degrees, the "romantic version[s] of racism" attributed to white Americans by many contemporary scholars of black popular culture, including Ross, Monson, and Lott.

White Privilege

In *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz offers a moving account of the origins of his own interest in white privilege, that is, in the "social structure that gives value to whiteness and offers rewards for racism" (viii).¹³ Lipsitz recalls that he was fifteen in 1963 when Bill Moore, a Baltimore postman, began his solitary "civil rights march" from Tennessee to Mississippi to protest the violent resistance to school desegregation in Mississippi (viii–ix). Three days into his march, Moore was shot and killed and left on the side of the highway in Alabama. In Lipsitz's words, "The bullets that killed Bill Moore changed my life. . . . Moore was a white man murdered by other white men because he opposed white

¹³ According to Karen Brodtkin, the racialization of Jews and other European immigrants is simply one example of the historical process through which "capitalism as an economic organization in the United States [has been] racially structured" (76). Jews became "white folks"—that is, middle-class Americans who enjoyed the privileges of whiteness that determined accessibility to housing and job opportunities—not simply because they "pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps" but because of post World War II affirmative action programs that "allowed [them] to float on a rising economic tide." At the same time, however, the US government offered no such programs to African Americans, who were left with "only the cement boots of segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and discrimination" (50–51). See also *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, Paula S. Rothenberg, ed., 2012; and *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, Mike Hill, ed., 1997.

supremacy. I had never encountered a story like that. It made me look into myself and provoked me to think about what I was willing to risk for my own beliefs” (xii–xiii).

Lipsitz was struck by Moore’s need to go beyond simply opposing “white supremacy in principle,” but rather “to put his life on the line trying to end it” (xiii). Through this distinction, Lipsitz offers a critique of white liberal paternalism, in which he believes lip service to antiracist principles often substitutes for individuals taking a stand—acting, that is, to oppose “white supremacy” (xiv). In Bill Moore, he sees an individual white person who “did not imagine himself innocent of the privileges he had received as a result of being white” but instead “took resolute action toward a solution” (xv). Yet Lipsitz also concedes that solutions to racism will not come simply from “dramatic moments of individual heroism,” but rather from white Americans acknowledging and working to change “the structural and cultural forces that racialize human rights, opportunities, and life chances in our country” (xv). In his own life, Lipsitz—like many other US scholars of critical race theory—has made his own activism central to his career as an academic (xvii–xx).

As white jazz autobiographers tell their stories, it is easy to find many examples of white privilege by which they benefitted in their lives and careers, yet for the most part these examples seem unexamined and perhaps even beneath their consciousness. The casualness with which they refer to themselves as white is itself significant, particularly for those who, as noted earlier, were not born white but became white; in this respect these autobiographers have clearly internalized 20th-century attitudes about race in the United States, by which people of colour are racialized, or marked, and white folks are

simply white, or unmarked.¹⁴ Perhaps even more significant, however, are the many descriptions by white jazz autobiographers of their engagements in white dance bands, or in recording studios, or on network radio shows, or in the most popular and best-paid white big bands of the Swing Era; in these descriptions, although black bands and musicians are held in the highest esteem for their authenticity and skill, it is rare that these white musicians acknowledge, let alone attempt to redress, the economic and social advantages they enjoyed over their African American counterparts. Moreover, for the dozens of descriptions in these autobiographies of white youngsters trekking to the South Side or Harlem or Central Avenue, there is rarely mention that interracialism almost always went in one direction—that is, that white musicians were allowed to visit African American neighborhoods and clubs, but that segregation—both by law and by custom—kept African American musicians out of white neighborhoods and clubs, either as audience members or as performers.

In many respects, then, these white jazz autobiographers would fail to meet the challenge proposed by Lipsitz and other scholars of white privilege, who see the inability of individual white people to acknowledge their privilege as implicit in the system of white hegemony that has served as the basis for American social, legal, and political structures throughout its history. Furthermore, should we ask if these white jazz autobiographers could have done more to challenge the laws and customs of segregation in their lives and careers, by the standards outlined above, the answer would undoubtedly

¹⁴ As Richard Dyer observes, “The invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white (which is to say dominant) discourse is of a piece with its ubiquity” (11).

be yes. It is fair to say that white jazz musicians' pioneering efforts to initiate interracial recording sessions and public performances rarely had a detrimental effect on their own careers, or, for example, on their income or ability to get jobs. If viewed against the example of Bill Moore's one-man march, the stand taken by these autobiographers to integrate their bands or their audiences must surely be seen as cautious, and sometimes even as self-serving.

For all of the reasons outlined above, scholars wishing to foreground white privilege in jazz would find fertile source material in white jazz autobiography. Yet even though I recognize the value in such an approach, my study takes a different tack, one which values the insights of white privilege scholarship but which also insists that these white jazz musicians are much more than mere examples of white privilege. In taking this approach, my intention is not to overlook the limitations and failures of their interracial experiences; I would suggest, rather, that the responses of these white jazz autobiographers—moderate and cautious as they were—nonetheless deserve attention for the insights they provide on the real-life negotiations that took place among jazz musicians of different racial and cultural backgrounds, musicians who at times succeeded in redefining and pushing the limits of interracialism on and off the bandstand.

White Resentment Narratives and White Jazz Autobiography

In *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (2007), Ingrid Monson examines what she describes as the “white resentment narrative” within some “jazz history and criticism” (16). This tendency—especially as articulated in various essays and

full-length studies over the past two decades, and in public debates within jazz circles that go back much further—expresses the view that the history of jazz has been unfairly represented as the exclusive or primary domain of black music and culture, and that, as a result, the contributions of white jazz musicians as creators, innovators, and stylists have been obscured or deliberately misrepresented.¹⁵ In fundamental ways, then, the objectives of white resentment narratives are diametrically opposed to those found within white privilege scholarship.

Two studies representing the latter position seem particularly worth noting: Richard M. Sudhalter's *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz, 1915–1945* (which Monson cites) and Randall Sandke's *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (published after Monson's study).¹⁶ In *Lost Chords*, Sudhalter argues that a “black creationist canon” was embraced by jazz historians and critics from the music's earliest presence on the American landscape and continues to the present day (his study was published in 1999); this black canon, he suggests, has prevented the recognition of “a distinct, significant, and creative white presence” within jazz since its beginnings (xviii). The critical issue of “influence,” Sudhalter maintains, “has been incontrovertibly two-way; many white individuals and

¹⁵ As Monson points out, the recent examples of this white resentment narrative evoke “similar debates that took place in the jazz community during the early 1960s” as a result of the increasing assertiveness of African Americans during the civil rights era (16). For Monson's discussion of two of these earlier debates, see Chapter 7 of *Freedom Sounds* (238–82).

¹⁶ Monson also mentions Terry Teachout's essay, “The Color of Jazz” (1995) and Gene Lee's *Cats of Any Color: Jazz, Black and White* (1995) (16).

ensembles have had powerful and lasting effect on the music, and on their black colleagues” (xviii).

In *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet*, Sandke—a jazz trumpeter and author of a text in which he describes an “alternative way of improvising and composing” that he calls “metatonal” music—does not hide his belief that a reverse racism has influenced the reception to his work and limited his opportunities to record and perform work beyond the early New Orleans style jazz for which he is mainly known (10; Mergner 2). Thus, a very personal motivation appears to guide his revisionist history of jazz. Furthermore, he believes that many other white jazz musicians have suffered a similar fate, particularly since the 1960s under the influence of black nationalism, and later as a result of the neo-classicist movement in jazz that promoted young African American musicians at the expense of more experienced white and black musicians (4–5).¹⁷ Like Sudhalter, who challenges the “black creationist canon,” Sandke attributes racist attitudes to the dominant jazz historiography—which he holds largely responsible for creating an inaccurate and distorted view of white jazz musicians and their contribution to jazz—and to the music industry itself—which he believes has promoted

¹⁷ Sandke, who was born in 1949, is a full generation younger than the youngest of the autobiographers in this study. It is not surprising, then, that his attitudes toward race and interracialism in jazz—attitudes shaped by his own experience as a white musician on the contemporary jazz scene—are significantly different from theirs. Nonetheless, his book also claims to explain interracialism in jazz from a historical perspective, and as such it enters the racial terrain under discussion here.

African American musicians at the expense of deserving non-African-American musicians.¹⁸

There is no doubt that the claims of Sudhalter and Sandke, as well as those of other critics who have challenged dominant narratives within jazz history that emphasize the African American sources of jazz, are to some degree affirmed by some of the jazz autobiographers under discussion in this study. Indeed, as we will see, the “white resentment narrative” manifests itself in the accounts of Art Pepper and (to a lesser extent) John LaPorta as they describe the hostility they experienced within black jazz circles during the 1960s, and in the account of Bob Wilber, who angrily insists on a universalist rather than particularist approach to jazz.

More often, however, the stories of these white jazz autobiographers challenge fundamental aspects of this resentment narrative, portraying their immersion experiences in black music and culture as deeply moving, even spiritual, rather than as a zero sum

¹⁸ Sandke proposes the binary “exclusionary” and “inclusionary” to describe what he sees as opposing approaches to the telling of jazz history since the 1930s (1). The exclusionary approach, in his view, represents jazz as “the expression of a distinct and independent African-American culture, isolated by its long history of slavery, segregation, and discrimination”; by contrast, the inclusionary approach allows that jazz, “even when produced by African-Americans (or anyone else for that matter), is more properly understood as the juncture of a wide variety of influences under the broader umbrella of American and indeed world culture” (1). Sandke’s claim that most contemporary jazz scholars participate in this “exclusionary” approach is, in my view, a grave misinterpretation of their work. As Aaron J. Johnson writes in a detailed and thoughtful review of *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet*, “[W]ho could or would claim that jazz was created in an exclusive black environment when the history of America is full of interactions and mutual adaptations between whites and blacks?” (141). In Johnson’s view, “Sandke largely fails to acknowledge that the central project of jazz scholarship over the last twenty to thirty years . . . has been one of demystifying legend- and anecdote-driven jazz history and challenging its dominant narrative” (139).

game that leaves them diminished or which lessens their confidence in their ability to play jazz. At the same time, however, their accounts also reveal their limited ability to understand the resentment and rage of their African American colleagues as a response to ongoing racism and unequal opportunities, or to acknowledge the privileges they have experienced by virtue of their whiteness.¹⁹

III) Who's Left Out?

As a result of the thematic structure of this study, some white jazz autobiographies receive closer attention than others, while others are left out entirely. Decisions regarding text selection, in other words, have been driven by thematic considerations, rather than by aesthetic judgments or the reputation of the autobiographer. For this reason, Paul Whiteman's 1926 autobiography, *Jazz*—the earliest and perhaps best known jazz autobiography by a white musician—is not included here; also excluded are autobiographies by several well-regarded sidemen and studio musicians: trumpeter Pee Wee Erwin, reeds player Drew Page, and multi-instrumentalist, Arthur Rollini. A few simple questions guided my selection process: To what degree had a particular autobiographer associated in his career and personal life with black music and culture? Did the autobiographer acknowledge the African American jazz tradition as central to his

¹⁹ Compare with Sudhalter, who seems inclined to emphasize (and perhaps overstate) the harmony and goodwill that existed among the musicians themselves who participated in this interracial exchange. In his introduction, for example, he cites the views of many musicians, both white and black, who maintained that “[t]he music was the thing: if it worked, the rest—including the races of the players—hardly mattered” (xviii).

own education as a jazz musician? What opportunity did that particular musician have for exposure to black music and culture?

In the first thirty pages or so of *Jazz*, Whiteman makes several references to the African and slave origins of jazz, beginning with his memorable opening sentence, “Jazz came to America three hundred years ago in chains” (3). These references are couched in the essentialist language of his time, in which blacks are depicted as primitive beings with innate gifts for rhythmic expression, but who lack even the awareness of their gifts, let alone the ability to intellectualize them (4). Beyond that, however, Whiteman is almost silent on the topic of the historical or contemporary contribution of Africans or African Americans to jazz. Instead, his autobiography functions as his *apologia* for jazz—his attempt to counter the widespread view of jazz in the 1920s as a musical and cultural practice associated with tawdry and immoral practices and activities. During his career, Whiteman strove to make popular dance music respectable to middle-class white Americans by removing it from its association with brothels and speakeasies and bringing it into the concert hall, by hiring formally trained musicians, and by emphasizing its connection to European art music.

In the few instances in which Whiteman does acknowledge the black contributions to American popular music, as he does when he refers to the origins of ragtime in “negro syncopated dance” (177), he dwells on the accomplishments of formally trained musicians such as J.C. Handy and Scott Joplin while failing to credit the black oral musical traditions that were essential to the development of these musical forms. Early in *Jazz*, Whiteman acknowledges that the “most primitive and the most

modern” have come together to make the unique American musical form, jazz (15); he notes that the rhythms of “savage tribes in far places” had been “absorbed, added to, and carried on . . . first in ragtime and blues, now in jazz” (15–16). The implication of Whiteman’s well known desire “to make a lady of jazz” is that jazz will be saved by white musicians with European music training who will sanitize the primitive and unrefined jazz that sprang from black sources.

Undoubtedly Whiteman is *sui generis* among jazz autobiographers; the others whom I have decided to leave out of this study are perhaps easier to categorize. Briefly, they all represent a type of musician who flourished in jazz and popular music environments from the 1920s through the 1950s, who played primarily in Dixieland bands or in large dance or swing bands, or in the white territory bands in the West or Southwest or in the studios of New York or Los Angeles. For many of these musicians, it was possible to pass their entire careers with relatively little personal contact with black musicians or the African American musical tradition in general.²⁰ For this reason, there is notably little discussion in their autobiographies of the role of race in jazz, or of the degree to which their own playing was shaped by African American music and culture.

²⁰ Arthur Rollini was an accomplished multi-instrumentalist whose career included stints with Paul Whiteman, the ABC Symphony, and also with the big bands of Benny Goodman and Bill Bradley and Ray McKinley. The Texan reeds player Drew Page played in territory bands in the Southwest, and later in the big band of Harry James and on the NBC staff. And although trumpeter Pee Wee Erwin notes that he was influenced by black jazz trumpeters Roy Eldridge and Red Allen and that he “much preferred the four-beat feel of the black bands,” his career was chiefly defined by his work in small Dixieland combos and in several prominent bands of the Swing Era, and as a New York studio musician (Erwin as told to Vaché 112).

IV) Selected Review of Previous Scholarship

The scholarship on jazz autobiography that relates directly to my discussion of issues explored in this study will appear throughout the body of this dissertation. The brief summaries included below are examples of critical approaches to jazz autobiography that are outside the scope of this study. Again, it is worth noting that these critics focus mainly on autobiographies by African American jazz musicians.

Among the first scholars to write on jazz autobiography was Kathy J. Ogren. In her essay “‘Jazz Isn’t Just Me’: Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas” (1991), Ogren considered early jazz autobiographies by Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Danny Barker, and Willie “the Lion” Smith for the “formulaic qualities” they reveal based in “black oral tradition, especially verbal strategies expressed through storytelling, bragging, and humor” (112–13). Ogren argues that there is an analogy between storytelling and improvisation in jazz performance and jazz autobiography. She stresses the participatory nature of jazz performance (e.g., the “second line” in New Orleans musical tradition), and the ways in which the written texts reflect this concern for and interaction with audience (118–19). In addition, Ogren identifies several key tropes of early African American jazz autobiographies; these include “the origins of jazz” (113), the road and travel (114), and music education (121). Ogren also touches briefly on the role of collaborator or amanuensis in these African American jazz autobiographies (123–24).

In “Narrating the Jazz Life: Three Approaches to Jazz Autobiography” (2006), Holly E. Farrington attempts a reading of selected works of African American jazz

autobiography by way of their narrative structures. Her model is derived from David K. Danow's study, *Models of Narrative*, in which he defines "three basic types of narrative: epic, mythic, and labyrinthine" (Farrington 376). Farrington considers Ray Charles' *Ray* and Ellington's *Music is my Mistress* as examples of epic narrative, in which, according to Danow, the "hero attempts to give meaning to his life in spite of the oppressive uncertainty and indeterminacy" (376), and in which the story is mostly told chronologically and linearly (377).

Farrington argues that mythic narrative, with its "quest structure" that is "outside our traditional and chronological boundaries of past, present, and future," is not typical of African American autobiography of the 20th century; she points to Bechet's *Treat It Gentle* and Mingus's *Beneath the Underdog* as the "only two unambiguous representations" (377). The model most common to jazz autobiography, in her view, is the labyrinth model. This model is related to "the quest narrative type commonly associated with 19th c. slave narratives." Yet Danow adds a complicating element to this model with which Farrington concurs: a failed quest will result in the hero wandering endlessly "in a space that accommodates one's physical presence but affords no hope of spiritual accommodation" (377). According to Farrington, autobiographies by Miles Davis, Cab Calloway, and Adolphus "Doc" Cheatham fit this elaborated labyrinth model (377).

In his essay, "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography" (2004), Daniel Stein also employs a narratological approach to his examination of predominantly African American jazz autobiography. Stein looks at "the narrative strategies the musicians mobilize to

fashion autobiographical selves that echo the complexities and dynamics of jazz practices” (174). The premise of his argument is that an inherent characteristic of jazz music is its fluidity and lack of predictability, and that “the jazz improviser’s interest in creating original and exciting music troubles critics’ and fans’ notions of fixity and essence” (181). This assumption guides his interpretation of the jazz autobiographies he examines; he looks at the fluid, changing constructions of self in the autobiographies of Mingus and Holiday, among others, and notes the ways in which these changing constructions mirror the approach of these artists to their music. Stein also examines jazz autobiographies by Armstrong, Ellington, and Mezzrow and their relationship to the “American autobiographical myth” (Spengemann and Lundquist, 1965), which “in its most general form describes human history as a pilgrimage from imperfection to perfection...” (175). According to Stein, this myth matches the typical narrative within “traditional jazz history” and jazz autobiography, but that some jazz autobiographies also offer disruptions of that myth (175–76).

V) Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, “The Authenticating Collaborator of White Jazz Autobiography,” considers the various ways in which the collaborator, contributing author, or amanuensis of white jazz autobiography attempts to authenticate the male autobiographical subject by positioning him primarily in relation to African American musical and social spheres, and sometimes also in relation to European and Euro-American intellectual and cultural spheres. I call this narrative strategy “reverse authentication”—a reference to Robert

Stepto's model of authentication in African American slave narratives that has been previously employed by critics of African American jazz autobiography. Specifically, the reversal in markedness here is intended to make two points: (1) collaborators of white jazz autobiography demonstrate the authenticity of the white jazz autobiographers about whom they write by stressing their ability to absorb and assimilate features associated with African American jazz traditions, which are depicted as the central and definitive sources of jazz; (2) like many of the African American male jazz musicians whom they emulate, white male jazz autobiographers are represented as primitives, excelling at feeling and instinct but generally lacking in intellectual sophistication, and thus they require the assistance of a white male amanuensis or collaborator with intellectual and literary credentials.

Chapter 2, "White Student, Black Teacher: Negotiating Race in the Learning of Jazz" describes a pattern within many of these texts in which the young white male student of jazz recognizes the need to immerse himself in African American music and culture as a requirement for achieving legitimacy or authenticity as a jazz musician. In contrast to the jazz musicians in Paul E. Berliner's landmark study, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994), whose accounts assume that jazz and black culture are inextricably linked, the accounts of many white jazz autobiographers reveal a self-conscious process by which they, as cultural outsiders, come to understand this relationship. Yet as their accounts demonstrate, the outcome of these interracial encounters vary widely, influenced by larger factors of history and geography, including regionally distinctive attitudes toward race, class, and ethnicity as well as nationalistic

impulses—for example, the increasing militancy of African Americans following the Second World War, and the development of Black Nationalism in the 1960s.

Chapter 3, “Representations of Identity in Jewish Jazz Autobiography,” examines the texts of four Jewish jazz musicians—Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Mezz Mezzrow, and Max Kaminsky—for what they reveal about the impact of their identity as Jews on their journeys into and experience of jazz music and culture. As this chapter will attempt to illustrate, the self-representations of these Jewish autobiographers are far from fixed or static; in particular, that their focus on themselves as Jews—as “other”—is complemented or replaced by a more general self-identification as white, and then, to varying degrees, by a longing to be black. This chapter proposes a reading of these autobiographers in relation to the figure of the white Negro, and the recent interpretations of that figure by critics such as Eric Lott, Ingrid Monson, and Jeffrey Melnick, among others.

Chapter 4, “Soldiers for Uncle Sam?: Depictions of Military Service in White Jazz Autobiography,” considers the accounts of white musicians who were drafted for the US military during the Second World War and in the Cold War period that followed. In particular, this chapter explores the following questions: How do white jazz autobiographers who have positioned themselves as outsiders to mainstream America in their accounts of immersion in black music respond to mainstream notions of patriotism when they are conscripted for military duty? Is there a relationship between their responses to the call to serve their country and their self-representations as jazz musicians? This chapter argues that due to the conditions of segregation in the US armed forces, the preoccupation of white jazz autobiographers with their place in African

American society is notably absent in their accounts of their war experiences, replaced instead with their self-positioning as American citizens, that is, as engaged with or removed from patriotic impulses. Their accounts reinforce and extend views by critics such as Kenney and Peretti, who concluded that white players who turned to jazz in Chicago and elsewhere in the early decades of the 20th century were motivated by factors beyond simply a desire for interracial encounters.

In my conclusion, I suggest that the immersion experiences described by white jazz autobiographers led to intense and often moving interracial encounters, but that the success of these encounters was qualified by the systemic and ongoing racism and inequity that prevailed in the jazz world, and by the limited ability or willingness of individual white jazz musicians to challenge that racism. I also propose that the contrast between their efforts to address racial inequity (albeit with limited success) and their seeming acceptance of the misogyny that prevailed within jazz culture is instructive, pointing to larger societal pressures that encouraged at least some reflection about race while leaving gender inequality relatively unchallenged.

Chapter 1: The Authenticating Collaborator of White Jazz Autobiography

This chapter examines the various ways in which the collaborator, contributing author, or amanuensis of white jazz autobiography attempts to legitimize and authenticate the autobiographical subject by positioning him in relation to particular musical, social, and cultural spheres. The argument that follows is informed by previous studies of jazz autobiography by William H. Kenney III and Christopher Harlos that have considered the literary function and significance of the autobiographer's collaborator—the editor, amanuensis, introducer or explainer. With only a couple of exceptions, the focus of these studies is on autobiographies by African American jazz musicians, in which issues of authorial control are clearly central to the text's impact and reception.

An important theoretical source for both Kenney and Harlos is Robert Stepto's seminal 1979 study, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, in which Stepto builds a model upon which to consider the collaborator/autobiographer relationship in the slave narratives.²¹ Stepto begins his study with a chapter in which he considers the formal organization of four African American slave narratives as a model for exploring issues of authentication and authorial control within them. He describes

²¹ For a consideration of the collaborator/autobiographer relationship in African American autobiography since 1945, see Albert E. Stone, "Two Recreate One: The Act of Collaboration in Recent Black Autobiography—Ossie Guffy, Nate Shaw, Malcolm X," in *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw*. 1982. Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press.

“three phases of narration” by which the slave narratives may be grouped (5). The following is Stepto’s description of the first phase of narration, or “eclectic narrative form,” that serves as a model for Kenney and Harlos in their respective studies, and which is also relevant to our discussion of collaboration in white jazz autobiography:

In their most elementary form, [or “eclectic narrative form” as Stepto refers to them elsewhere], slave narratives are full of other voices which are frequently just as responsible for articulating a narrative’s tale and strategy. . . . Their primary function is, of course, to authenticate the former slave’s account; in doing so, they are at least partially responsible for the narrative’s acceptance as historical evidence. (3)

In an eclectic narrative form, the voice of the central narrator is segregated from the white voices of the introduction or other appended materials. According to Stepto, this lack of interaction between the authorial voice and other textual voices is indicative of the limited control of the author “over the text and event of the narrative itself” (6).

In “Negotiating the Color Line: Louis Armstrong’s Autobiographies,” Kenney applies Stepto’s model in his analysis of four documents for which Armstrong received credit as author or co-author in order to consider Armstrong’s “degree of control over the text” (40). Of particular interest to our discussion are his observations concerning the complex structure of Armstrong’s earliest published autobiography, *Swing That Music* (1936), in which “at least four different voices speak from its pages, and only one even claims to be Louis Armstrong” (40). All the voices except for Armstrong’s are white, and

all seem intended to explain, translate, or vouch for the integrity of the autobiographical subject himself.²²

In the complex narrative structure of *Swing That Music*, Kenney sees a parallel with Stepto's "eclectic narrative form" described above, arguing that Armstrong's first autobiography "offers a sort of conversation between whites that frames the black jazz star's narrative, recreating the structural characteristics of the nineteenth-century former slave narratives that were similarly surrounded by the comments of white abolitionists" (40). In Kenney's view, then, "*Swing That Music* reproduces the power structures that had dominated Armstrong's relations with the owners and customers of South Side Chicago's black and tans" (44). Christopher Harlos also invokes Stepto's narrative model in his essay, "Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics," in which he considers the paratextual material of a number of jazz autobiographies to reveal the degree to which the collaborator or other textual voices serve to diminish the authority of the autobiographical subject.²³

That both Kenney and Harlos consider the authenticating strategies of the slave narratives an appropriate model for describing the relationship between mainly black jazz autobiographers and their white collaborators says much about the position of African

²² Among these voices are an introduction by white bandleader Rudy Vallee and an explanatory chapter that concludes the book by Horace Gerlach, "a British musician/arranger"; in addition, Kenney points out that "eight of the nine" musicians whose photographs appear alongside transcriptions of solos based on Armstrong's tune "Swing That Music" are white (Kenney 40).

²³ The only autobiography by a white jazz musician that Christopher Harlos analyzes in any detail is *Straight Life* by Art Pepper; he mentions the autobiographies of Art Hodes, Mezz Mezzrow, and Steve Jordan only in passing.

Americans—including celebrated jazz musician/autobiographers such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and Charles Mingus, among others—within 20th-century US society. But what happens when the focus shifts to the relationship between the collaborator and autobiographer of white jazz autobiography? As this chapter will attempt to illustrate, various authenticating strategies are also at play within these texts, but chief among them is the attempt by collaborators of white jazz autobiography to emphasize the autobiographical subject's connection to African American music and culture. In response to Stepto's model of authentication in African American slave narratives, I call this strategy "reverse authentication."

More precisely, the analogy may be described as follows: just as the African American slave narrators were authenticated by their white sponsors—the white abolitionists and editors who vouched for the slaves' and ex-slaves' worthiness as human beings and as authors within a European literary tradition—so too are white jazz autobiographers authenticated by their collaborators and editors, but in a reverse way: that is, as possessing the musical skills and cultural familiarity that grant them legitimacy (or that stamp them as authentic) within the African American jazz tradition.

It is important, of course, to acknowledge both the strengths and limits of this analogy. The relationship of white jazz autobiographers to their collaborators, for example, bears no relation to that of the slave narrators and the northern white abolitionists who supported them. In addition, the collaborators of white jazz autobiographers are, without exception, white, so in this respect there is also no claim for an inverse relationship to that found in the slave narrative tradition. Perhaps most

importantly, the term reverse authentication is not intended to minimize the privileged position that white jazz musicians experienced relative to their African American counterparts in respect to career opportunities within American popular music or their freedom from the entrenched racism that marked the everyday experience of life in America for black musicians.

Rather, the term reverse authentication as used in the following discussion serves two distinct but related functions: first, it emphasizes the primacy of black music and culture within white jazz autobiography; and second, it describes the pattern by which the collaborators of these texts attempt to demonstrate the “blackness,” and therefore the authenticity, of these white autobiographers within the black jazz worlds described in their accounts. In musical and cultural terms, African Americans are the authorities in these autobiographies; they possess the key to authenticity that white jazz musicians try to unlock through study and emulation.

Yet a notable exception to this pattern of reverse authentication may be found in Steve Jordan’s autobiography, *Rhythm Man: Fifty Years in Jazz*, which will be discussed later in the chapter; in particular, in contrast to the collaborators who stress the accomplishments of their autobiographical subjects in absorbing the black jazz tradition, Jordan’s collaborator in fact stresses the dominant role of white musicians, including Jordan, in the rhythm guitar tradition. In addition, this chapter will also consider autobiographies that present a more complicated model of collaborator authentication, one in which the white jazz musician is positioned both within African American as well as European and American intellectual and cultural spheres.

First, though, I would like to clarify some of the terms of this discussion. It is hardly surprising to discover that a majority of white jazz autobiographers utilize the help of a professional writer or amanuensis in the process of writing their autobiographies; few of them, after all, had any prior experience as writers.²⁴ For that reason, most white jazz autobiographers name a second author, or collaborator, in addition to themselves; in some of them, however, the precise role of the collaborator as distinct from the autobiographer is not obvious or apparent. The discussion that follows, then, will consider only those texts in which an additional voice or voices are present and take the form of paratextual additions—that is, introductory or concluding materials, or insertions from the autobiographer’s collaborator within the body of the text itself—distinct from the voice of the autobiographical subject.²⁵

The chapter is divided into three sections: Section One begins with a consideration of brief appended introductory materials (i.e., prefaces, forewords, and introductions) in the autobiographies of Charlie Barnet, Bud Freeman, and Art Hodes; it ends with a consideration of Steve Jordan’s autobiography as an exception to the pattern of reverse authentication. Section Two examines longer insertions within the body text itself in the autobiographies of Benny Goodman and Eddie Condon; and Section Three considers the

²⁴ Among the autobiographies discussed in this study, only those by Don Asher, Artie Shaw, and John LaPorta do not identify a second author, collaborator, or amanuensis. Of these three, Don Asher was a professional writer, Artie Shaw had considerable literary ambitions, and John LaPorta—who openly acknowledges his shortcomings as an author—seemed chiefly motivated to straighten the record concerning “musical events in my life [that] had been written about contrary to what had occurred” (LaPorta ii).

²⁵ The one exception is my inclusion of Mezz Mezzrow’s *Really the Blues*, in which Mezzrow’s collaborator, Robert Wolfe, is not cited as author of the paratextual material but appears as a character within Mezzrow’s first-person narrative.

curious example of Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues*, in which the autobiographical subject explains within the framework of his own narrative the nature of collaboration with his co-author, Bernard Wolfe.

I: Authenticating Prefaces, Forewords and Introductions

Perhaps the clearest example of a collaborator's contribution to this process of reverse authentication may be found in *Those Swinging Years: The Autobiography of Charlie Barnet*, with Stanley Dance. Dance (1910–1999) was an influential British jazz critic who moved to the United States in 1959 and was a close associate of some of the leading African American jazz musicians of the mid-20th century, including Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, and Count Basie. In the early 1950s, Dance coined the term “mainstream” to describe their music, which he believed was “caught in the doldrums between the modern jazz movement and the New Orleans revivalists”; in addition to arranging recording sessions for them, he also began to write extensively about them.²⁶ Indeed, before Dance collaborated with Barnet on *Those Swinging Years* (published in 1984), he had compiled an impressive list of publications written with or about African American jazz musicians

²⁶ See "Dance, Stanley." *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed. In his obituary of Dance in *The Independent*, Steve Voce argues that Dance's belief in the superior musical abilities of African Americans, although never stated directly, was demonstrable in his writings and public comments. According to Voce, Dance used his term “mainstream” to distinguish jazz played by African American musicians from “swing,” which he reserved for the music played by white bandleaders such as Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. Although mainstream and swing were similar in terms of “the music and its roots,” the racial origins of the players seemed key to the distinction he made between them, and although Dance “never spoke of the matter or engaged in racial politics, [he] felt that black players made superior music to their white counterparts” (Voce 1).

and in addition had overseen important recording dates featuring them for several different labels.²⁷

It is especially intriguing, then, in light of Dance's primary interest in the music of African Americans, that he decided to collaborate with white bandleader Charlie Barnet on *Those Swinging Years*; Dance, in fact, begins his preface with an acknowledgment that this particular collaboration is a step in a different direction for him: "In previous books I have primarily been concerned with the big band era as viewed by black musicians. In this case the perspective is that of one of the most successful white bandleaders" (xv). So why did Barnet's life and career warrant attention from someone who had invested so deeply in promoting African American jazz musicians? Precisely, according to Dance, because of Barnet's significant yet overlooked "contribution to the big band era" as an employer of black musicians. For while Benny Goodman had "received enormous credit for 'breaking the color bar' by hiring Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton, Barnet went ahead and did it without fanfare, employing far more black musicians, incidentally, than Goodman or any other white bandleader ever did" (xv). Quiet activism accompanied by a modest demeanor, Dance seems to be suggesting, is at the core of Barnet's significance as a swing-era bandleader.

²⁷ Among Dance's earlier publications were the biographies, *The World of Duke Ellington* (1970); *The World of Earl Hines* (1977); *The World of Count Basie* (1980); and *The Night People: Reminiscences of a Jazzman* (1971), an as-told-to autobiography with jazz trombonist, Dicky Wells. For a compelling discussion of the complicated racial dynamics at work in Wells' autobiography, in which several white people (including Dance) speak on behalf of the black autobiographical subject, see Harlos, 153–56.

To make his point even more forcefully, Dance lists twenty-two African American instrumentalists and two featured vocalists who played in Barnet's band "at various times" (xv); one of the vocalists was Lena Horne, whose racial consciousness and activist stance have been well documented, and whose complimentary comments about Barnet (from her own autobiography) Dance cites at length.²⁸ And although Dance then acknowledges that Barnet's focus on excellence extended to his choice of white musicians (he lists twenty-four of them by name), he quickly returns to his central theme—that is, the bandleader's relationship to African American jazz musicians and their music. In particular, he notes Barnet's frequent references to the music of Duke Ellington as his "greatest source of inspiration," and to saxophonists Johnny Hodges and Coleman Hawkins as his primary instrumental influences (xvi).

Admittedly, Dance does refer to other aspects of Barnet's life that contribute to the shaping of his autobiographical persona, including his prodigious drinking and tumultuous relationships with women; even so, it seems clear that his chief goal is to place Barnet in a unique category among white big-band leaders by emphasizing his progressive hiring practices and the African American influences that shaped his own musical persona.

²⁸ See Lena Horne and Richard Schickel. 1965. *Lena*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday. Included in Dance's quote from Horne is her description of Barnet as "a soft touch for anyone with a good story and as far as color was concerned, it just never came up. Around some of the men in the band I was made aware of some of our differences in color, but around Charlie it was never discussed. I just felt safe with him. I don't know if he knew it then—I don't think I was letting anyone know what I was thinking about in those days—but I thought he was a good man, and after we got to know each other we became good friends" (qtd. in Barnet and Dance xvi).

A related kind of reverse authentication may be observed in Bud Freeman's as-told-to autobiography, *Crazeology*; it is not Freeman's amanuensis, Robert Wolf, however, who performs this task, but rather Studs Terkel—the Chicago-based radio host, oral historian, and author—who introduces the reader to Bud Freeman in a brief foreword. Terkel's credits as an author and well-known public figure on the subjects of oral history, jazz, and race give him an authority, not unlike Dance's in his collaboration with Charlie Barnet, by which he may argue for Bud Freeman's significance as a jazz musician and as a storyteller about the jazz community from which he came.²⁹

Freeman, who was eighty-two when *Crazeology* was published in 1989, was another of the white Chicagoans who learned his craft as a jazz musician in the 1920s, in the heyday of the black migration to the city from New Orleans. And although Terkel notes the impact of Freeman's long residence in Britain on his speech and attire ("I'm an Anglophile" he quotes him as saying), the most important contribution of *Crazeology*, according to Terkel, is its acknowledgement of "the everlasting debt we owe the black jazz artists for enriching our lives." Freeman describes the impact of his visits to Chicago's South Side to hear Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, and Bessie Smith, among others, and says "his life was transformed." Terkel's concise comment about this, "And so was ours," serves to position him in relationship to the political climate of the Reagan and Bush years against which he was writing: "Bud's simple manner in describing the

²⁹ Studs Terkel (1912–2008) published twelve books of oral history based on his interviews with Americans from a diverse range of social, ethnic and racial backgrounds; among these were his first publication, *Giants of Jazz* (1957), and *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession* (1992), published three years after Freeman's *Crazeology*.

graciousness of his black mentors and of the black community puts to shame much of the shallow, ‘profound’ commentary on race that we hear these confabulating days” (Freeman and Wolf xii).

Terkel’s foreword helps to shape a specific expectation for readers of what kind of jazz autobiography we are about to experience; although Freeman’s legacy is rooted in the white Chicago jazz school of the 1920s, Terkel insists on stressing Freeman’s connection to the African American jazz tradition of Armstrong, Oliver, and Smith and his eagerness to apprentice in that tradition.

In the preface to *Hot Man: The Life of Art Hodes*, Hodes’ collaborator, Chadwick Hansen, opens with some biographical detail that offers a particular insight into Hodes’ place and significance in jazz history:

Art has always been very much his own man, musically as well as personally, and therefore he doesn’t fit easily into any of the usual categories. His roots are partly in the Chicago style, except that his playing is blacker than that of most of the white Chicagoans. His strongest roots are in the blues. One critic remarked as early as 1939 that he was the only white pianist who could play the blues convincingly, and many others have echoed that judgment since. (Hodes and Hansen ix)

In this passage Hansen attempts to describe the music of Art Hodes by stressing his “blackness” in two separate but closely related ways; first, he vouches for Hodes’ ability to sound black—that is, to play piano in a manner that listeners would identify with that

most typically associated with black music; and second, he points to Hodes' particular interest in the blues, a form the roots of which lie in African and African American music. In so doing, Hansen is attempting to authenticate Hodes, to claim legitimacy for a jazz musician who, even though he is not black himself, is immersed sufficiently in its culture so as to make his music worth listening to and his life's story worth reading.

Later in the preface, Hansen takes care to explain the specific contributions that he and Art Hodes each made to the writing of *Hot Man*. "We knew from the beginning," Hansen states, "that it would not be the usual as-told-to life, in which the musician talks into a tape recorder and his collaborator edits the tapes into a coherent narrative" (x). He has already informed the reader about Hodes' credentials as an educator, writer, and editor about jazz; Hansen and Hodes have decided, therefore, to use "Art's writings. . . both published and unpublished" as the basis for his autobiography (x).³⁰ Hansen's role as editor and sometimes-biographer was necessary, he tells us, because of Hodes' tendency to write "anecdotally rather than historically" and to offer sometimes-contradictory versions of "the same story." In addition, Hodes' natural modesty seems to have left him reluctant to say things that Hansen believes "needed to be said" (x).

The goal of this rather detailed explanation seems to be to justify Hansen's extensive editorial role, which includes frequent insertions (set in italics) that connect passages set in Hodes' first-person narrative voice, and which provides biographical or

³⁰ In his editorial role for *Hot Man*, Hansen drew upon Hodes' published articles from *The Jazz Record*, a magazine Hodes edited "from 1943 through 1947," as well as Hodes' 1960s *Down Beat* column, "Sittin' In." Other sources named by Hansen include "articles and interviews in many places" and a large collection "of unpublished writings, ranging in length from two pages of typescript to twenty-five" (Hodes and Hansen ix-xi).

contextual information for the reader. In Hansen's words, "The reader should be warned, then, that although when Art is speaking the words are always his, the sentence structure is often mine and the larger narrative structure is always mine" (xi–xii). Yet Hansen is at pains to assure the reader that the voice captured on these pages is Hodes', and to insist on the connection between Hodes' style as a storyteller and as a musician:

Art once said about his piano playing that he was "part schooled and part primitive," and the same might be said of his language. Both the music and the language have rich rewards for the attentive listener. The music is suffused with the blues, and in many ways this book is itself a blues—a lament for and a celebration of a music that has been here and gone. (xii)

Hansen's preface, then, clearly establishes Art Hodes as a white jazz musician whose most important influences lie in African American music and culture. This theme also emerges in many of the italicized passages inserted by Hansen into the main body of Hodes' autobiography. While these passages, as stated earlier, provide specific information and improve the narrative flow, they also serve to bolster the autobiographical subject under construction. For example, in a chapter that is primarily concerned with Hodes' early jazz education in Chicago in the late 1920s, Hansen interrupts Hodes' narration with a description of his mature musical style as deriving from African American jazz and blues pianists of that era:

Like all of the major jazz musicians, Art has a style that is his and no one else's. . . . That is not to say that it is entirely devoid of influence, as some

jazz musicians pretend of their own styles. One can hear something of Lil Hardin in the way he drives a band with his left hand, something of Earl Hines in an occasional right-hand phrase, and something of the many pianists he followed on Chicago's South Side in the blues that suffuse much of his playing. (19)

Hansen's comments serve as preparation for Hodes' much more detailed description of his jazz education on Chicago's South Side, which will be explored at greater length in a later chapter. For now, however, it is sufficient to say that, by Hodes' account, his education was long and arduous, and that for some time his attempts to play the blues were met with laughter by his black audiences. In the midst of his account, however, Hodes' narration is interrupted by a brief but effective insertion from his collaborator, who writes: "*Eventually, of course, people stopped laughing*"; the next anecdote, in which Hodes recalls that his blues piano silenced a noisy crap game in a cabaret on West Division Street, is particularly effective because of Hansen's introductory comments (24).

In chapter 8 of *Hot Man*, "Spreading the Good Word," Hodes focuses on his career as jazz educator, both as writer and as speaker, beginning in the 1940s. He describes his experience of hosting a jazz radio show on WNYC, "The Metropolitan Review," in which he played recordings and discussed them, and in addition, performed on piano and interviewed guests. On one show Hodes had as his guest Cow Cow Davenport, an early boogie-woogie pianist. Here Hansen again interrupts Hodes' narration, first to provide a brief biography of Davenport and then to offer an assessment

of Hodes' role in the preservation of jazz history and the honoring of some of its important but overlooked contributors. "*One of the genuinely important achievements of the group of collectors and jazz critics of which Art had become a part was to rediscover some of the older black jazz and blues musicians and to provide an audience for them*" (56–57). Hansen's comments serve to broaden Hodes' own importance in jazz history: not only was he an early white jazz pianist who could play in an authentically black style, but he also played a significant role in the lives and careers of certain African American jazz musicians whose work might otherwise have been forgotten.³¹

The final chapter of *Hot Man* moves quickly through a number of stories that bring Hodes' life and career up to the time of publication (1992) and seek to establish him as a musician who has remained faithful to a small-ensemble, "hot" jazz style. Among the stories told by Hodes, Hansen scatters several insertions, including one in which he mentions praise for Hodes from well-known critics Virgil Thomson, John S. Wilson, and Whitney Balliett. Yet according to Hansen, Hodes "*values even more the praise of fellow musicians, especially the praise of black pianists: Little Brother Montgomery, who told him, 'You're blacker than 90 percent of black piano players'; Horace Silver, who said, 'If there was no Art Hodes there'd be no Horace'*" (109). Although Hodes' first-person narration returns for the final page of his autobiography, this final insertion from his collaborator, in which Hansen once again vouches for the autobiographer's authenticity

³¹ In Hansen's discussion of Hodes' tenure from 1943 to 1947 as co-publisher and co-editor of *The Jazz Record*, he displays a similar impulse to praise Hodes by emphasizing his sense of racial justice: "Like Art's bands, the covers [of *The Jazz Record*] were mixed, black musicians scrupulously alternating with whites" (59).

by, in this case, citing the praise of black pianists, is yet one more piece of a carefully constructed autobiographical subject.

Authentication is also an important element of Tom Scanlan's brief introduction to Steve Jordan's *Rhythm Man: Fifty Years in Jazz*, and yet there is a critical distinction to be made between Scanlan's manner and purpose of authentication and the examples discussed above.³² Although Scanlan acknowledges the relative obscurity of his autobiographical subject, he introduces him by emphasizing his superlative skills as a jazz rhythm guitarist. Jordan is, in Scanlan's words, "a musician's musician and one of the best rhythm guitar players in jazz history" (2). In contrast to the examples cited earlier, however, Scanlan makes no attempt to show Jordan's particular desire to emulate African American music or culture; to the contrary, he attempts to show that the rhythm guitar tradition from which Jordan emerged was dominated by white players, and that these players exerted an important influence upon notable African American jazz musicians.

Notably, the stories Scanlan chooses to demonstrate Jordan's excellence place him in direct comparison with three African American jazz guitar legends: Freddie Green, Wes Montgomery, and Charlie Christian. In the first one, Scanlan compares Jordan to Green, rhythm guitarist in the Count Basie band for fifty years. After he first informs the reader that both Jordan and Green "were schooled in the George Van Eps fingering

³² Steve Philip Jordan (1919–1993) was a jazz guitarist who was known primarily for his accompanying, or rhythm, style, rather than as a soloist; he played in several of the most popular big bands of the swing era, including those led by Artie Shaw, Stan Kenton, Boyd Raeburn, and Benny Goodman, and recorded with many well known jazz musicians, including Vic Dickenson, Buck Clayton, Coleman Hawkins, and Roy Eldridge, among others (Jordan and Scanlan 3).

system as taught by Allan Reuss”—Van Eps and Reuss were both white—and offers a brief comparison of their styles and playing techniques, Scanlan then answers his own question, “Who’s better, Green or Jordan?” with the assertion, “It’s a matter of taste” (2). To support his claim, Scanlan recounts how Jordan “was the first guitarist to be offered Freddie Green’s chair in the Count Basie band” after Green’s death in 1987. But even though Jordan was reportedly “proud of being first call” to replace Green, who was arguably the best known and most respected rhythm guitarist in jazz, he turned it down because of his advancing years and lack of desire for the grueling demands of road travel (2).³³

Next Scanlan sounds his earlier theme that the rhythm guitar has suffered from a general lack of attention (in part because of its background role) even among “jazz historians, critics, and journalists,” and as a result few writers and even many guitar soloists “don’t know much about rhythm guitar either” (2). As evidence of the latter, Scanlan recalls his own experience of witnessing guitar legend Wes Montgomery studying Jordan as he played in order to try to figure out his “left hand playing chords.” According to Scanlan, Montgomery “was clearly impressed” and told Jordan “It sounds great, but I don’t understand what you’re doing!” Scanlan’s corroboration of Montgomery’s bemusement—“And I’m sure he didn’t”—is a bold and even harsh judgment of Montgomery’s supposed shortcomings as a rhythm guitarist, particularly

³³ Scanlan, seemingly aware that some readers might wonder about the interracial makeup of Basie’s band, adds parenthetically that Basie’s band, “if you are wondering, ... has had more than a few white players in recent decades, a kind of reverse integration you might say” (2).

since Montgomery's remarkably innovative and influential soloing style was based in part on his use of block chords and octaves as a way of building interest and intensity in his solos.

Finally, while Scanlan acknowledges the pioneering role of Charlie Christian in the development of the electric guitar in jazz, he feels compelled to point out that Christian's shortcomings as a rhythm guitarist forced Christian's big-band employer, Benny Goodman, to hire someone else to fill those duties. Nonetheless, Scanlan admits, Christian's "exciting, major new jazz solo sound" brought him many disciples, and "young rhythm guitar players became extremely rare. After all, the money was up front, in the solo spotlight" (3). Although Scanlan presumably has selected these particular passages to illustrate Jordan's rarity *and* excellence, his tone and manner leave the impression of authentication through derogation. In other words, Scanlan seems to be saying, Jordan deserves to be better known and more successful, and were it not for the whims of jazz listeners and critics, he might be as well known as the three legendary African American guitarists with whom Scanlan has compared him. Scanlan's introduction, in which race is only mentioned parenthetically, relies on the reader's adequate knowledge of jazz history to construe its heavily racialized undertones.³⁴

It is worth noting that Jordan's self-representation within the body of his autobiography differs in important respects from the persona constructed by his collaborator. In particular, Jordan is notably effusive in his praise of other musicians and

³⁴ While Scanlan never claims that Jordan was better than Freddie Green, he argues that "if Green had not been with Basie from 1937 until Basie's death in 1984. . . , Green would be, like Jordan, a great player known only to those inside the world of jazz" (1).

refers to close friendships with many African American jazz musicians. He, like Scanlan, traces the rhythm guitar lineage to the white guitarists, George Van Eps and Allan Reuss, but he does so without the atmosphere of competition that marks Scanlan's account.³⁵ In addition, while Jordan suggests that "[e]lectric guitar soloists have received most of the attention and most of the money in recent years, but few of them can even begin to play rhythm guitar properly" (137), he acknowledges "Charlie Christian's single-string guitar wizardry" (103). And in a chapter, "Memorable Recording Sessions," he recalls that he "felt complimented to be the only white musician" at two different sessions in which he was in the company of leading African American jazz musicians (84, 87). In its entirety, Jordan's own account stresses his presence within highly integrated jazz communities marked by respect and friendship, rather than animosity.

II: Intertextual Insertions in the Autobiographies of Eddie Condon and Benny

Goodman

In his 1992 introduction to the Da Capo Press paperback edition of Eddie Condon's 1947 autobiography, *We Called It Music: A Generation of Jazz*, Gary Giddins describes Thomas Sugrue as Condon's collaborator, stating that Sugrue "was responsible for the book's strictly historical italicized passages" (Condon with Sugrue ix). These passages,

³⁵ For example, Jordan writes about Basie's guitarist, Freddie Green, "Freddie preferred the deep sounds and no one played those deep sounds as well as Freddie did" (137). Both Jordan and Green studied with Allan Reuss, about whom Jordan writes, "I think he is the best rhythm guitar player there ever was" (137). Yet Jordan also credits Green as an influence, stating that "I played straight four for a long time but I started listening to Freddie Green playing with an accent and began to play that way, too" (138).

which total approximately forty pages of the almost three-hundred-page autobiography, are divided into four separate chapters called simply “Narration.” While Sugrue undoubtedly provides the chief collaborative voice in Condon’s narrative, it is worth also considering the contribution of writer John McNulty to the shaping of Condon’s autobiographical persona. McNulty, who wrote for *The New Yorker* from 1937 to 1955, is featured prominently in Condon’s first chapter, “A Pair of English Shoes,” and is mentioned in passing on three occasions near the end of the text. As Condon explains in detail in this chapter, McNulty was instrumental in convincing him to write his autobiography, and even briefly served as amanuensis to encourage Condon’s first random memories and associations by which he would begin to capture a version of his life on paper.

The setting for the chapter is sometime in the mid-1940s. Condon is comfortably settled in New York with his wife and two daughters, when McNulty comes for a visit, seemingly with the purpose of urging a reluctant Condon to write his autobiography. As we learn near the end of Condon’s autobiography, he and McNulty had become friends at Costello’s saloon at Forty-fourth Street and Third Avenue in New York, described by Condon as “a watering place for writers, newspapermen, Irishmen, and residents of the neighborhood” (258). McNulty was, according to the saloon owner’s brother, ““a chronicler”” in the Irish tradition, whose job it was ““to keep a record of important events

and to make sure that a few legends grew up along the way.” Condon describes McNulty as “fine company for me and he never seemed busy” (258).³⁶

The chapter featuring McNulty is primarily taken up by a lengthy discussion between the two men that covers a range of topics that seem intended to situate Condon within the broader American and specifically Irish American cultural realm, and to situate him firmly outside the American mainstream. For example, an exchange between McNulty and Condon about Condon’s recently cancelled radio program—“Eddie Condon’s Jazz Concert,” emphasizes the popularity of the show among GI’s overseas (and in this way perhaps serves as a covert expression of Condon’s patriotism), but also reveals Condon’s subversive impulses that contributed to the cancellation of the show (2–4).³⁷

Later in the chapter, after McNulty suggests that Condon ought to write his autobiography, a vivid passage depicts the first stages of the writing process, with McNulty asking questions to stir Condon’s memories of family and music, and more

³⁶ In his intriguing essay, “Eddie Condon in Illinois: The Roots of a ‘Jazz Personality,’” William Kenney suggests that Eddie Condon—whose father ran saloons in Indiana and Illinois while being pursued by Prohibition activists—“came to have a special affinity for the American version of the old Irish pub that had been a gathering place for dispossessed young Irishmen who developed there patterns of male solidarity and avuncular loyalty.” As Kenney explains, “During the generations of English dominion, the pub had become a major focus of Irish national identity. In the American Midwest, it continued to supplement the church and family in providing ethnic cohesion” (262).

³⁷ Condon tells McNulty that “We filed program notes with the script department each week, then tore them up” (2). Among Condon’s guest speakers were several Irish American writers, including John O’Hara, Joe McCarthy (the writer, not the senator), and George Frazier. Condon insisted that “We ad libbed the program verbally and musically” (2). When Condon and his business partner were given an ultimatum to accept a revamped show or to quit, they chose to quit (3–4). See Chapter 4 for a more detailed assessment of Condon’s patriotic as well as subversive impulses.

specifically, the jazz community in which he resides. Among Condon's recollections are childhood memories of rural Illinois and Indiana, where his large, working-class Irish American family operated saloons and played music, and from whom he learned an attitude of irreverence toward government and, more generally, toward middle-class respectability and mores.³⁸

As Condon's memory is stirred by McNulty's questions, people are named—sometimes by Condon himself, sometimes by Condon or his wife, who passes through the room while the men are talking—who appear seemingly as a random collection of musicians, writers, and drinking companions who have touched his life; among them are writers John Steinbeck, John O'Hara, and Dorothy Baker, musicians Mezz Mezzrow, Bix Beiderbecke, and many others associated with the Chicago style of jazz that Condon played throughout his career. Perhaps most striking about the memories and associations that Condon records in this first chapter is that there is not a single reference to African American musicians or to jazz as a music whose roots are in black culture. The world portrayed in "A Pair of English Shoes" is strikingly white, even as references to Condon's Irish background and associations show that at the time of writing, the Irish were still, in some ways, in the process of becoming white Americans.³⁹

³⁸ In "Eddie Condon in Illinois," Kenney traces the source of Condon's disdain for propriety and middle-class values to his Irish Catholic upbringing in the staunchly conservative (and Protestant) American Midwest at the height of Prohibition.

³⁹ In Chapter 3 of this study I briefly review some of the central texts within whiteness studies that trace the non-white or conditionally white status of 18th and 19th century European immigrants in America.

Yet Thomas Sugrue offers a more complex representation of Condon in his longer italicized passages, which are written in the voice of an omniscient narrator. Considered in its entirety, Sugrue's narration may be seen to have the following aims: to demonstrate Condon's ties to African American music and culture, and therefore to legitimize his claim as a jazz musician who made a significant contribution to the Chicago jazz style that flourished in the twenties; to position Bix Biederbecke and the Chicago musicians who fell under his influence as a separate but equally legitimate kind of jazz expression; to establish jazz as the only true art produced in America, and an art which was deserving of a place on the European concert stage; and finally, to position Condon within the wider Irish and Irish American cultural realm.

In the first narrated chapter, the focus is the specific history of the Condon family and an overview of the first decades of jazz music, with its roots in African and African American music. Other topics covered are the raging jazz debates between the traditionalists and modernists and the influence of black music on the generation of white jazz musicians learning to play in Chicago during the 1920s (Condon and Sugrue 13–31). This chapter begins with a portrait of Condon's Irish grandparents, who came to America to escape the Great Famine and who moved from east to west in search of work and land on which to raise their ever-growing family. Within the first paragraphs however, the focus shifts from Condon's Irish heritage to the first experience of David Condon, Eddie's grandfather, with the music of African Americans, thus suggesting the particular significance of this exposure for future generations of Condons in America. As the narrator tells us, after Eddie's grandfather had found employment working on the levees

in New Orleans, he wrote his wife *“that the city was the most pleasant he had encountered, and that particularly it had a great deal of music, which would please her. The Negroes . . . sang especially well, and had many songs and dances of their own”* (13).

But the start of the Civil War sent David Condon on the move again; in language that stresses his humanity as it evokes the imagery of the Underground Railroad, the narrator explains that David *“had no desire to fight for slavery against a government which guaranteed his freedom. To avoid the Confederate draft he walked home. He traveled by night, hiding in cornfields and canebrakes during the day. He was fed by slaves who smuggled food to him ‘hidden in their bosoms.’ He arrived home barefoot”* (14). Years of hard labour followed, first in the coal mines of Illinois and then later on the Prairies, where the work of clearing land and raising crops had by 1871 left the Condons in a position to purchase land for themselves.

As the narrator stresses, music played an important role in the Condon family life. We learn, in reference to Eddie’s grandmother, Margaret Condon, that despite the hardship and toil of daily life, *“through all this she sang. Music was her complete joy. Her voice was clear and sweet; thousands of frogs in the slough gave it background”* (16). Margaret played organ, and many of the children played instruments— *“combs, jew’s-harps, accordions, violins, harmonicas, banjos”* (16). One of the children—John Condon, who would later become Eddie’s father—was a skilled fiddler, and his courtship of Eddie’s mother Margaret began as he watched her dancing, accompanied by his fiddle (18). They were married in 1885 and Eddie, their ninth child, was born in 1905. The almost-mythic imagery of the narration continues with this first description of the

autobiographical subject who would also grow up to become a musician: “*He was the last child and he was born in Goodland, where his father had gone to conduct a saloon. His right ear never grew nor had a drum*” (19).

At this juncture the narration switches once again from the family’s personal history to the music of African Americans in the US South in the years “*following the war in which [David Condon] refused to take part*” (19). In a passage filled with essentialist language and imagery, the narrator stresses the innate ability of African Americans to communicate feeling through music: “*No one taught them; they could not read music. They played as they felt and they made the instruments do what they believed all music should do—talk.*” Moreover, this particular form of musical expression that came to African Americans in a “*natural way*” was, according to the narrator, “*something new. It was jazz*” (19). Thus, by linking the musical history of the Condon family to the history of jazz as a vital expression of African American societal and cultural practice, the narration anticipates and authenticates Eddie Condon’s own relationship to jazz; this pattern of linkage and authentication will continue throughout Sugrue’s narration.

The narration next engages a topic of hot debate for jazz writers, critics, and musicians in the period in which Condon’s autobiography was written and published; that is, the “*fratricidal warfare between the Fundamentalists and the Modernists,*” as the modern jazz of revolutionaries such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk threatened to push into oblivion the traditional jazz with which Condon was associated, with its links to New Orleans and Chicago. The narrator’s tone of utmost disdain rings clear in his condemnation of jazz scholars, who insisted on judging

authenticity based on racial and geographic origins, and who used the technical language of European art music to describe a music which, as the preceding passage argued, was a natural expression of feeling, not thought (19–20).

Yet, as the narrator insists, “*what jazz is—good jazz, bad jazz, imitation jazz—can be put into understandable terms*” (20): the key difference between the West African musical tradition of the slaves and European art music had nothing to do with “*color or culture,*” but rather with “*consciousness.*” Whereas European culture strove toward individual attainment based on “*reason,*” the “*Negro . . . showed no desire to go away from what the European called the unconscious or subconscious mind. It was full of fascinating things—fairies, goblins, devils, elementals, and as it flowed it made music*” (21). And while European music was guided by a theoretical understanding of “*melody and harmony,*” and reproduced sounds that could be represented through musical notation, the Negro had the ability to hear “*all the sounds*” and to imitate them, with the result that his music was more rhythmically and tonally complex (21).

Thus, even as the narration shifts rapidly from topic to topic, its overall effect is to repeatedly juxtapose African American and European music and culture, with the former prevailing. So, for example, the narrator tells us that 20th-century European culture—under the influence of Freud and the revolutionary contributions of artists such as Picasso and Joyce—had begun to reevaluate the significance of the unconscious, abetted in their “*rebellion*” by the music of African Americans, which came “*straight from the unconscious*” (22). And when the discussion returns to a more specific comparison between European and African music, we learn that while the focus of European music is

on highly developed form and structure, African music is much looser, with a concentration on individuals improvising within the context of group performance (22).

Much of the discussion in this section could have been drawn from contemporary jazz histories; for example, the narration explores the roots of the blues as the transformation of “*English hymns into spirituals*” by African American slaves (23) before considering the geographical and historical roots of jazz in New Orleans; once again, the emphasis here is on the importance of music in the social life of blacks, as shown by explanations of cutting contests and funeral customs in New Orleans (24–25). The final section consists of short biographies and anecdotes about prominent African American musicians from the early days of jazz in New Orleans and their influence on white musicians, who learned, as did their black mentors, by imitation and aural development, rather than by formal training. The migration of these New Orleans musicians to Chicago, where young white Chicago musicians eagerly embraced their music and their lifestyle, situates Eddie Condon—without naming him directly—within this story of interracial musical mingling and exchange.

The second narrated chapter follows a chapter in which Condon writes about his first meeting and subsequent friendship with Bix Beiderbecke and travels with an outfit called the Jazz Bandits; as the chapter ends, he has decided to return to Chicago. The subject of this narrated chapter—the history of jazz in Chicago and its most influential players, both black and white—thus seems intended to serve a clear pedagogical function, a guide to direct the reader’s responses to the following chapter, in which Condon writes about his own experiences in Chicago in 1924.

Continuing in its exaggerated and affected style, the second narrated chapter recounts the stories of the best known black New Orleans musicians who moved north to their new home in Chicago; these stories—perhaps apocryphal, certainly hyperbolic, and repeated with variations in other sources—note the line of succession among jazz greats, from Freddie Keppard to Joe Oliver to Louis Armstrong (98–100). But quickly the narration shifts its focus to the white Chicagoans—among whom Condon was to play a significant role—who immersed themselves in the music and lifestyle of the black New Orleanians. In the words of the narrator, these were the “*white boys gathered around the bandstands at the Dreamland and Lincoln Gardens, some of them startlingly young*” who “*were discovering the new music and listening to its masters*” (100).

The narrator has now set the table to introduce Eddie Condon and to place him within this group of eager youngsters, as well as to convey information about him in a manner that could not be conveyed by the autobiographical subject himself:

They knew the Condon kid from Chicago Heights, too; he was small, quick-moving, clothes-conscious, sharp-tongued, seldom still, and forever organizing parties, dates, and excursions to the south side. They called him “Slick.” He was innocently frank with phonies; otherwise he talked in a mixture of understatement and hyperbole. About Louis Armstrong’s cornet playing he would say, “It doesn’t bother me.” . . . He was passionately, deeply devoted to jazz, proselyted constantly in its behalf, refused to solo on his own instrument, and pioneered in the appreciation

of Beiderbecke. Bix's playing never bothered him; Bix's indifference to clothes and fresh linen and romance did. (101–02)

In this passage Sugrue conveys a sense of Condon's physical energy that is less apparent in the first-person narrative, but beyond that he also directs the reader's attention to Condon's significance not as an outstanding soloist (he played only rhythm guitar) but rather as a spokesperson, organizer, and proselytizer for hot jazz. Here we see Condon acting as a bridge between the white and black jazz communities as he organized "excursions to the south side" to hear King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and the other great New Orleans musicians while he also "pioneered in the appreciation of Beiderbecke." In the short biography of Beiderbecke that follows, we learn that Condon and the other white Chicago musicians, although not themselves possessing Beiderbecke's musical gifts, nonetheless played a significant role in directing him to hear some of the great African American talents, such as Bessie Smith, on his trips through Chicago (103).

Having established Condon's role in encouraging a convivial exchange between white and black jazz musicians in Chicago, the second narrated chapter pauses to reflect on the differences between the two communities. "Jazz was not considered a proper profession for well-bred young white men" forced to work in establishments operated by the likes of Al Capone and his associates (104). Moreover, the different upbringing and musical backgrounds of these white musicians was reflected in a different sensibility toward the playing of jazz:

[T]he youngsters developed a style based upon but different from New Orleans jazz. The beat was pushed and nervous, the tympani had the

urgent sound of Indian drums; there was tenseness, almost frenzy, in the solo flights of the horns; there was not the unhurried, effortless, relaxed mood of Negro jazz. Improvisation by adolescent white boys reared in polite homes was bound to be different from the conversational instrumentation of colored men belonging to a minority of thirteen million submerged in the freest nation on earth. It was a fresh expression, a new voice. (104)

The narrator's explanation, guided by stereotypical assumptions about the social and cultural backgrounds of jazz musicians, is at once both apologetic—the white players are not capable of producing the “effortless” and “relaxed” mood of the black players—and boastful in its implication that the “fresh expression” and “new voice” of these white jazz musicians offered a significant development for jazz.⁴⁰

The third narrated chapter occupies the space between Condon's decision to move to New York in 1928 and the several chapters that follow in which he chronicles the struggles and hard times that accompanied his first years in that city. Set against the backdrop of Depression-era America, the anecdotes and stories that dominate Condon's narrative in this section show him and the other jazz musicians in his circle waging a battle against poverty and unemployment while remaining steadfast in their determination

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the complex response of the African American middle class to jazz, and for specific accounts of the social and economic expectations of African American jazz musicians from middle-class families, see DeVeaux, 49–54.

to play small-ensemble hot jazz even as the “sweet” music played by big bands soared in popularity.⁴¹

The narrated chapter, which precedes Condon’s account of his early New York experience, anticipates Condon’s struggles to protect a valuable “*art form*” against the popular music that encroached upon it (162). It begins, however, with an assertion—in seeming contradiction to the earlier claim for the unique contributions of the white Chicago musicians to the development of jazz—that jazz was black music that white musicians could only imitate (162). The point of this assertion, however, seems entirely to illustrate Condon’s accomplishment in absorbing crucial elements of black music in his own playing. Once again the narrator brings the third-person Condon directly into this passage, allowing him to speak before evaluating his place within the New York jazz circles of the late 1920s:

“The Negro is born with rhythm,” Eddie Condon said. “We’ve got to learn it. The rhythm section is the spine of a jazz band. It holds the music together.” He [Condon] exemplified his theory; the small orchestras with which he played had unity. “Condon has a miraculous sense of time,” Red McKenzie said to the boys at the Three Deuces. “He doesn’t make much sound by himself in a band but he makes a lot of difference in how the whole band sounds. He knows music.” (162)

⁴¹ As Condon writes, “We didn’t realize then how little chance we had in New York. Violins and soft saxophones were the fashion. . . . The only place we could play was in our rooms, at our own request” (172).

Here, as in the earlier narrated chapters, Condon's authenticity is illustrated through his understanding that learning jazz means absorbing its roots in African American music and culture. In addition, Condon's physical presence within a black cultural sphere serves as a direct challenge to European art music and culture; the narration informs us that the "*visiting Chicagoans*," including Condon, must travel north to Harlem to hear the music that had been almost entirely excluded from New York's concert halls, for jazz "*had not come from Europe and it therefore could not be imposed upon the public as something the public ought to hear*" (163).⁴²

To this point the narration may be seen to authenticate Condon by showing his links to the African American jazz community of New Orleans and Chicago and stressing his own important contributions to the Chicago-Dixieland jazz of which he was a founding and influential member. But the third narrated chapter also authenticates Condon by stressing his unswerving devotion to an older style of "hot" jazz that would be deemed by many to be obsolete, and that would be replaced first by big band swing music and then by modern jazz, later called bebop.

Although the narrator grants that some of the big bands—namely Fletcher Henderson's and Duke Ellington's—were capable of producing "hot" jazz, he argues that swing music produced by "*white band leaders of the late thirties*" such as Benny

⁴² Sugrue claims that Condon "*was responsible for the first recording by a mixed group of white and Negro musicians*" (164); despite Gary Giddins' assertion that this claim was false—according to Giddins, "the New Orleans Rhythm Kings session with Jelly Roll Morton probably has that distinction" (x)—it gives further credence to the thesis that Condon gains authenticity through his social and musical affiliation with African Americans.

Goodman and the Dorsey brothers produced “*slick, commercial, arranged music; it was successful; it paid the rent*” (164). But the musicians did not find this kind of music fulfilling, so they used jam sessions to continue exploring “*music the way they wanted to play it, improvising, creating*” (164). To illustrate the difference between artistic integrity and the requirements of daily living, the narrator quotes saxophonist Frank Teschmaker: “*You can’t play it hot and make a living out of it*” (164).

Condon’s refusal to go commercial—his own narrative shows him often struggling to pay the rent—becomes part of a carefully constructed portrait by the narrator, as well as by Condon himself within his first-person narration, that grants Condon authenticity through stressing his dedication to his art above practical considerations.⁴³ The narrator’s language of religious zeal and conversion adds to this impression: “*In New York Condon by instinct and interest became a free lance jazz missionary*” (164). And later in the same passage: “*Condon was unswervingly devoted to jazz; with quiet, stubborn fanaticism he proselyted for it. He stayed away from the contamination of big bands; sometimes he made a living, sometimes he didn’t. ‘We bled to death,’ he once said of those years. ‘We gnawed at each other’s wrists’*” (165).

By the end of the chapter, Sugrue has given Condon a leading role in the resistance movement against the commercialization of jazz. Stressing his integrity and devotion, Sugrue writes, “*Eddie Condon began to work seriously and persistently for the music in which he believed*” (165–66). Anticipating the portrait that Condon himself will

⁴³ For a critique of the view of jazz as an art form that existed outside the constraints of the marketplace, see DeVeaux (1997).

paint in the remainder of his first-person narrative, the narration shows Condon's success as coming not primarily through his accomplishments as a player, but rather through his skills as a spokesperson, organizer, and bandleader. Among his accomplishments, he will lead "*some of the finest white jazz groups ever heard.*" Moreover, he will also succeed in bringing jazz into the European concert hall and in drawing "*serious critical acclaim for the music.*" Through these accomplishments, Sugrue asserts that Condon deserved his nickname, "*Mr. Jazz*" (166).

The final word in Condon's autobiography is given to his collaborator, whose last narrated chapter brings the main body of text to a conclusion.⁴⁴ In this final section, Sugrue returns to a central theme of his narration; that is, that jazz musicians "*are pioneer practitioners of the only American art form,*" but while there has been considerable respect shown for jazz in Europe, for the most part it has remained unappreciated at home (294). He supports his thesis with a number of quotes in praise of jazz from European critics and composers, including Hugues Panassié and Charles Delaunay.⁴⁵

Yet although Europeans show their appreciation of jazz, Sugrue notes that they "*cannot themselves play jazz well*" (296). Here Sugrue supports his claim with a quote by Virgil Thomson from a 1943 article in *Vogue* magazine, in which Thomson praised

⁴⁴ The original 1947 edition of Condon's autobiography also contained an appendix entitled, "The Chicago Bands: Eddie Condon On Records: An Informal Discography." A 1962 Corgi Edition contained a new chapter written by Condon following a tour to Great Britain; this chapter is reprinted in the Da Capo Press version, which is my source for the above discussion.

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that Sugrue never argues, as does Panassié, that white musicians brought a level of refinement and musicality to the hot jazz played by African Americans. See Hugues Panassié. 1936. *Hot Jazz: The Guide to Swing Music*, 28–30.

“noncommercial swing” as exemplified “by our greatest instrumental virtuosos under Eddie Condon’s direction” (296). With support from an authority of Thomson’s stature, Sugrue manages to convey Condon’s significance in keeping a particular style of jazz before the public, without exaggerating Condon’s significance as a player, *per se*.

In the end, the narration solidifies Condon’s position as leader of a vanguard standing in opposition to an elitist (and presumably lily-white) America that fails to recognize the genius of jazz, an art form born within its own doors. The final passage recounts Condon’s failed attempts to book Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. for a jazz concert under his direction. They were turned down, according to the narration, because the owners of the hall—the Daughters of the American Revolution—feared the destruction to their hall that a jazz audience might cause. The refusal stood, even after “*Condon and his men offered to post a bond of \$100,000 to cover possible damage by the audience.*” In response, Condon booked the ballroom of the Willard Hotel, which suffered no property damage despite an audience of six hundred (296).

The final paragraph introduces a remarkable simile, as Sugrue compares the reception of Condon and his associates by mainstream America to that of James Joyce within Ireland; in so doing, the narrator grants Condon’s music the stature of high art while he simultaneously denigrates those critics and members of the general public who are unable to recognize it as such.⁴⁶ In addition, Sugrue’s final image provides a neat

⁴⁶ According to Sugrue, “*It is all very much like Ireland and James Joyce, the author of Dubliners, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses, and Finnegans Wake. Recently an American magazine decided to run a picture story of Dublin, the setting for all of Joyce’s fiction. A photographer was sent to Belvedere College, the Jesuit day*

reprise of the first chapter, in which Condon has attempted to establish his credentials as an autobiographer by placing himself within an elite circle of American writers, including John Steinbeck, John O’Hara, and John McNulty.

To summarize, then, the authenticating voices in *We Called It Music*— Thomas Sugrue’s in his “Narration” and John McNulty’s within selected passages of Condon’s narrative—appear to serve two distinct functions. They establish Condon’s link, first and foremost, to a jazz tradition with roots in African American music and culture, but also, to a lesser extent, to white European and Irish American cultural and intellectual circles. If the authenticating strategies in *We Called It Music* may be viewed as a struggle between Euro-American and African American cultural values, the latter appears to win out in the end.

But if this struggle is apparent within Condon’s autobiography, it is even fiercer within another white jazz autobiography, Benny Goodman’s *The Kingdom of Swing* (1939), in which the impetus to judge, compare, and evaluate musical forms within European art music and American jazz traditions forms the central authenticating strategy for Goodman’s collaborator, Irving Kolodin. In his foreword, Kolodin refers to himself as Goodman’s collaborator but does not specify exactly the nature or degree of his role; the only sections directly attributed to him are the book’s foreword and two chapters, each of which includes the descriptor, “An interpolation by Irving Kolodin” (Goodman and

school which Joyce attended and which figures prominently in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. While the photograph was being taken the Rector of the school said, ‘Have you heard of the sad case of a certain student, James Joyce, a freak writer’” (296–97).

Kolodin 46, 171).⁴⁷ Kolodin insists that the “virtuoso performer of popular dance music” (of which he names Goodman as an example) deserves the respect and attention given to classical musicians; he lays the blame for the music’s bad reputation in part on the less-than-respectable venues in which it had typically been heard (11). Moreover, he adds, jazz should be “accorded the courtesy of attention *according to its own standards*” (12; emphasis in original); in his attempt to define what these particular “standards” might be, he refers to “popular dance music” (i.e., Benny Goodman’s brand of jazz music) as “a *player’s music*, created out of the instinct, and only in a secondary sense out of the training of the performers themselves” (12; emphasis in original). A player’s interpretation of a particular tune, he argues, therefore provides the “element of ultimate interest” in judging a jazz performance (12).

Kolodin’s brief comments here give an early clue as to the particular method by which he will portray Benny Goodman and his music as both legitimate and authentic. First, he challenges the attitude of contempt with which many within the European art music domain have viewed jazz; and second, he insists that understanding the place of “instinct” within jazz expression is critical to understanding its difference from classical music. In other words, he seems to appeal to Goodman’s readers to judge his music

⁴⁷ Irving Kolodin (1908–1988) was an influential music critic, educator, and author of more than a dozen books on various aspects of European and American classical music history; he was also “one of the first American critics to give extensive reviews of phonograph records.” He worked as music critic of the *Saturday Review* (1947–82) and the *New York Sun* (1932–50), and wrote a full-length history of The Metropolitan Opera (Smith, *Grove Music Online*). In addition, Kolodin was responsible for the “musical history of jazz” segment of Goodman’s renowned 1938 concert at Carnegie Hall; he also wrote a piece on John Hammond and his influence in the world of swing music for the September 1939 issue of *Harper’s* (Collier 216, 100).

according to the standards they would use when judging European art music, but he simultaneously pleads for popular dance music to be judged on its own terms, terms in which musical expression derives more from feeling than from musical training.

Kolodin's musings provide evidence of his opposing and perhaps even contradictory impulses that will mark his portrayal of Goodman and the jazz world to which he belongs. As great as his effort is to convince readers that Goodman's music is deserving of serious attention and respect, he will, as we will see, frequently resort to stereotype to distinguish popular music rooted in African American culture from the training and requirements of European art music.

Kolodin's first interpolation, "That Toddling Town," takes up chapter three of *The Kingdom of Swing*, and follows on Goodman's opening chapters in which he narrates his childhood experiences on Chicago's West Side, where he grew up in impoverished circumstances in a large Jewish immigrant family. In "That Toddling Town," Kolodin offers a brief and didactic account of jazz history with New Orleans as the music's original source, but with Chicago (the main focus of the chapter) as the clear center of jazz during the period of its Northern migration. His first aim, it seems, is to situate Goodman within the Chicago of the mid-1920s, a metropolis in which many "communities of varying character" were in evidence. There was the Chicago that was an important center of white culture and finance—"The city of Carl Sandburg, Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson," the home of the Civic Opera, the "slowly maturing financial schemes of Samuel Insull"—but as Kolodin is quick to point out, "Goodman's Chicago was none of these" (46). There was also "the close-packed West Side" (where

Goodman lived) and “the even more closely-packed South Side,” where “a staggering number of [Negroes] lived in squalor and filth” but still managed to produce “a night life which gave employment to some of the most original musicians in jazz” (46–47).

This preamble, of course, is Kolodin’s attempt to illustrate the world of wealth and privilege of Chicago’s elite from which the working-class Goodman was excluded, and to contrast it with Chicago’s black South Side that would exert such an influence on the city’s young white musicians, including Benny Goodman. Kolodin next turns his attention to sketching an outline of the path by which Goodman and other white Chicagoans learned to play swing music; his account reveals much about his views on jazz history, especially in regards to the cultural origins of the music and the extent of white imitation and borrowings of an African American art form.

Kolodin begins his history lesson with brief biographies of several prominent African American jazz musicians who left New Orleans and made their ways to Chicago, including Ferdinand “Jellyroll” Morton, Sidney Bechet, Johnny and Baby Dodds, Jimmy Noone, Joe “King” Oliver, and, of course, Louis Armstrong. “This is merely a sketch, of course,” he adds, “in terms of certain outstanding men” (48–49). He then turns his discussion to the white musicians from New Orleans, including Leon Rapollo and Paul Mares, who also made the trek northward and formed the New Orleans Rhythm Kings as they settled in Chicago after World War One. The New Orleans musicians, “both colored and white,” Kolodin continues, contributed the key “element in jazz which . . . became known as swing,” which, among other characteristics, emphasized strong ensemble playing (51).

Moreover, Kolodin observes, since jazz—unlike classical music, Kolodin’s central area of interest and expertise—lacked a “written history” or formal, written pedagogical system, students were left to learn the music “imitatively,” that is, by listening to records or hearing live bands in performance (51–52). In this way, white musicians (he lists Goodman and many others) “growing up in Chicago during the twenties” were lucky enough to learn from “their idols” directly, and to become “outstanding white players” with “unique qualities of genius” (52). Yet as if this short history of jazz and Goodman’s and his fellow white Chicagoans’ place in it required a bit more tweaking, Kolodin concedes that, according to the accounts of various of the white players themselves, they did not always turn to the best or “more authentic” sources first:

They might begin by admiring an inferior white band which copied the New Orleans Rhythm Kings; then proceed, when the enthusiasm for the first band had exhausted its subject, to the more authentic players, and only after this, appreciate the extent to which the playing of the Negro was basic in all of them. (53)

In this fairly convoluted discussion of jazz’s racial origins, then, Kolodin manages both to acknowledge the primacy of African American music and culture on jazz, and also to make a claim for the young white Chicagoans who themselves earned the status of authenticity through their direct link to outstanding African American players.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In a brief digression, Kolodin argues that Bix Beiderbecke, among all the white jazz musicians of his time, must be considered an exception to his assertion regarding the primary influence of black musicians.

Kolodin next sets out to illustrate in greater detail the interactions between these black and white musicians, with the white players making the trek to Chicago's South Side, which was for them "an inexhaustible source of example, and, if you will, inspiration" (54). From the African American musicians they heard at the Lincoln Gardens and other venues, the white players learned about approaches to improvisation and rhythm that stood in marked contrast to the "sweet" music played by the contemporary white bands; despite Kolodin's clear intent here to praise the music of the former in contrast to the latter, he nonetheless returns to the kind of essentialist language that was noted earlier: "On the one hand [the music of the white bands] was a mechanical, formalized adaptation of something originally vital and sincere—on the other [the music of the black bands] was a constant freshening of this basic impulse, the character of a race expressing itself in the performance of certain unique personalities" (56).

The preferred gathering place for the young Chicagoans, Kolodin continues, was the Nest on 35th Street, which featured all-night jam sessions, and which allowed Goodman and his peers their first opportunities to play with their idols (56–57). And yet, as he is quick to note, the African American players also benefited from these interracial mixings, for it was the white drummer Dave Tough who first brought Earl Hines to the attention of Louis Armstrong. "Thus," he concludes, "the process repeated itself indefinitely, with influences and counter-influences so varied and confused that no direct line of succession can be traced through the whole complex pattern" (57–58). In this way, Kolodin claims, it is possible to trace Zutty Singleton's influence on Gene Krupa (who was introduced to Singleton by the white musician, Milton Mezirow [sic]), just as it is

also possible to find Singleton “climbing over a wall at the Southmoor Hotel to peer in at a window just to see a white boy whose playing on records had been the talk of his band— a white boy named Benny Goodman” (58).

Thus, Kolodin’s brief history of jazz—in which he has managed a clever dance between homage to the black sources of American jazz and insistence on the significant contributions of white musicians—ends with a vivid image of black New Orleans drummer Singleton scaling a wall to catch sight of the teenaged Benny Goodman.

Kolodin’s second interpolation, “Swing Is Here,” is sandwiched between Goodman’s accounts of his first, struggling efforts to form a big band and his spectacular success at the Palomar Ballroom outside Los Angeles in August 1935, a date that many jazz historians mark as the unofficial launch of the big-band swing era. From a more general history of jazz, Kolodin now turns to focus specifically on the swing phenomenon of the mid-to-late 1930s that would cast Goodman, above any other American popular musician, black or white, in the leading role. Importantly, it is precisely the significance of race that Kolodin names as one of the central factors in “the emergence of swing as a national enthusiasm”; that is, for the first time, there was “the concentration of enough fine jazz musicians in a single white band to direct attention to it that no colored band, however good, could hope to attract” (171).

Yet Kolodin is quick to distinguish Goodman’s music “from the prettified jazz which had become the white man’s fashion in the twenties,” even though the latter, as exemplified by the bands of Art Hickman and Paul Whiteman, made “revolutionary” contributions to jazz by favouring arranged music played by “trained and cultivated

musicians” over a reliance on “instinct” (171). Indeed, Kolodin argues, these bands had a lasting impact on upcoming generations of jazz musicians, who came to understand the benefits of formal training and the use of arrangements, but who were insistent upon translating “the resources of part-writing, voicing and instrumentation *into jazz terms*” (172, emphasis in original). So what exactly does Kolodin mean by “jazz terms”? Precisely those attributes that Goodman and other white musicians learned originally from black sources; that is, music that placed a premium on “vitality and independence,” and that stressed individual improvisation within group interaction. In this context, then, the use of formal elements such as arrangements only contributed to strengthen the music, “to make it more orderly, more integrated, more unified” (172).

But when Kolodin attempts to give a more precise definition of swing, he is forced to abandon his reliance on analogies to European classical music and return to examples from “the best Negro bands,” whose playing contained “an element” that simply

could not be identified as an expression of anything in the written parts they were using. It was a style of performance, an interrelation of rhythms, *a product of a mere enthusiasm for the act of playing, a freshness and spontaneity that could not be indicated by accents, note-values or other written symbols.* (174, emphasis in original)

“For almost a decade,” Kolodin continues, only a limited number of white musicians had been playing in this style:

It was only when an attempt was made to transfer this atmosphere and enthusiasm to a large white band (which eventually succeeded in the perfected Goodman organization) that a large public became aware of the particular stimulation and interest that *authentic jazz*, in its straightforward, undiluted form possesses. (175, emphasis added)

Convolved and circular as Kolodin's argument seems at times, his overall intention seems clear: to emphasize the authenticity of Benny Goodman's swing music by establishing, once again, its original links to black music; and to insist that Goodman's astonishing popular success—which he achieved without sacrificing his musical integrity—is a demonstration of his unique and far-reaching contribution to jazz.

Yet Kolodin, the classical music scholar, does not end his argument here, but within a few pages returns to his earlier comparison between swing music and European art music, with the obvious intention of legitimizing Goodman and his music. Specifically, he suggests that swing music had evolved to a point at which the technical language of European art music, including terms such as “inflections, accents, intonation and phrasing” were appropriately applied to it, as well (177). These words have barely escaped from his pen before he is answering the imagined “outraged voices” of classical music critics, who question the serious attention given to jazz musicians, whose substandard technical abilities were such that “no respectable musician would tolerate” (178).

The key element, according to Kolodin, is intention. Swing musicians do not lack the ability to “play pretty”; rather, the decisions they make regarding tone quality and

vibrato, melody and rhythm, all have to do with cultivating an “individual style,” the hallmark of the best jazz playing (178–79). “For the best jazz players,” he continues, “are possessed of musical impulses unequalled, for originality and emotional fervor, elsewhere in American music” (179). Kolodin’s roller-coaster of evaluations and judgments continues, for even as he finishes praising the considerable talents of “the best jazz players,” he seems in the next breath to qualify his praise, suggesting that the key ingredient which distinguishes them from their classical counterparts has to do with opportunity, or more precisely, the lack of it:

Who is to say what accomplishments a Beiderbecke, an Armstrong or a Teagarden might not have achieved had his talent been directed along more conventional lines? Their backgrounds in Iowa, Louisiana and Texas inclined them to the most convenient outlets that came to hand—bringing them eventually to a jazz band rather than a Philharmonic, to Fifty-second Street (in New York) rather than Fifty-seventh Street. (180)

In the end, Goodman’s collaborator seems hopelessly unable to follow his own advice to his readers: to judge jazz “according to its own standards” (12). Oblivious to the condescending attitude contained within his analysis, Kolodin attempts to leave his musings on a note of optimism, speculating that “a slight percentage” of the ardent followers of swing music might even turn their considerable listening skills to European art music. For a young person who has listened to the complex rhythms played by swing drummers “would hardly find Stravinsky’s *Sacre du Printemps* perplexing; and the contrapuntal interweavings of a first-rate jam session have more relationship to a Bach

fugue than even the musicians would consider possible” (182). Above all, Kolodin’s analysis reveals his *own* discomfort with elevating jazz to high art, even as he calls upon others to do so.

III: The Authenticating Collaborator in Mezz Mezzrow’s *Really the Blues*

As stated earlier, Mezz Mezzrow’s *Really the Blues* (1946) is the only autobiography under discussion in this chapter in which the collaborator’s voice is not revealed in intertextual or paratextual insertions, but rather at the end of the text’s final chapter, and then by the autobiographical subject himself, when Mezzrow breaks away from his narration to tell the reader how the book came to be written. Until this point, Mezzrow’s autobiography had been written entirely in Mezzrow’s first-person voice and had given no clues as to the specific editorial intervention of his collaborator, Bernard Wolfe.⁴⁹

Mezzrow describes meeting Wolfe one night at a Greenwich Village jam session, when “this young white fellow who tells me he don’t know much about music, he’s a writer, but he likes my records fine” approaches him about the idea of doing a magazine piece on him (Mezzrow and Wolfe 333). Soon Wolfe “begins hanging around up in Harlem” with him (334). It is in itself noteworthy that Wolfe’s collaboration with Mezzrow developed in the African American cultural mecca of Harlem, for *Really the Blues* is ostensibly a story of transformation in which Mezzrow, born to Russian-Jewish

⁴⁹ The original 1946 publication of *Really the Blues* includes three appendices, all written in Mezzrow’s voice, and a glossary of hip slang of unstated authorship. Wolfe’s undated afterword, which first appeared in the 1990 Citadel Press publication of *Really the Blues*, is the only portion of the text for which Wolfe receives acknowledgment as sole author.

parents on Chicago's Northwest Side, attempts to re-create himself, socially and musically, as a black man.⁵⁰ Before long Wolfe is convinced that Mezzrow's story requires more than just an article to do it justice; he tells Mezzrow "[i]t needs a book, a hell of a long book, and you've got to write it. It's more important than you think" (334).

Despite Mezzrow's colorful attempts to convince Wolfe that he's not up to a literary undertaking, Wolfe insists on Mezzrow's place among other significant storytellers of his time, writers that Mezzrow admits "I never heard of," including André Gide, B. Traven, Céline, Henry Miller "and guys like that" (334).⁵¹ The common thread within this perhaps seemingly disparate group of writers is that they all functioned, to varying degrees, as outsiders reporting on the societies in which they lived and worked; in Wolfe's view, this would be also be Mezzrow's chief contribution to American letters:

"Mezz, you've got a story to tell just like those writers did, and it deserves to get down on paper. Look: you've been lying flat on your back for a quarter of a century, almost, watching the screwy kaleidoscope of American life jiggle and squirm over your head. ... It's a real American success story, upside down: Horatio Alger standing on his head." (334)

But then Wolfe issues a stern warning to Mezzrow not to expect the commercial or popular success from his story that "hammy poets" and others achieve, for his tale, unlike theirs, does not lend itself to "slogonizing verse" or recitation "over the radio on

⁵⁰ In Chapter 3 I have a more detailed exploration of this aspect of Mezzrow's account.

⁵¹ "'Me write a book?' I say. 'Hell, that's like asking a bricklayer to take up embroidery for a hobby. Why man, the King's English would never recover from the shock. I better keep on telling my story on my horn, and let it go at that'" (334).

patriotic occasions”; in fact, its “raw” quality might even limit its “commercial success” (334). Yet its very lack of commercial appeal would, according to Wolfe, simply highlight its chief value: namely, that “it’s true, authentic” in its ability to portray “the plight of the creative artist in the U.S.A.—to borrow a phrase from Henry Miller, that writer I told you about” (335).⁵²

Mezzrow’s response of tongue-in-cheek humility—“I sure never suspected I was living a saga and an odyssey. ... Now it turns out I was *significant!*”—leads, in the book’s final paragraph, to his agreeing to participate in this joint venture with Wolfe: “We put our heads together hard, ... and we finally wrote that book” (335). This “conversation” between Mezzrow and Wolfe within the final pages of Mezzrow’s autobiography, then, offers yet another example of the authentication of a white jazz autobiographer by his collaborator, but it is a notably different kind of authentication from those uncovered in the other autobiographies discussed in this chapter. Wolfe’s namedropping here, rather than highlighting Mezzrow’s intense interest in re-creating himself as a Black man and jazz musician—which after all is usually identified as the main concern of the more-than-three-hundred pages of narrative that preceded this final conversation between autobiographer and collaborator—instead situates Mezzrow within various bohemian and

⁵² The reader might justifiably read as ironic Wolfe’s remarks to Mezzrow regarding the book’s lack of commercial appeal. As Scott Saul writes, Random House published *Really the Blues* in 1946 to considerable hype, with promotional ads that described it as “an upside down success story” about “a man who ‘crossed the color line, *backwards.*” By 1952, the book sales were estimated to be 20,000 to 30,000, and “critic Leonard Feather estimated in 1960 that one in five *Down Beat* readers had read the book” (Saul 41).

subcultural literary circles of America and Europe, and emphasizes his own importance as a storyteller, and even as a writer.

While references to jazz musicians and writers abound in Mezzrow's narrative, notably absent are references to the literary figures of the sort Mezzrow had "never heard of" but mentions, under Wolfe's influence, in these final pages of his autobiography; it is possible to argue, then, that this final section tells the reader more about the literary interests and associations of Mezzrow's collaborator than it does about the cultural circles in which Mezzrow himself traveled.⁵³ Nonetheless, it does serve to position Mezzrow—the high school dropout who was as well known for his association with marijuana, both as a user and as a seller, as he was for his abilities as a jazz musician—as a worthy literary subject and author.⁵⁴

⁵³ In Scott Saul's essay on Mezzrow and Wolfe, in which he refers to Mezzrow as "the first white Negro in print" and to Wolfe as the "first highbrow critic of the white Negro" (Saul 48), he cites aspects of Wolfe's biography—his turn to Trotskyist politics in the mid-1930s as the result of the Depression's devastating impact on his family; his year-long position as Trotsky's bodyguard and secretary in Mexico; and his participation in "Greenwich Village bohemia" in the 1940s, including his friendship with Henry Miller that led to his own career as a pornographic novelist—as important background for understanding his influence on the crafting of Mezzrow's autobiography (49–50).

⁵⁴ In addition, the final section also brings the question of authorial control to the forefront, forcing the reader to consider the degree to which Mezzrow's lengthy first-person narration is in fact biography rather than autobiography. In his afterword in the 1990 Citadel Press reissue of *Really the Blues*, Wolfe refers to "the experience of writing the Mezzrow book" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 391). Scott Saul certainly argues for the substantial role played by Wolfe, whom he calls Mezzrow's "literary midwife and probably the one who gave the edge to Mezzrow's sociological analysis and the blinding gloss to his jiving spiel" (Saul 345, fn. 30). But this view is somewhat countered by Gayle Wald, who notes Mezzrow's claim that he "drafted *Really the Blues* in longhand and then submitted the manuscript to Wolfe for editing and revising" (Wald 202, fn. 4). Wald adds that Mezzrow "claimed that 365,000 words were cut from the original manuscript" but that "the material was later lost" (202, fn. 4).

This chapter has considered the various ways collaborators of white jazz autobiography have attempted to authenticate their autobiographical subjects. Almost without exception, their central aim has been to position these white jazz autobiographers within an African American musical and cultural context in order to prove their authenticity as jazz musicians. (The one exception to this pattern, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, was the collaborative strategy of Tom Scanlan in Steve Jordan's *Rhythm Man*.) In addition, however, we have considered several autobiographies in which the collaborator has presented various—sometimes seemingly competing—authenticating strategies. This more complex pattern raises obvious questions. Do the intertextual insertions within Condon's and Goodman's autobiographies, for example, reveal just the Eurocentric inclinations of the collaborators, or something more essential about Goodman and Condon's own relationship to their music and to their public careers? If Kolodin and Sugrue represent attempts by jazz collaborators to make their autobiographical subjects appear more legitimate by positioning them within the world of the European concert hall, does Bernard Wolfe represent an outright rejection of that world, with his embrace of the bohemian subcultural world where he situates Mezzrow? And what might the collaborators' concerns regarding the position of white jazz musicians within African American culture tell us about shifting attitudes toward race and culture in the periods in which these texts were published?

Some of these authenticating strategies are perhaps easier to comprehend than others. The evidence suggests that Eddie Condon's Irish American heritage exerted at

least as strong an influence on him as did black music and culture; in that respect Thomas Sugrue's narration, in which both these traditions are on display, seems consistent with Condon's own self-representation. And while Irving Kolodin's intertextual insertions reveal his own Eurocentric inclinations, they also accurately reflect Goodman's own considerable interest in performing and recording "legitimate clarinet music"—that is, music from the European classical tradition (Goodman and Kolodin 166). More importantly, if Kolodin and Sugrue attempt to position jazz as high art worthy of the European concert hall, then their impulse to do so seems consistent with the attitudes expressed by Goodman and Condon in their own first-person accounts.

By contrast, Wolfe and Mezzrow's representations and interests in *Really the Blues* seem fundamentally unstable, and perhaps even in conflict with one another. Certainly Mezzrow was not particularly literary, as he himself admits in the passage quoted above, and there is no evidence to suggest that he was inclined to participate in the literary circles to which Wolfe belonged. It is worth wondering then, what Wolfe and Mezzrow intended by placing Mezzrow, even if only indirectly, within these circles. If their chief purpose was to produce a funny and ironic text, then the characterization of Mezzrow was no doubt a success. Certainly the book resonated with its anti-establishment readers, who were responsible for the book's brisk sales in the years following its 1946 publication. One is left, nonetheless, with a sense of uncertainty regarding the precise nature and purpose of the collaboration itself; in Chapter 3 I will return to aspects of this collaboration again, when I have a more detailed examination of Mezzrow's self-representation in *Really the Blues*.

Whatever the particular motives of these collaborators and autobiographers, one pattern emerges that seems beyond dispute. In each of the autobiographies discussed in this chapter, the collaborator seems guided by two distinct goals: first, to convince the reader that such an unlikely subject as a white jazz musician—doubly an outsider by virtue of his playing a style created by African Americans and lacking any clear credentials as a literary figure—is worthy of our attention as a jazz autobiographer; and second, to legitimize the autobiographical subject's participation in African American or Euro-American musical and intellectual spheres. In the following chapter, the focus shifts from the authenticating strategies of the collaborators of these texts to those of the autobiographical subjects themselves, as they describe the process by which they learned to play jazz through immersion in African American music and culture.

Chapter 2: White Student, Black Teacher: Negotiating Race in the Learning of Jazz

Introduction: Explanations of Jazz Learning: From the Practical to the Sublime

Pianist Don Asher recalls that when he asked Jackie Byard's friend, a tenor saxophonist, to explain

how he got such a pronounced dip in his playing or, more specifically, what he did on the bridge of such and such a tune, he responded with mystical pronouncements: "You got to ride the car to the end of the line," and "If you didn't bring your cleats, stay off the field," and "Always take your best shot and go to the wall with it." In a more constructive vein, he suggested I listen to some old piano-roll rags and wrote out a list for me.

(50)

Asher's witty anecdote about an experienced musician's response to his questions about particular aspects of playing jazz—including the harmonic construction of a particular tune or how to swing—illustrates the difficulty of articulating through language an activity that is essentially non-verbal (at least in its instrumental form) and that is learned more through the development of aural and muscular skills than through verbal instruction. Nonetheless, a significant concern for many of the jazz autobiographers in

this study is their desire to describe the process by which they learned to play jazz; in so doing, they provide an important source for documenting approaches to jazz learning during the first six decades or so of the twentieth century, as the music underwent continuous and sometimes dramatic change. And yet the impulse of these autobiographers to document this process is not, in and of itself, particularly surprising, nor is it a feature unique within the autobiographies of white jazz musicians. After all, at the heart of *all* jazz autobiographies is the description of a lifetime's fascination and engagement with music, and of the long and often laborious process involved in translating that fascination into competence and even excellence as a player.

But are there, in fact, aspects of these accounts of learning by white jazz autobiographers that distinguish them from those by their African American peers? Invaluable sources for considering this question are several landmark studies of jazz from the fields of ethnomusicology and cultural history: Paul F. Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994); William Kenney's *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904–1930* (1993); and Burton W. Peretti's *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (1994). In the discussion that follows, Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* provides an invaluable source against which to compare white jazz autobiographers' paths of jazz learning, while the studies by Peretti and Kenney offer insight into the implications of these white musicians' immersion in African American music and culture.

Thinking in Jazz is the most comprehensive study to date of how musicians learn to play jazz, from their first exposure to African American music as youngsters, through

their initial efforts as instrumentalists and singers, and finally to their most significant work as professional musicians.⁵⁵ Berliner begins with a basic argument that the process of jazz improvisation has often been misunderstood, that many non-practitioners assume it to be entirely an expression of inspiration, a way of playing without reference to an already existing composition or “the elaboration of prefigured musical ideas” (1–2).⁵⁶

Citing certain problems in previous jazz scholarship and criticism that had “created offense by imposing outsider perspectives on jazz that are alien to the music and unsympathetic to the artists” (5–6), Berliner became convinced that knowledge about the intricate process of jazz learning and about immersion in jazz culture could best be recovered from an insider perspective. When he approached musicians with his “interest in jazz education, in redressing such issues as stereotypes about improvisation,” they responded with an eagerness to participate in his study, expressing their frustration that “their skills are poorly understood, even downright misunderstood, and their knowledge

⁵⁵ Berliner’s precise description of his project is a “study of jazz improvisation” (9), which he sees as an essential ingredient of jazz music as a whole; it is worth noting, though, that his definition of improvisation includes a wide range of musical expression, from more or less preconceived, arranged, or composed elements to those newly created by the artist in the moment.

⁵⁶ At times the musicians themselves also contribute to this misconception. For example, Art Pepper concludes his autobiography by suggesting that his approach to playing music has always been innate and intuitive, rather than self-conscious or methodical: “As for music,” he writes, “anything I’ve done has been something that I’ve done ‘off the top.’ I’ve never studied, never practiced. I’m one of those people, I knew it was there. All I had to do was reach for it, just do it” (Pepper 475). Many of Pepper’s other comments in *Straight Life*, however, as well as those of the people who knew him (including a former student), indicate that he was in fact considerably more conscious of the learning process than his concluding remarks might suggest.

undervalued by outsiders” (5). Berliner’s goal, then, was to make “available to outsiders what has largely remained knowledge privileged within a close-knit community” (6).

Beginning in the late 1970s, Berliner immersed himself in various jazz communities, first in Chicago and then in New York, where he moved in 1980. His methods included interviews with dozens of jazz musicians, close study and transcription of recordings, and attendance at “rehearsals and performances by jazz groups where [he] could collect data that would contextualize artists’ remarks” (9). In addition, Berliner “resumed [his] former study as a jazz trumpeter and took periodic lessons with various artists” (9). Berliner also cites as sources of comparison for his own findings significant works of jazz scholarship in the period in which he was developing his research, as well as selected “jazz biographies, autobiographies, and interviews” (13–14). His research convinced him that “there may be elements of creativity that are destined to remain mysteries, but it *is* possible to talk effectively about many aspects of the subject [of jazz learning] that previously had eluded articulation by scholars” (8, emphasis in original).

It is not surprising, but nonetheless worth stating, that most of the musicians in Berliner’s study are African American, although Berliner notes that he included “other ethnic groups . . . as well” (7). Perhaps more to the point, the assumption of both Berliner and the participants in his study—both black and white—is that jazz *is* African American music, and that as such, the learning experiences of jazz musicians have been shaped by their intimate involvement with African American music and by the broader culture from which it comes. For example, in a section called “Early Performance Models,” Berliner explains that many of the participants in his study

describe the process by which they acquired an initial base of musical knowledge as one of osmosis. They cultivated skills during activities as much social as musical, absorbing models from varied performances—some dramatic, others incidental yet profoundly effective—that attuned them to the fundamental values of African American music. (22)

To illustrate this assertion, Berliner includes the recollections of several African American musicians regarding their specific cultural exposure to black music—one had a father who hummed the blues, one a mother who “sang jazz ‘all the time,’” one was the son of a well known jazz saxophonist who grew up “surrounded” by music, and still another awaited “the daily arrival of the neighborhood ice peddler” who would sit down to play the blues on the piano “after delivering the family’s ice” (22–23). Berliner also reveals this process of exposure and osmosis through the experiences of his participants with black church music, with other forms of live music, jukeboxes, and neighborhood record stores, and with their direct participation in jam sessions and marching bands (23).⁵⁷ In other words, the African American musicians in Berliner’s study are initiated into the world of jazz through the everyday fabric and routine of their lives; black music is an integral, rather than separate, part of their social and cultural experience. Or, as Berliner concludes, “Altogether, the youngster’s early base of musical knowledge and its

⁵⁷ Most of the participants in Berliner’s study “developed their skills between the late thirties and early sixties and subsequently devoted their careers to bebop or related hard-bop styles. . . . The musicians also included a few representatives from the early jazz period and from the avant-garde, as well as some who perform multiple styles from New Orleans jazz to jazz rock” (7).

multilayered cultural associations provided solid ground for their specialized study of jazz” (30).

This is not to suggest that Berliner fails to acknowledge the outsider perspective of the non-African-American participants in his study; he suggests, for example, that some of them have experienced “racial stereotyping” when “the capacity for jazz improvisation and other musical skills has . . . been confused with the benefits of different training” (31).⁵⁸ But the point of this extensive preamble is to ask: what is revealed when the focus is *entirely* on the learning experiences of white jazz musicians? That is, what happens when the participants in this process of exposure and osmosis are not themselves African American, but rather outsiders to the culture? In what ways do white jazz autobiographers articulate their understanding of their outsider position as they describe the process of learning jazz? Are there aspects of their learning experiences that distinguish them from those described by Berliner’s participants?

The argument that follows may be summarized as follows: that in contrast to the jazz musicians in Berliner’s study, whose accounts assume an intrinsic relationship between jazz and African American culture, the accounts by the white jazz

⁵⁸ For example, Berliner cites the example of trumpeter Red Rodney, who claimed that he and his white musician friends believed that “improvising was something special that only the ‘black guys’ did well. In contrast, the white players were the good readers, the good section players” (31). Rodney’s validation as a jazz player came through the attention of Dizzy Gillespie, who “took a personal interest in him and initiated his association with Charlie Parker” (31). Later, Berliner cites the experiences of a Jewish American and a “young Japanese musician” during his discussion of the intense identification of jazz learners to particular outstanding musicians, which he describes as an experience “similar to religious conversion, in many instances transcending cultural boundaries” (31–32). In another passage, Berliner maintains that for certain black and white musicians, jazz functioned as “rebellion against middle-class values” (33).

autobiographers examined in this chapter reveal an intensely self-conscious process by which they, as cultural outsiders, come to understand this relationship.⁵⁹ More specifically, a pattern emerges in many of these white jazz autobiographies, in which the young white student of jazz recognizes (sometimes immediately, sometimes gradually) the need for immersion in African American music and the culture that surrounds it as a requirement for achieving a certain kind of legitimacy or authenticity as a jazz musician. This realization, as we will see, may take various forms, including seeking an African American jazz musician as a mentor or teacher, participating in interracial jam sessions and performances, and attempting to emulate African American performers or bands through close study of recordings and live performances. As these white jazz musicians learn to play by immersing themselves in African American musical forms and their wider cultural contexts—as they willingly and eagerly become students under the guidance of African American teachers—they reveal their willingness to disrupt, challenge, or circumvent prevailing codes of conduct that governed interracial relationships within mainstream American society.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This argument may be seen as an extension of Kenney's assertion that the "white Chicago jazzmen" of the 1920s "all passed through a complex process of personal orientation toward the world of music in general and of black music in particular" (1993, 98). As the discussion below will illustrate, this "process" of reorientation toward black music and culture is also apparent in later generations of white jazz musicians.

⁶⁰ It is worth stating, however, while Berliner's study serves as an extremely useful source for considering particular aspects of the learning experiences of the musicians under consideration here, there are significant differences between the accounts of his participants and those by white jazz autobiographers. With a methodology informed by his training as an ethnomusicologist, Berliner delivers an extremely focused, detailed, and technical exploration of the ways by which jazz musicians acquire melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic competence. In preparation for his interviews, Berliner prepared a "twenty-

To be clear, this chapter's focus on the influence of black music and culture on these white jazz autobiographers is not intended to deny that these same musicians also counted other white musicians and bands among their formative influences; certainly the accounts below provide many examples of the latter, as well.⁶¹ The point of focusing on the autobiographers' particular immersion in black music and culture, then, is to see how they describe their experiences, in Burton Peretti's words, as "the marginal figures, the pupils . . . [who] more fully than any other white Americans . . . became an *appendix* to black culture and history," and who in part "innovated and rebelled by willingly becoming musically subordinate to a socially and culturally subordinated group" (Peretti 96–97).

In order to illustrate the patterns that emerge among white jazz autobiographers from different eras and with widely divergent socio-economic and geographical backgrounds, the material in this chapter is arranged topically. The first section, which focuses on the early music experiences of these white jazz autobiographers, reveals their

five page set of diverse questions" from which he selected those most appropriate for each particular interviewee (5). In this respect, of course, the responses of his participants are quite different—both in nature and specificity—from those that one would generally find in jazz autobiographies, many of which are intended for a general readership and which therefore do not assume a technical knowledge of music.

⁶¹ William Kenney, for example, traces the "jazz journey" of the young white Chicago musicians in the 1920s through the music "of the leading white dance bands, to the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB), to the "smoother, more swinging" music of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and finally to the black jazz of Chicago's South Side (1993, 99–102). Through this process, Kenney explains, "Most of the white Chicagoans brought their white musical influences with them to their encounters with South Side music and culture" (102). Notably, many of those same musicians write with reverence about cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, whose musical genius, I would argue, allows him to serve in an authenticating role for other white jazz musicians.

tendency to shun or to express a lack of interest in formal Western classical music training, and instead to gravitate toward “ear” music—that is, the popular music that they heard around them and that they learned to play by methods other than through formal musical notation—and then to jazz music in particular. While Peretti has noted this aversion to formal training among the white Chicago jazz musicians of the 1920s, the accounts discussed here show that this tendency extends (with important exceptions) to jazz musicians of later generations and from other regions of the United States.⁶²

The second section focuses on specific descriptions of methods of learning—primarily, but not exclusively, from African American sources—including listening to recordings and attending live performances and rehearsals.⁶³ The third section explores the intimate space of the private music lesson through Don Asher’s and Bob Wilber’s accounts of their studies with celebrated African American jazz musicians—Asher with Jaki Byard and Wilber with Willie “the Lion” Smith and especially with Sidney Bechet. Shifting from the private to the public, the fourth section examines accounts of initial

⁶² As Peretti notes, while many early black musicians sought formal training, “[a]dolescent white jazz players, in a telling contrast, characteristically rebelled against formal training. They disliked schooling of any kind, and they also avoided musical instruction early in their careers” (Peretti 85, 106–07). See also Kenney 1993, 96.

⁶³ The various learning methods described by white jazz autobiographers resemble closely those identified by Berliner in his chapter, “Hangin’ Out and Jammin’: The Jazz Community as an Educational System,” in which he argues that “[f]or almost a century, the jazz community has functioned as a large educational system for producing, preserving, and transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums” (37). These methods, as Berliner outlines, include learning through “hanging out” with other musicians (37), consciously emulating the style of older, established players (40), participating in jam sessions (41–44), “sitting in at concerts” (44), and developing “professional affiliations with bands” (46–51).

forays into Black musical worlds, while the fifth section focuses on the specific public ritual of the interracial jam session. Section six focuses on accounts by selected autobiographers of both the triumphs and limitations of their interracial alliances. Within any given topic, the accounts of particular autobiographers are presented chronologically, that is, as roughly corresponding to the stylistic tendencies that they represent. In other words, the learning experiences of those musicians who played in the older New Orleans and Chicago jazz styles are set out before that of those musicians who became swing or bebop musicians, even if, as in the case of Bob Wilber, the musician was a contemporary of the latter group.

I. Early music experiences

A seeming paradox emerges in the descriptions by white jazz autobiographers of their early music experiences, for even as many who came to maturity in the 1920s and 1930s showed a disdain for formal education, they also frequently used metaphors of education and schooling to describe the process by which they learned to play.⁶⁴ Bud Freeman, for example, begins his autobiography with a claim for his hometown, Chicago, as the nation's center for jazz learning in the 1920s:

Young musicians had the best possible opportunity for learning about this music because we had most of the great jazz musicians living among us.

We had wonderful clubs on the black South Side, where the likes of Louis,

⁶⁴ According to Paul Berliner, "Generations of jazz musicians have described their training in bands by using metaphors of formal education" (Berliner 49–50).

King Oliver, Jimmie Noone, Earl Hines, and Baby and Johnny Dodds gave us the greatest music lessons we could ever ask for. (Freeman as Told to Wolf 1)

In a similar vein, Art Hodes explains his decision to immerse himself in the music on Chicago's South Side with the claim that "[t]here were no schools where one could go and learn to play jazz. These people were my teachers. I went among them, lived with them, absorbed their music, and came away enriched" (23). Later he adds, "For me it was all school, only school was never like this. You awoke to music, and you were swinging all day. At night it was for real—the jam session, sitting in. I don't know how many piano players I gave free lessons to. Walk in on their job and ask to sit in. They not only got a rest, they got a lesson" (29). Yet as this section will attempt to illustrate, long before these autobiographers became professional jazz musicians, they revealed particular musical inclinations and preferences valued in jazz—an inclination to play by ear or by rote, to learn in groups with other young learners, and to seek out popular music and culture over formal Western classical music training.

According to Wingy Manone, who was born into a working-class Italian family in New Orleans in 1904, the city's musical culture seeped into the bones of those who lived there, regardless of their race, class, or ethnicity. "A kid in New Orleans, in my day," he writes, "was exposed to music, righteous music, from the day he was born. He learned it just like he learned to walk and talk. You came from the Crescent City, man, you *had* to have music in you" (Manone and Vandervoort 10, emphasis in original). Yet most striking in his description of his own music training is his desire to learn from New

Orleans' black community; he writes that although he began lessons on cornet when he was eight years old "from a lady who ran a school of music" and who taught him "all the E flats, and the B flats, and the rudiments," he lasted less than a year before he announced that he "was getting sick of this" and told her "I would like to take you someplace and let you hear the kind of stuff I want to learn" (12). His teacher agreed, so Manone

took her way up on the river in New Orleans, and we went across on the other side of the levee. That's where they build those Tobacco Road houses on the quicksand, on the edge of the water. When we got there I showed her all the colored people, waitin' to hear some music. We were the only two white people in about a thousand colored folks. (12-13)

But when the musicians began to play, his teacher said, "Why, those people are just a bunch of fakers, they don't even know what they're playing themselves." When Manone challenged her, "But it sounds good, don't it?" his teacher admitted that it did, but added that if he wanted to learn music that was "not in the book," she would "disown" him (13). Manone's response was "Well, you better start disownin', 'cause I done took my last lesson" (13). Although Manone states his gratitude to her "for showin' me the rudiments, 'cause she really helped me a lot," his central music education came from "those colored boys across the levee . . . who really taught me to play" (13). Significantly, he boasts that his presence within New Orleans' black community was, at least to some degree, transgressive:

They didn't want no white folks around, but they let me come, as long as I stayed on the boundary line. I had to stand in that quicksand to hear 'em.

So I picked my spots to stand on. When I got in up to my knees I'd wiggle out and go stand on another spot. I had to do this about every half hour, to keep from getting stuck. That was my music school. (13)

A key element of Manone's music education was his natural impulse to learn by listening and then copying what he had heard. "I kept goin' across the levee to hear it," he explains, "and tried it on my horn until I got it" (14).⁶⁵ In addition, he explains that he and his friends would buy sheet music and take it to "a nice old Italian professor, Vincent de Corte," from whom Manone had earlier taken "a few lessons" (14). According to Manone, "He didn't like jazz, but he was a nice old fellow. He'd play the melody for us and show us the harmony and we could catch it" (26). The youngsters would then practice jamming on the tune "until we had a brand-new piece, and finally got to arguing among ourselves about how the tune really went. Then we would play it straight, but our way sounded better, so we'd jam it again" (26).

Later, Manone describes how his impulse to take liberties with the basic harmony of a tune got him in trouble with his own band, who, as non-readers, would spend hours working up an arrangement, only to have Manone play different chord changes each time through. "Playing the lead, this didn't make any difference to me, but my boys beefed about it" (46). Finally his band insisted that he follow the harmonies that they had set out,

⁶⁵ As Berliner explains in *Thinking in Jazz*, many "self-educated performers initially learned music by ear, as well as by hand and by instrument: memorizing the sounds of phrases together with their corresponding finger patterns and positions on an instrument. Having, in effect, formulated an internal tablature representation, the student can draw upon its visual and physical imagery to aid the ear in retrieving and rendering a part" (28). In addition, Berliner adds, some learned to read conventional music notation, some had perfect pitch (or perfect relative pitch), and some had photographic memories (28).

and in retrospect Manone admits the discipline this required was to his benefit: “Any time I got off the harmony I sounded awful. So I had to learn the proper chords and stay with the right progressions. They were doing me a favor, at the time, but I didn’t realize it then. We had a lot of arguments about it” (46). Nonetheless, Manone continues to tell stories that convey his great pride in his ability as an “ear” player and his disdain for formal music schooling. He reports that he earned a salary far above the going rate with the vaudeville act of Blossom Seeley and Benny Fields, and that when someone offered to get Fields “the best trumpet player in town” for much less, “and he can read, too,” Fields responded by declaring, “Listen, when this guy Wingy learns to read I’m gonna fire him” (48).⁶⁶

Pianist Art Hodes, who, as will see later in this chapter, names Manone as an important mentor in his early development as a jazz musician, also stressed the importance of ear training in his pre-jazz musical experience. Hodes was born in Russia in 1904, but his family moved to New York when he was six months old, and to Chicago when he was six, settling in the “Bloody Twentieth” Ward, Chicago’s tough immigrant neighborhood (Hodes and Hansen 6). When he was about eleven he began music lessons at Jane Addams’ Hull House, studying piano and voice; he was the only boy in the choir, a fact that caused him some embarrassment at the time, although in retrospect he

⁶⁶ In Manone’s story about his brief experience with Bix Beiderbecke as members of “the first MCA band ever organized,” he again conveys pride that he and Beiderbecke were “fake” musicians (i.e., non-readers), even when their inability to read music notation cost them their jobs; for Manone, their firing was simply evidence of MCA’s inability to understand the skills that really counted in a jazz musician. “We didn’t care,” he insists, “we got more appreciation from guys who were really hipped” (61).

acknowledges the immense musical benefit of that experience: “Each week I was put into a different section, so I sang soprano parts, alto parts, tenor, bass. I grew to hear all the different parts. I developed my ear. And oh how that helped me when I began to hear music I liked and was able to pick it up and play it by ear” (7).⁶⁷

After he graduated from high school, Hodes was hired to accompany the singers and “keep the piano going” (12) at Chicago’s Rainbow Gardens Cafe, owned and operated by Dago Lawrence Mangano, “one of Al Capone’s gambling bosses” (1). When he started at the Rainbow Gardens, he could only play in three keys, but the ear training he had at Hull House allowed him to, in his words, “fake. Let me hear a tune a couple of times and I could play it in any key I knew. What I had to learn was more keys, and I had plenty of time to learn in” (12). Gradually, Hodes writes, he “learned to play in a few more keys and added numbers by memory. I stayed there eighteen months in all, and before I left that job I was known in the trade as a good entertainer’s piano player” (12). Although that designation gave Hodes a measure of satisfaction, he recalls a memorable exchange in this period with pianist Joe Sullivan, when Hodes attempted to play the piano at the “high-class cafe” where Sullivan worked. According to Hodes, Sullivan told him,

⁶⁷ I thank Michael Coghlan for pointing out the hyperbole in Hodes’ claim here. Although Hodes gravitated to popular music, his father preferred hearing him play Chopin, some of which Hodes admits that he “really dug” (8). Hodes’s older sister played “popular sheet music” on the piano, and Hodes “could pick up the tune just by hearing her practice” (8). But the medium that most influenced him in his early music development was radio; he describes being “glued” to his “little crystal set” and falling asleep listening to popular music. “At best what I heard was pseudo-jazz,” Hodes recalls, “the Coon-Sanders Nighthawk [sic] Orchestra out of Kansas City” (8). (The Coon Sanders Nighthawks Orchestra was a ten-piece white band from Kansas City that achieved national popularity through its radio broadcasts from Chicago beginning in 1926 through the early 1930s. [Jones redhotjazz.com])

“‘You’re an entertainer’s piano player. Lay off my piano.’” (15). Sullivan’s uppity attitude, Hodes explains, was because Sullivan “was listening to Earl Hines at the Apex club, but I’d never heard a colored man play” (15). Hodes’s comment reveals the vast cultural distance between his immigrant Chicago neighborhood and the city’s South Side. “I’d never been out to the South Side,” he writes, “You stayed in your own neighborhood pretty much” (16). Hodes quickly came to realize that the “main thing I had to learn was the style, the idiom, which the blacks had and I didn’t” (16).

As noted in Chapter 1, music was the central influence of Eddie Condon’s childhood in Indiana and Illinois, an influence nurtured by his large Irish-American family, many of whom played instruments or sang at home and at church. In *We Called It Music: A Generation of Jazz*, Condon recalls, “Before I went to church for the first time I had a vague idea that Mass was a songfest. Every Sunday morning the program of the choir was rehearsed from all parts of our house . . . Anyone passing through the parlor hit a chord on the piano to set the pitch” (40). Condon’s own, as well as his family’s, tendency to learn music by ear or by rote, rather than by reading music, quickly becomes an important trope of his autobiography; perhaps no other white jazz autobiographer displays more overt pride in the folk origins of his music learning, or more delight in shunning the path of formal education of any kind, including music.⁶⁸

Condon’s first instrument was the ukulele, which he learned to play without difficulty, since “all my life I had heard chords and I could play them on the piano” (57).

⁶⁸ Condon explains that one of his sisters played the piano “by ear,” while two others, “Helena and Grace didn’t get along with their teachers; they ragged the scales they were supposed to learn and played notes that weren’t in the score” (57).

Notably, his lifelong inclination to accompany, rather than to be a soloist, seems to have emerged early: “With Pa on the fiddle, Cliff on the alto horn, and one of the girls at the piano it was easy for me to sneak in and play the rhythm; with all that noise nobody knew I was there” (57). When Condon was in high school, his brother came home with records by blues singer Mamie Smith and Her Jass Hounds. “I had never heard anything like the music that was on them,” Condon remembers. “Jim got some more records and we played them over and over” (58). The recordings were a mixture of “blues and popular tunes” by both African American and white bands, and Eddie’s sister was sufficiently inspired that she “signed up for a course in ragtime in Chicago; after the second lesson her teacher asked her not to come back; he told her she was far ahead of him” (59). His sister continued to learn, Condon notes, by “picking tricks off the new records, adding them to the technique she had developed playing *That International Rag* and *Maple Leaf Rag*” (59).

In high school Condon played ukulele and then banjo in various small pick-up bands, playing popular tunes of the day; his account of this, his pre-jazz and early jazz learning experience, places considerable emphasis on its haphazard nature, stressing his own as well as his friends’ inexperience and lack of skill (61). Yet Condon had by then made up his mind “to be a musician,” and he confessed as much to his father, who replied, with a generous display of Condon humour, “there is nothing wrong with that, except that if you are a bad musician you may not be able to make a living and probably you will be hanged. You had better go down cellar and practice some more. Right now you are terrible and you can’t read music.” Eddie’s own response, “What’s that got to do

with being a musician?” returns the reader to the trope of the reading versus non-reading musician, with Condon’s obvious prejudice for the latter (62).⁶⁹

In fact, according to Condon, his inability to read music led directly to his job in 1922, when he was just sixteen, with Peavey’s Jazz Bandits, a small band from Iowa. “My handicaps were just what [Peavey] wanted,” Condon explains; as Peavey told him, “There is no use trying to convert the older musicians to jazz. . . . Since you can’t read music you have nothing to unlearn” (70). Peavey and his wife, a pianist whom Condon describes as “a fine musician,” were particularly attracted to the improvisational nature of the blues and early jazz, and Condon notes that while Peavey’s wife

spent a lot of time teaching me chords and modulations; Peavey instructed me in the afterbeat and the structure of the blues. Together we listened to records by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; day after day we practiced jazz tunes—*Panama*, *Clarinet Marmalade*, *Jazz Me Blues*, *Tiger Rag*, *Livery Stable Blues*, *Sensation Rag*, *Skeleton Jangle*, *Royal Garden Blues*, *Eccentric Rag*, *Muskrat Ramble*, *Satanic Blues*. (71)⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In another exchange, an unnamed relative asks about Condon, “How can he be a professional musician when he can’t read music?” to which another replies, “He doesn’t have to read music; he can play it” (65). In still another, Condon learns from his father that his brother has arranged a job “in an orchestra” for him in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; when Condon confesses his anxiety because “I can’t read music,” his father replies, “You don’t have to read music; they just want you to play the banjo” (66).

⁷⁰ Condon conveys his own attraction to the improvisational aspect of jazz with his account of hearing Tony’s Iowans, a band who played on the J. S. Strefus Lines: “This is it, I thought—you know what the melody is, but you don’t hear it. The cornet and the clarinet, and sometimes the trombone, treat it like a girl. They hang around it, doing handsprings and all sorts of other tricks, always keeping an eye on it and trying to make an impression. The rhythm section provides transportation, everything floats on its beat.

Condon's comments about reading versus improvising musicians suggest that, at least to some degree, he believed that the skills were mutually exclusive; he explains, for example, that Peavey's Jazz Band truly "were a jazz band," unlike those "musicians in the country through which we were traveling, [who] were not jazz players; they read music. We operated as a group mind, improvising together on a selected theme or melody" (91).⁷¹ When he was in his early twenties, Condon finally did learn to read music (148).

For Chicago native Bud Freeman, "a few lessons on the C-melody sax from Jimmy McPartland's father" was the extent of his formal music training when he was young (8). "I didn't like them because I wanted to play my own way, to play the rhythm that was in me," Freeman explains, echoing the view of many of these white players that formal, written music inhibited their ability to express their individuality as musicians. "I wanted to express my love for King Oliver's and Louis's playing, but Jimmy's father was teaching me chromatic, major, and minor scales. Even with those lessons I didn't really learn to read music until I got a tenor sax, two years later in 1925" (8).⁷²

Pianist Don Asher, born two decades after Freeman, expresses a similar sentiment in his description of his early music training as a serious student of the Western classical

This was what [Peavey's Jazz Bandits had] been trying to play all summer. This is jazz" (79).

⁷¹ Condon's praise for the self-taught, non-reading musician is also evident in his description of Bix Beiderbecke, about whom he writes, "He played it all wrong, so the experts said—he taught himself, and he couldn't read music—but it came out right" (115).

⁷² The consequence of his lack of formal training, Freeman admits, was that he was "slower at learning my instrument than the others were at theirs. They had all had musical training. . . . Jimmy had said that [Frank] Tesch[emacher] wanted to throw me out of our band because all I could do for a long time was play one note" (8–9).

music tradition. Even as he practiced piano for hours a day, Asher writes that he “couldn’t rid my mind of the idea that I was playing long-dead composers or that the notes were fixed indelibly on the pages, not to be tampered with . . . And something else was in the air and on the airwaves, something livelier, more flexible, exuberant, slapping a grin on my face and luring me down vibrant alleys. Benny Goodman, Earl Hines, Jimmie Lunceford, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, Woody Herman, the King Cole Trio” (Asher xi).

In his account of his early learning experiences, swing bandleader Charlie Barnet also emphasizes his strong impulse to play by ear, and like Bud Freeman, he gradually became aware that his aversion to reading formal music notation was detrimental in certain situations. Barnet received his first music training at school, where he studied piano and played saxophone in the band; in addition, he “took some lessons from Harry Voltaire of the Six Brown Brothers, a popular vaudeville act” (5). During one lesson with Voltaire, Barnet played a song that he had quickly taught himself on the C-melody saxophone after hearing it at a show “the previous night,” which prompted a warning from his teacher: “He was afraid that if I played by ear like that,” Barnet writes, “I wouldn’t bother about learning to read music, although I knew all the notes and their values” (5). Barnet admits that Voltaire “was right, because it was a long time before I learned to read properly” (6).

When he was a teenager Barnet played with Frank Winegar and His Pennsylvanians, a mediocre band, by Barnet’s description, that relied on “stock orchestrations” of three-part harmony (15). While he waited for the other musicians to learn their parts, Barnet quickly made up his own, instead of learning the part he had been

given. “It was easy with only three-part harmony, so I soon had the whole book memorized and had no need to take out the parts, although I did so to make it look good” (15). Barnet’s guise was eventually discovered, and he was briefly fired but then rehired “with the understanding that I would stick to the written notes. I did that, but I still think the parts I made up were better than those in the stocks” (15). Although Barnet, after this experience, finally learned to read with greater precision, he admitted to the musician who had been assigned to tutor him in this task “that it was easier and more fun making up my own parts” (16). Barnet seems to have remained at best lukewarm in his attitude toward formal notation, readily acknowledging that it was not his strongest skill.⁷³

“Mine was such a privileged childhood, with so many nice things about it,” Bob Wilber writes in the opening pages of *Music was not Enough*, one of the more remarkable accounts of a white musician’s experience in jazz. Wilber was born in 1928 in Greenwich Village into upper-middle-class prosperity; his father was “a partner in the publishing firm of F. S. Crofts, a small company specializing in college textbooks” (3). Their next-door neighbour was John Hammond, who was already a college graduate when Wilber was born; about this coincidence, Wilber writes, “I have often wondered if the first jazz I ever heard was from John’s phonograph next door as I lay in my crib” (4).

⁷³ “I don’t think I *ever* became a good reader,” Barnet admits, “but I got so I could read satisfactorily, without being one of those guys who could sightread the music right down. I did get to the point where I could write arrangements, but when I became a leader I wasn’t called upon to read so much. It was then more or less a matter of steering the ship, and when I came in to play eight bars or so here and there, they were usually of the jazz variety that didn’t require any reading” (Barnet with Dance 16, emphasis in original).

Wilber's stepmother's father was treasurer and vice-president of US Steel, and his early memories of visits with her parents include a "very Victorian" lifestyle of house servants, "household schedules and social arrangements. . . . They didn't have cocktails and wines because that wasn't part of their life style, but after the main course at dinner finger bowls would always be brought out into which we dipped our fingers before drying them off on our linen napkins" (6). As a young child, Wilber was fascinated by the family's black butler and chauffeur, Madison, who was "a great fan of Bill Robinson"; Wilber recalls pestering him, asking him to "[t]each me how to tap dance, Madison" (6).

In 1931 the family moved to New York's Gramercy Park, but a couple of years later to Scarsdale, "a community of wealth and privilege, of country clubs and gracious socializing, an Ivy League enclave" (4). Wilber describes his father as "a fairly proficient [ragtime] pianist" who also loved "Broadway musical theater," and whose love of music

was transmitted to me each evening when he used to play the piano after a hard day's work. I can see him now, his hands flying over the keyboard, and my mother tapping her feet or dancing round the room. The first jazz record I can remember hearing was Duke Ellington's Victor recording of *Mood Indigo*, which Dad had purchased shortly after its release. As the record was issued early in 1931, that would put my age at only three, yet I can still remember as if it were yesterday: the mysterious sound of the high muted trumpet and trombone, the mournful low-register clarinet and the solemn, steady 'plonk, plonk, plonk,' of the banjo. (Wilber 5)

Wilber's privileged childhood gave him access to a wide variety of music; at his elementary school there was a "music appreciation group on Friday afternoons," in which the students listened to "a radio show for children hosted by Walter Damrosch" who "played excerpts from the classics and explained them to his young audience in a patient, gentle way" (6). Wilber's primary interest, however, was the swing music that was all the rage at the time, and he began his career as an instrumentalist by playing along with records on tin flute. By the time he reached junior high school he had switched to clarinet and had also learned "to play a little boogie-woogie on the piano" (7). Although Wilber began by listening to the white big bands of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Harry James, his friends introduced him to recordings of "the great black bands of the swing era, plus the music of New Orleans, Kansas City and Chicago. . . . The more I listened," Wilber recalls, "the more excited I became. The music seemed to contain something that was flesh and blood and reality" (8).

Perhaps most striking in Wilber's account is his skill in portraying the symbiotic relationship between the worlds of Scarsdale affluence and New York's black jazz community. Wilber describes, for example, how his father's fascination with the music of pianist Teddy Wilson led him to take his family to see Wilson and his "marvelous" band at Café Society Uptown in 1941. "Little did I know," Wilber remarks, "I would have the opportunity to play with all those wonderful musicians one day!" (8). The family also attended Ellington's premiere performance of *Black, Brown and Beige* at Carnegie Hall in 1943, "a black-tie affair with the proceeds going to the Russian War Relief Fund" (10). He adds that his grandmother, who "had been a church organist all her life," turned to him

as trombonist Tricky Sam Nanton performed one of his renowned “plunger solos” and exclaimed with delight, “‘He’s trying to tell us something.’ Clearly the message of this music had even reached her!” (10).

But the relationship between New York’s black jazz community and their suburban admirers became significantly more personal when Wilber’s “school chum . . . somehow got his parents to arrange for Willie [“The Lion” Smith] to come out to Scarsdale every Sunday afternoon to give him lessons” (9). When the lesson was over, the family and their friends “would gather in the living room with a round of drinks and Willie would entertain them. He loved to perform and could mesmerize any audience” (9). According to Wilber, he and his friends found out about the weekly gathering and insisted on being included. “We couldn’t pass up a chance to play with the great Willie Smith and be coached by him—‘the Lion’ was our professor!” Wilber comments, thus marking this experience as an important part of his early jazz education (9).⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the interracial cultural exchange that Wilber’s family permitted had its clear and definable boundaries, for even as they displayed a genuine engagement with American popular music—including the music of African American musicians Duke Ellington, Willie “the Lion” Smith, and Sidney Bechet—they made clear their expectations that their son would “follow the normal path of the typical young person from Scarsdale—Ivy League college, law or medical school, and so on” (13). Yet not only did Wilber reject the Ivy League route that his parents had planned for him, he lasted

⁷⁴ Wilber adds that he made arrangements for “the Lion” to come to his own family’s house, with his father purchasing the “cigars, brandy and milk” that their guest preferred, but “at the last minute Willie had to cancel and never did get out to our house” (9).

“only one term” at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, where he had agreed to go as a compromise, finding it “cold and inhospitable, and worse still, there was no jazz” (13). He returned to Scarsdale and picked up where he had left off with his jazz-loving friends, including pianist Dick Wellstood, whom he describes as “very much of a rebel,” and who would host parties at his mother’s suburban house in Greenwich, Connecticut with jam sessions “that sounded like an African tribal orgy. It was really wild, with people passing out on the lawn. The terrible din would continue until the neighbors called the police” (14). As for his own attitude in this period, Wilber writes, “I was concerned with only one thing—blowing my horn. . . . My hair was wild, sticking up all over the place; I never combed it—in fact I don’t think I even owned a comb. I was totally into playing, oblivious of everything around me except music. Our whole crowd was like that” (15).

In contrast to the autobiographers discussed above, John LaPorta began formal classical music lessons when he was young and continued them into adulthood, eventually becoming one of the few musicians of his generation to reach high levels of performance playing classical music as well as jazz.⁷⁵ In LaPorta’s words, “Making music with others became an essential part of life very early on for me” (10). He first studied

⁷⁵ LaPorta was born in 1920 into a hardworking Italian family in the predominantly working-class Polish neighborhood of northeast Philadelphia, where his father worked as a barber. At his father’s encouragement, when he was eight LaPorta began to play the clarinet; his father hired a baritone horn teacher who “conducted a German band but knew nothing about the clarinet” (3). As a result, although LaPorta learned to read music at a young age and to play with speed, he also developed embouchure and breath-control problems commonly experienced by self-taught or poorly taught musicians; years later he found an excellent clarinet teacher who helped him “dispose of my multitude of disastrous playing problems and introduced me to the world of musical expression” (7).

clarinet and then began to play the tenor saxophone, and when he was twelve he joined the Polish American String Band that competed in Philadelphia's annual New Year's Day parade. This experience opened the path to playing at "local functions with small groups," mainly at weddings and dances in the Polish community (4). LaPorta stresses the ear-training that this job gave him as invaluable preparation for improvisation as a jazz musician:

The band usually had three or four musicians often consisting of drums, accordion, clarinet and violin. I had to learn everything by ear. More often than not one or two of the musicians were from Poland. They played authentic polka and obereks by ear so I had no written music to go by. This was an invaluable experience and in many ways prepared me for making a relatively easy transition to improvising. (4)

LaPorta was a sophomore in high school in 1936 when he was selected for the American Youth Symphony Orchestra, founded and conducted by Leopold Stokowski and made up of "Philadelphia's select high school instrumentalists," many of whom, according to him, were playing at levels that rivaled those of a "major symphony orchestra" (7). At the same time, LaPorta played in his high school concert band and orchestra, experiences that led to playing opportunities for him in various kinds of rehearsal bands, "from full dance bands down to quartets" (10). By the time he was fourteen, he was regularly playing saxophone "in cafes and nightclubs," usually in a trio with piano and drums (10).

LaPorta's description of his early musical experiences thus demonstrate his willingness to explore a wide range of music from various traditions, including European orchestral and band music, traditional Polish folk music, and small group jazz combos. He stresses the importance of "live music" opportunities that were available to him as a developing musician. "This was fortunate for me since there were no Jazz schools available and no teachers with whom one could learn the idiom" (10). By his junior year in high school, he was "playing six nights a week at a cafe in northeast Philadelphia" (10); at that time he transferred from the traditional high school he was attending to Mastbaum Vocational School, where, in addition to playing in the orchestra and band, he studied "sight singing, ear training, harmony, and required academic courses" (11). Mastbaum gave LaPorta the opportunity to play, sometimes for more than eight hours a day, with other young musicians, many of whom "were to carve out notable careers in the field of music" as symphony players, arrangers, and jazz musicians (12–15).

In the opening pages of *Straight Life*, Art Pepper remarks on the musicality of his mother's family and his own early love of music, recalling that "when I passed a music store and saw the horns glittering in the window I'd want to go inside and touch them. It seemed unbelievable to me that anybody could actually play them. Finally I told my dad I just had to have a musical instrument" (10). In his description of his first music lessons—on clarinet—when he was nine, Pepper emphasizes his natural and seemingly effortless playing ability, as well as his inclination to play by ear. He writes that his teacher, Leroy Parry

was like another father to me and I used to love talking to him. That's what our lessons were. None of them had anything to do with technicalities on the learning of music. It was just talking, having somebody to talk to. And I never had to practice. Just before Mr. Parry came I'd get my clarinet out and run through the lesson from the previous week. He'd think I'd been practicing the whole time. When I did play I played songs. I played what I felt. I didn't want to read anything or play exercises. (11)

Sometime in the mid-1930s, Pepper's family moved to San Pedro, where his father, who was a longshoreman, would take him to the bars lining the waterfront, "sit me up on the bar, and make me take out my clarinet and play little songs like 'Nola' and 'Parade of the Wooden Soldiers' and 'I Can't Give You Anything but Love, 'The Music goes Round and Round,' 'Auld Lang Syne'" (11-12). Pepper would also play requests from the patrons—"real tough guys; they were my dad's friends," some of whom had missing fingers or limbs from workplace accidents (12). With this experience, Pepper learned that through music "I could get away from that and be respectable and not have to get dirty and get hurt and work myself to death. . . I always felt scared before I played, but after I did it I was proud and my dad was proud of me" (12).

It is not until the latter part of *Straight Life* that Art Pepper turns to a discussion of the central musical influences in his life; notably, he mentions both white and black musicians. His first influence when he began to play the clarinet was Artie Shaw, whom he heard "on records and on the radio, and I thought he played beautifully, with a wonderful sound and a great technique" (372). In addition, Pepper avidly bought records

of his favorite bands and musicians, including Count Basie with Lester Young and Jimmie Lunceford with Joe Thomas on tenor, whom Pepper admired for his “full sound; he kind of moaned through his horn; he growled; he moved me.” In Pepper’s view, Lunceford’s “saxophone section was the best I’ve every [sic] heard, even up to now” (372).

Beyond the music itself, Pepper was struck by the glamour of the entertainment world, and by the women with whom the musicians associated. He was impressed by Artie Shaw’s good looks and by the fact that he had a “beautiful” wife, who was a “movie star” (372). “And I never doubted for a second,” Pepper adds, “that I could be as great as Artie Shaw” (372). One time when he was listening to the Lunceford band in person, “all of a sudden this beautiful black chick came up.” The “chick” was Dorothy Dandridge, and Pepper describes being dazzled by her furs and by the way “she stood there listening to the band and looking at Joe Thomas”; after the set, he remembers that “everybody fell all over her, and she went to Joe Thomas and started rapping with him. It was so glamorous. I loved not only the music, I loved the whole idea” (372).

Pepper’s compelling descriptions of his first forays into jazz illustrate his early awareness of the black roots of the music as well as his attempt to claim, by way of his exceptional musical ability, his own right to play. When he was a student at San Pedro High, Pepper played in a trio in which the guitarist “would strum the guitar” while explaining to him that “[t]hese are the chords to the blues, which all jazz emanates from.

This is black music, from Africa, from the slave ships that came to America” (40).⁷⁶ In a revealing question, Pepper asked the guitarist “if he thought that I might have the right to play jazz,” to which his friend replied, “You’re very fortunate. You have a gift” (40).

While in another context Pepper might simply have been soliciting his friend’s opinion regarding his musical ability, in the context of their discussion about the African origins of the blues Pepper’s exchange with his friend holds particular significance, granting him legitimacy and the right to cross the cultural divide separating blacks and whites. “I wanted to become the greatest player in the world,” Pepper adds in response to the guitarist’s encouragement. “I wanted to become a jazz musician” (40).

II. Descriptions of Jazz Learning

While many autobiographers in this study express their musical indebtedness—especially in their formative years—to particular white musicians or bands, they emphasize the transformative nature of their encounters with recorded music and live performances by black bands, as well as their one-on-one music lessons with African American teachers or participation in interracial jam sessions. According to Bud Freeman, his own exposure to black jazz came gradually; in his sophomore year at Austin High School in Chicago in 1922, he and his school friends spent long hours at “a soda parlor called the Spoon and

⁷⁶ At that time, Pepper explains, “I liked what I heard, but I didn’t know what the chords were. Chords are the foundation for all music, the foundation jazz players improvise on” (40). When he asked the guitarist for suggestions about ways to improve his ability to hear harmony, his friend replied, “‘Listen to the sounds I’m making on my guitar and play what you feel.’ He strummed the blues and I played things that felt nice and seemed to fit. We played and played, and slowly I began to play sounds that made sense and didn’t clash with what he was doing” (40).

Straw”. . . . It had a little wind-up Victrola and stacks of records and we would play them while we had our sodas and shakes” (Freeman as Told to Wolf 4). Freeman describes the youngster’s discovery of a record by the white band, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, as a cause for great excitement: “We were used to hearing commercial dance music, but this sound was something else” (4). The recording made such an impression, in fact, that the teenagers “decided that afternoon to become jazz musicians and form our own band”—this despite the fact that Freeman, who was sixteen, had never previously played an instrument or studied music (4).

For Freeman and the other young white Chicagoans, learning by listening to recordings formed a significant part of their jazz education. “I was so involved in listening to jazz that I can’t tell you what life was like in those days,” he writes. “We did not live as other people did. Music was twenty-four hours a day. When we weren’t performing we were listening” (17). Each “new Bix or Louis record” would be a cause for celebration, with the young players gathering at one of their homes, where over “wine and food” they would “discuss the record, but not as critics would. We talked about phrases. We would sing a phrase and play it over and over and over. We were learning, but we were learning through feeling. No one was invited who did not feel it. This is what we did for years on end (17). In a similar vein, Eddie Condon writes that in 1927, “at the apartment” he shared with Freeman and Frank Teschmaker, they and their friends “played records and analyzed them, drank Italian wine, talked music, and played it together. We

knew what we wanted to do and we tried to make sounds that represented it” (Condon with Sugrue 146).⁷⁷

There was perhaps no better opportunity for Freeman and the other Chicago players to learn from their idols than through close observation of them in live performance, and Freeman describes happily tagging along with his friends to hear the New Orleans Rhythm Kings at Chicago’s Friar Inn. Shortly thereafter the youngsters had their first opportunity to hear the black musicians from New Orleans, when a friend “took [them] out to the Lincoln Gardens to hear King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band” (Freeman as Told to Wolf 5–6). According to Freeman, “After that we never went back to the New Orleans Rhythms Kings because when we heard the King Oliver band, we knew that we were hearing the real thing for the first time” (6).⁷⁸

With a kind of religious fervour, the enthusiasm of the young white musicians for the jazz on Chicago’s South Side spread from player to player. When Eddie Condon moved to Chicago in 1924, he quickly befriended Freeman and Jimmy MacPartland, who took him to hear Oliver’s band with Armstrong, Johnny and Baby Dodds, and Lil Hardin,

⁷⁷ According to Burton Peretti, “In the late 1920s, when they were firmly decided on musical careers, Bud Freeman and other whites from this group did gain some formal training in performance and theory, but, significantly, their initial involvement in music was strongly autodidactic” (107). To the contrary, however, the accounts of the Chicago musicians emphasize the highly interactive nature of their learning experience, as they rehearsed, listened to recordings together, or regularly attended live performances in groups.

⁷⁸ As Freeman recalls, “Almost all of the white musicians who played this music listened to King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band. They learned to play their beat, which was also the beat of the great Harlem pianists Willie ‘The Lion’ Smith, James P. Johnson, Luckey Roberts, and Fats Waller. Willie called it ‘the beat of the heart,’ and many of the young white players learned to play it” (Freeman as Told to Wolf 6).

among others, at “a fraternity dance at the Chez Paree” (Condon with Sugrue 107).

Condon’s description of that experience in *We Called It Music*, like those of Freeman’s quoted above, establishes the significance of these white musicians’ encounters with the black jazz bands from New Orleans. For when Oliver and Armstrong began to play

It was hypnosis at first hearing. Everyone was playing what he wanted to play and it all mixed together as if someone had planned it with a set of micrometer calipers; notes I had never heard were peeling off the edges and dropping through the middle; there was a tone from the trumpets like warm rain on a cold day. Freeman and MacPartland and I were immobilized; the music poured into us like daylight running down a dark hole. . . . Armstrong seemed able to hear what Oliver was improvising and reproduce it himself at the same time. It seemed impossible, so I dismissed it; but it was true. (107–08)

In an oft-quoted passage, Freeman describes the pilgrimage of “[a]spirng white musicians” to the Lincoln Gardens, and the “wonderful” response they received from the “people there”:

They paid no attention to us; they knew we were there to hear the music. The big, black doorman weighed about 350 pounds, and every time he saw us he would say, “I see you boys are here for your music lessons tonight.” He knew. That was rather a sage thing for him to say because hardly any whites knew about this music. . . . The Lincoln Gardens was strictly a black club, but they didn’t keep us out. (6)

In *We Called It Music*, however, Eddie Condon offers a perhaps more candid view of this act of cultural crossing by these white youngsters, explaining that “older white kids” would sometimes be called upon to accompany “youngsters to the Lincoln Gardens,” because the cabaret “was by and for Negroes, and the white kids in short pants who were there—some of them on bicycles—to hear the music had good reason to feel slightly uncomfortable until they had pushed their way close to the bandstand and been recognized by Oliver” (111). Condon’s explanation exposes the inevitable tensions within these interracial encounters and demonstrates beyond doubt that in the South Side clubs and cafés, the black musicians and audiences held sway, and the white musicians waited to be granted access to their world. As Condon concludes, “A nod or a wave of [Oliver’s] hand was all that was necessary; then the customers knew that the kids were all right. Night after night we made the trip” (111).

Condon’s language suggests that at times he and the other white musicians had almost moved to the South Side. For example, in a passage in which he describes their avid interest in the black clarinetist, Jimmy Noone, Condon writes that they “went to the Nest” to hear Noone play “at least five times a week.” Noting that they “were the Nest’s best customers,” Condon adds, “We left our golf clubs there, our instruments, our galoshes” (Condon with Sugrue 132).⁷⁹ Bud Freeman explains that he “got to know Louis

⁷⁹ Yet, unlike Mezz Mezzrow, for example, Condon gives no indication in *We Called It Music* that he believes in the innate superiority of African American players. In fact, Condon tells a pointed anecdote about going to a speakeasy with the white pianist Joe Sullivan to hear a “young Negro” pianist whom John Hammond had recommended to them. Unimpressed by the pianist, Condon and Red McKenzie order Sullivan to “go over

[Armstrong] in 1925,” when the trumpeter was “playing at the Sunset Cafe [as] soloist with the Carroll Dickerson band” (13), and that after that he and the other Chicago musicians “used to go” to hear Armstrong “once, twice, even three times a week” (13). Significantly, he adds that “[m]ost of the patrons were black. . . . Most people went there for the booze or a woman; we went there for the music” (13).⁸⁰ Later Freeman adds, “I don’t think there will ever again be anything in the world like the Sunset. Things just happened spontaneously there, and you never knew what was going to happen next. It gave me the best musical education I ever had” (14).

As these anecdotes reveal, the engagement of these white musicians with the black music on Chicago’s South Side was inextricably linked to their attitudes about race, specifically to their flouting of racial codes of behaviour that governed the daily interaction of blacks and whites in Chicago.⁸¹ Freeman refers to the inherent racism that encouraged white people to believe “that blacks were inferior to us” and attributes his own lack of racist attitudes to his father, who “didn’t have any prejudice” (7).⁸²

and straighten him out! Joe went to the piano,” Condon recalls. “In ten minutes the place was rocking and the customers were stamping and whistling” (223).

⁸⁰ See also Art Hodes’s assertion, quoted later in this chapter (page 64), that he traveled to the South Side for the music, not for the women; this repeated refrain from white jazz autobiographers suggests their awareness of the inherent sexual tensions within these interracial encounters.

⁸¹ Burton W. Peretti argues that the white musicians who came of age in Chicago during the 1920s differed “from the other white visitors to the ghetto” in that “no other identifiable group of white Americans of this era approached black culture with such openness and repaid it with comparable gratitude, praise, and emulation” (88).

⁸² It is notable that in Bud Freeman’s explanation of his decision to forge a career as a jazz musician, he reveals essentialist views about African Americans apparent in the autobiographies of other white musicians, such as Mezz Mezzrow and Artie Shaw. “It was not just their music that moved me,” he insists, “but the whole picture of an

Freeman's initial interest in jazz led him to explore black churches, where he discovered "the most wonderful beat in music, the most inspired jazz I've ever heard" (17–18).⁸³

The jazz education of Art Hodes, another Chicago jazz musician who came to maturity during the 1920s, may be summarized as his resolve, quoted earlier, to learn "the style, the idiom, which the blacks had and I didn't" (Hodes and Hansen 16). Hodes's account combines the various aspects of the learning experience outlined above—listening to recordings, attending live performances, and rehearsing with other musicians—as well as daily activities such as walking and singing; in its totality, the experience he conveys is one of complete immersion in New Orleans music and the wider culture from which it sprang. Although Hodes was influenced both by black and white players, Wingy Manone—the white player with whom he associated most closely—was inspired foremost by Armstrong and other black sources.⁸⁴

oppressed people who appeared to be much happier than we whites who had everything. It was on the strength of this that I developed a love for them and their music and became a jazz musician" (Freeman as Told to Wolf 7). For further analysis of this tendency, see Peretti, 189.

⁸³ Later, Freeman notes the range of his music influences; while Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong made "probably the biggest" impression, he also names "King Oliver, Earl Hines, Dave Tough, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, James P. Johnson, and Willie "The Lion" Smith." In addition, the "modern French composers" influenced his harmonic conception, and "[b]lack church singing and black tap dancing left "powerful impressions" on him. So wide-ranging were these various musical influences that Freeman had no fear that his own style would "become old-fashioned and belong to a particular era" (26). By 1927, he adds, he "had absorbed all of these influences except the Harlem pianists. I had come into my own voice. Of course, in 1927 I knew nothing about melodic line; it takes a lifetime to learn how to play a melody. It takes musical validity. . . . My style was just the result of so much listening" (26–27).

⁸⁴ Hodes cites the influence of many other white jazz musicians living and playing in Chicago in the 1920s—including Max Kaminsky, Gene Krupa, and Frank Teschemacher,

With considerable narrative skill, Hodes draws a rich and detailed portrait of the musicians and musical styles that helped to shape his own emerging musical persona. He names Lil Armstrong as an important early influence, citing her piano style on Armstrong's recordings with the Hot Fives, on which—because there was no drummer—“Miss Lil had to play a lot of left-hand chords, ‘solid’ piano, instead of spreading out. Without thinking about this at the time I started pounding out chords” (17). In his chapter, “Learning Jazz: The South Side,” Hodes recounts that following a job at a summer resort on Delavan Lake, he returned to Chicago and “had my first encounter in person with the great Negro musicians,” including Armstrong, Earl Hines, and Zutty Singleton (20). In this same period he also befriended Manone, and according to Hodes, “[i]n a short time we were roommates, then buddies, the best and closest of friends” (20). He and Manone moved to the North Side, “around some kids from New Orleans that Wingy knew,” and Hodes quickly fell under the spell of New Orleans music and culture. (21). “Anybody from New Orleans had a beat, could feel the music” (21). Trumpeter Manone was obsessed with the music of Louis Armstrong; he “owned a victrola and a half-dozen records, all by Louis, which he played and replayed” (21):

[Wingy] had a beat you couldn't get away from. If we had two blocks to walk, we'd walk it in time. Wingy would sing some song as we walked along and we'd both swing along in time. Those couple of years I lived with Wingy, we lived with a beat. Our mistress was music; we worshipped

among others—all of whom were traveling to the South Side to hear African American musicians.

her as a god. From the morning when we'd start in on the vic till late at night when we were exhausted and had to go to sleep, we had but one desire—to play, to play better this minute than we had the last, or to hear something played that would knock us out. I'd wake up with Louis's 'Muskrat Ramble' on the vic, and immediately I was back in time, walking to the music, dressing to it, and being walked out of the house. (21)

Hodes's description of hearing Armstrong at the Savoy Ballroom on the South Side illustrates the degree of respect—even reverence—that he and other young white musicians held for him:

The joint was always packed and it would take us minutes to get to the back where the bandstand was. But Louis would see us at once, and his face would light up and we'd feel warm inside. And right after the set we'd go back with the band into the band room. We hung out there like groupies. . . . And then we'd wait for the band to begin playing again, and for it to be Louis's turn to play. Man, the guy could really blow then. How we wanted to be in the same league. Not the formula, just the feeling.

(22)⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Armstrong's influence was remarkably wide in its reach; Charlie Barnet, for example, who was clearly associated with swing music rather than with the earlier jazz of New Orleans or Chicago, nonetheless describes the experience of hearing Louis Armstrong for the first time when he was in Los Angeles as a young man as "the most exciting thing that ever happened to me musically. I had never imagined trumpet playing like that. By then, I had heard some of the Okeh records with Earl Hines, but the impact of Louis in person was just tremendous" (Barnet with Dance 14).

But Hodes writes that his “real jazz education started” when Armstrong took him and Manone “to a barbecue place on State Street near 48th where the primitives, the pianists that came up from the South, hung out. . . . That place and its people taught me about the blues” (22). It was at this barbecue joint that Hodes heard a pianist whom he refers to only as Jackson, whose playing made an enormous impact on him: “I can’t begin to tell you what that sound did to me. This was the first time I had heard the blues really being played” (23). Jackson had been hospitalized with a broken leg, Hodes explains, and had experienced the blues while lying there and “thinking about that wife of his who’d left him. . . . When he sat down at the piano those notes would tell all that” (23). Gradually, though, Jackson began to play popular tunes and stopped playing the blues. “Well, I played popular music better than he did, so I would ask him to play the blues. Finally he said to me, ‘Man, what you always asking me to play the blues; you know, I ain’t got the blues.’” According to Hodes, “That’s how I learned the blues was more than music” (23).

In *Those Swinging Years*, bandleader Charlie Barnet states that from the early 1930s he was a regular in Harlem, where he listened to the best black bands of the day, including those of Benny Carter, Rex Stewart, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway. He was only a teenager, yet the evidence of his careful listening to black bands was already apparent, especially in his quick grasp of the concept of improvisation. When he got a job on “the SS *Pennland* of the Red Star Line,” he explains, he was already “beginning to do a little improvising, and when I was with Frank [Winegar] I’d had the occasional tenor solo. Since we ended up in Harlem all the time, I had been indoctrinated and knew that

this was what I wanted to do” (18–19). As Barnet developed as an instrumentalist, arranger, and bandleader, he continued to look to the black jazz tradition for his central influences. Barnet notes that he played tenor saxophone in his early professional career in a style “greatly influenced by Coleman Hawkins, my idol” (55–56); later he took up the alto sax, noting that “Johnny Hodges was my idol, and I guess I borrowed a lot of things from him” (80). And by mid-1930s, Barnet had defined his musical aims for his own swing band: “I now wanted to incorporate Duke Ellington’s harmonic approach and tone colors with Count Basie’s rhythmic drive” (77).

For Art Pepper, the most important aspect of his development as a jazz musician was his unwavering determination to let his own voice emerge, rather than simply to copy another musician’s style. Occasionally he would buy books of transcriptions of various players—“*Solos by so-and-so*, taken off the records”—but soon he discovered that playing a solo note-for-note from a transcription was a meaningless exercise for him, for the influence operated at a more sub-conscious level (373). At times he experienced some feelings of self-doubt about his approach, especially when at jam sessions he would detect particular influences in other horn players, but by the time he began playing with Stan Kenton, people had started praising him for the individuality of his approach and concept; this gave him the confidence to believe that he “wasn’t wrong after all” (373).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Yet perhaps paradoxically, Pepper describes his tenure with Kenton as a musical turning point for him, for the complexity of Kenton’s music forced him to acquire formal theoretical knowledge. As he explains, “while it had been possible to play solos by ear with Benny [Carter], with Stan things were different. He had a syncopated style, very original; things were built on an eighth note, three quarter notes, and another eighth note. It wasn’t easy to hear when you played a solo, and it got increasingly difficult” (50).

Then Pepper was drafted, and when he returned to the jazz scene three years later, the swing-influenced style he had been playing had been swept aside by the new idiom of bebop. In response to these changes, he decided that the “only thing I could do was just practice and play and play and develop my own thing,” but he was determined to do so without simply being a Charlie Parker imitator, like so many of the players he saw around him who would “copy these things off the record and practice by the hour Bird’s solos and his licks” (374). In Pepper’s view,

Everybody sounded like him with the same ugly sound. Guys I’d heard before who had had beautiful tones now, all of a sudden had ugly tones like Bird. Out of tune. Squalling. Squawking. I didn’t want to play that way at all, but I realized that I had to upgrade my playing and I had to really learn chords and scales. So I didn’t copy anyone. I didn’t practice much, but I went out and blew and blew and blew. Then I rejoined Kenton, and I sounded only like me. (374–75)

Pepper admits that later in his career he almost lost his sense of individuality as a player through his infatuation with John Coltrane: “He’s the only guy I ever heard in my life that I said, ‘I’d give my right arm to play like that’” (375). For several years he focused on tenor, but in the end he realized that “Trane was so strong he’d almost destroyed me. . . . But since the day I picked up the alto again I’ve realized that if you

Pepper hit a wall when he attempted a solo on “Harlem Folk Dance,” on the band’s first recording for Capitol Records. “That when I realized I *had* to learn something about chord structure and the theory of music” (50, emphasis in original). Pepper sought help from other musicians in the band, and he “gradually learned to read the chords” (50).

don't play *yourself* you're nothing. And since that day I've been playing what I felt, . . . regardless of what those around me were playing or how they thought I should sound" (375–76, emphasis in original).

As the above quotes illustrate, Pepper seems intent on representing the process by which he learned jazz as instinctive and emotive, rather than intellectual or methodical. But what exactly is Pepper meaning to convey, one might ask, when he stresses imagery involving activity rather than intellect or thought to describe the process of learning to play bebop, a style recognized for its rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic intricacy? Does he perhaps fear that talking or writing about specific theoretical approaches to playing jazz might reduce something that holds such emotional significance for him?

And yet Pepper's frequent use of the word "practice" suggests a self-conscious application of principles by which he learned to play with greater skill and control. He suggests, for example, that it was not until 1953, when he was sentenced to two years at the US Public Health Service Hospital at Fort Worth, Texas for heroin possession, that his real education as a jazz saxophonist began. He was appointed "head of the music department," and, in addition to doing some teaching, he would "close the door in this little room and just sit there and practice. I did that every day, and it was the first time I'd ever practiced, and I really got down with music" (146). Although Pepper himself is never specific about what exactly he was practicing, an interview in *Straight Life* with Steve Kravitz, who studied with Pepper in 1960, offers important clues about the methods that guided Pepper as a teacher, and likely formed an important part of his own learning experience. According to Kravitz, who describes Pepper as a meticulous and thoughtful

teacher, Pepper would write “out all his lessons. They’re beautiful. He’d write out an exercise and a duet and a jazz etude, and for my assignment I had to write an exercise and a duet” (222).⁸⁷

It is possible that for Pepper, then, the ineffable or intangible aspects of jazz improvisation—and of creativity in general—were what mattered most to him, and that descriptions of the technical work that enabled such creativity were of secondary interest. As we will see in a later section, Pepper’s descriptions of his experiences in interracial playing situations, or of hearing a black fellow inmate sing, are notably rich in emotion and feeling, rather than in elaborate technical discussion of the music itself. Perhaps what he is getting at, then, when he claims that he “never studied, never practiced. I’m one of those people, I knew it was there. All I had to do was reach for it, just do it,” is comparable to what Art Hodes intended through his remark that “the blues was more than music” (Pepper 475; Hodes and Hansen 23). For both Pepper and Hodes, the experience of learning to play jazz was as much about *living* the music as it was about playing scales and exercises and learning to read music.

⁸⁷ Later, Kravitz expands on Pepper’s teaching method: “I had been told to write an exercise out. He’d said, ‘It’s an exercise so make it difficult, something that will make you work.’ I wrote this incredible, unmusical, impossible exercise. You know, leaps from the top of the horn to the bottom, silly rhythms. . . . He tried it and he couldn’t play it. Nobody could have played it. And he said, ‘Well, you’ll never have to play anything this hard.’ He wrote out some more etudes and another duet, and we worked them out” (223).

III. Private Studies with African American Teachers

There is perhaps no better illustration of the white jazz autobiographers' willingness to cross cultural boundaries in order to learn jazz than in their descriptions of personal relationships with African American musicians who have served, at different times and in various capacities, as their teachers, mentors, and models. In Don Asher's *Notes from a Battered Grand*, Asher introduces his account of his lifelong relationship with pianist Jackie Byard with a remarkable description of hearing Byard for the first time, when Asher was fourteen and Byard a high school senior, in an "unassuming establishment" in downtown Worcester called Dominic's Café.⁸⁸ "And what poured out that door was as wide and surging as a swollen river," Asher writes. "A skinny white drummer and the colored piano player Duke had spoken of: a big heavy-shouldered fellow in a blue shirt and brown pants. His eyes seemed remote, inwardly focused as he played, and his smooth, plump, sweating face glistened with ardor and tension" (7). Asher recalls being held captive by Byard's "sound," a sound that stirred in him images of an exotic and intensely desirable black world:

But the sound . . . it was jubilant, cocky, it leaped and shouted. I can't say how long I stood in the doorway more inside than out, oblivious to the shadowy, questioning faces, washed by echoes of all the music I had ever heard or read about—the Harlem house-rent parties . . . , the strut of southland cakewalks and brass band parades, and endless, linked choruses

⁸⁸ Asher's desire to hear Byard was whetted by Asher's sixteen-year-old neighbour, an aspiring drummer, who told him: "There's a piano player in the joint across the street you won't believe, sounds almost like Tatum. Colored guy" (Asher 6).

of pile-driving boogie-woogie that went lickety-split like a night train slamming across prairie tracks. Heads were snapping and fingers popping on the little patch of dance floor, the piano player's galloping stride springing off walls and bodies and needing no support, drums merely aboard for the ride. . . . The little room seemed ready to explode, hardly able to contain the cadences pouring out the doorway and into the street, engulfing me in waves of vibration that set my scalp tingling and tripped a wild, grainy current down my backbone. (7)

Asher approached Byard after the set, "homing in on the blue shirt and sweating dark face, as single-minded and needful as a hungry pup sniffing a backyard barbecue" and arranged to take lessons with him (7-8). He spent long hours at Byard's house every Friday, arriving in the early afternoon after school, "and when I left the shadows were lengthening" (10). Byard charged him seventy-five cents for a lesson, unless Asher stayed for a particularly long time, in which case "I guiltily gave him a dollar, which was my entire weekly allowance, and for that he was grateful" (10). Sometimes they would go to play at the nearby Saxtrum Club, a hangout for local musicians as well as for "road bands coming through, both black and white" (10). Prominent musicians, among them Roy Eldridge, Anita O'Day, and Frank Sinatra, would drop by, and even though Byard was only eighteen, he was, according to Asher, "the club's resident luminary and official host," known throughout the neighborhood for his all-night practice sessions that featured "scales and exercises, parallel and contrary motion, . . . random excursions and improvisations mingling with snatches of Chopin and Bach" on the club's "ancient

upright” (10). Asher and other neighborhood kids would gather outside the club’s locked door to listen, and Byard, aware that he had an audience, would “slide into some whooping way-back whorehouse piano, a big, pumping, joyous sound, and in our imaginations it was like being present at a spectacular parade, hearing a whole history of the music from the New Orleans cribs and levees on up the river” (10–11).

Notably, Asher says little about Byard’s precise teaching methods; rather, his concern is to convey the impact of Byard’s playing on him and his awareness of the deep cultural and social divide that these lessons allowed him to cross. With his characteristic humour, he describes the consternation of his classical piano teacher at observing the changes in his playing. Even though he did not tell her that he was also studying with Byard, “she had detected something coarse and alien infiltrating the texture of my playing, and she was puzzled. ‘Your legato lines are losing definition and clarity, Donald, and I can’t seem to put my finger on the difficulty’” (11). When Asher finally told her that he was studying with Byard and would no longer be coming for lessons, she was, in his words, “devastated. . . . She phoned my mother to express her dismay, sorrow, and sympathy, and my distraught tearful mom all but said Kaddish over my watery grave” (11).

Asher spent only about a year studying with Byard, who moved to Boston “and more challenging vistas,” yet in that time Asher was convinced that “the legacy had been passed on; his imprint was on me, at least a shallow facsimile of it. My repertoire had expanded to the point where I could get through an entire night without repeating tunes, and I was beginning, in a small white way, to swing” (47). Although Asher chooses an

image of “whiteness” to highlight the impact of Byard’s teaching on him, he might just as easily have said that he was starting to sound “black.” In fact, in his next reference to Byard, as he recounts one of his early jobs at a joint “on Route 9 between Worcester and Boston,” Asher notes that “[a] fresh, rhythmic pulse (the Negro players called it ‘snap’ or ‘dip’) was beginning to infiltrate my playing, a resonance from the year with Jackie Byard and from listening to [Byard’s friend,] the Carousel tenor man. . .” (49–50).

Asher’s relationship with Jackie Byard, in fact, remains an important backdrop to his entire narrative, demonstrating his continuing dedication to jazz, as well as his link to the authentic, black jazz tradition. At various points in the text Asher refers to Byard in order to draw attention to their contrasting career paths—specifically, while Byard became an influential jazz pianist and educator, Asher was forced (in part, as he acknowledges, by his own limitations as a jazz pianist) to put together a more modest career that combined jazz gigs with steady employment in society bands and as house pianist at lounges and clubs in San Francisco, most notably at the famed nightclub, the hungry i.⁸⁹

With a novelist’s attention to narrative form, Asher has Byard make an appearance at the book’s end, when Byard, who has come to San Francisco to play at “a prominent jazz room” in town, comes over for dinner (299). Noting Byard’s changed appearance—“He had lost a lot of weight and hair, and sported a trim gray beard flecked with white”—Asher has the wistful realization that “[i]t had been a good twenty-five

⁸⁹ In an earlier passage, Asher assesses his own career by comparison to that of Jackie Byard’s: “Jackie Byard and I were running roughly parallel courses—on strikingly different levels” (76).

years since he turned me upside down, slapped me on the butt, and pushed me howling into the world” (299).⁹⁰ And yet, although he clearly differentiates their accomplishments and talent, Asher seems most concerned with stressing his connection to Byard through the language of jazz. Following their meal, Byard sat down at the piano and “played some of his original compositions” for Asher, whose response reflects both the degree of his respect for his former teacher and also his desire to place himself within the elevated ranks of the jazz community to which Byard belongs:

It isn't often you get to hear a virtuoso of the first rank in your living room. I was awed. . . . A hard act to follow, as they say, but . . . I found the courage to sit down and play some of my things for him. Musicians are always striving to shine for one another, to attain esteem in the other's eyes; envy and admiration, competitiveness and support are complexly linked. . . . In our mutual respect the divisions between former teacher and pupil, between wizardry and mere proficiency, vanish. (300)

While Asher's portrait of Jaki Byard focuses primarily on their intense musical relationship, Bob Wilber describes his studies with Willie “the Lion” Smith and Sidney Bechet as experiences of deep cultural immersion, in which his social interactions with his teachers—eating soul food with “the Lion” and later living with Bechet and his mistress in Bechet's house in Brooklyn—were as significant as the music lessons

⁹⁰ Asher also notes that Byard had changed his name—from Jackie to Jaki—since their days in Worcester.

themselves. Wilber had moved to New York City from Scarsdale in the mid-1940s, where he shared a “tiny little cubicle” of an apartment at 112th and Broadway with two other musician friends, including pianist Dick Wellstood (Wilber and Webster 17). At a time when bebop had become the central and preferred language of expression within jazz, these young players from the Westchester area—some, including Wilber, still in their teens—were obsessed with keeping the old music alive.⁹¹ In 1945 Wilber joined forces with several of them to form the Wildcats, a group whose central influences were “the music of Morton, Armstrong and Oliver” but, as Wilber insists, “we didn’t want slavishly to copy the old records but rather to improvise freely in the context of the New Orleans idiom” (18).⁹²

“I was enjoying living in New York and was developing warm and rewarding friendships with many musicians,” writes Wilber, “most of whom were of an older generation, and many of whom were black” (20). Wilber describes going up to Willie “the Lion” Smith’s flat in Harlem “to study with him” in order to develop a better harmonic understanding of the tunes he was playing (20).⁹³ Wilber gives a specific account of Smith’s reharmonization of the Irving Berlin song, “A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody,” describing it as “so startling. It made you think that everything was going

⁹¹ According to Wilber, there were in that period “at least 30 to 40 other young musicians jamming around the Westchester area” (16).

⁹² The Wildcats got good write-ups and exposure in the *New Yorker*, and in Art Hodes’s magazine, the *Jazz Record*, and soon they were recording (18–19).

⁹³ See also Chapter 3 for Artie Shaw’s account of himself as an eager young white musician seeking (and finding) a mentor in Willie “the Lion” Smith. Gunther Schuller names Smith, along with Luckey Roberts, James P. Johnson, and Eubie Blake, as being “in the vanguard of the Eastern jazz movement by virtue of their harmonic sophistication and increased technical virtuosity” (Schuller 255).

haywire, but next moment your [sic] realized that he had done it on purpose” (20). Wilber adds that Smith would “sometimes reverse” the standard “oompah” pattern of “note, chord, note, chord. . . . It would sound as if he had lost the beat, but again it was something he did purposefully” (20).

According to Wilber, “Willie was a great friend and a marvelous teacher.” When the lesson was over, teacher and student would go to Father Divine’s in Harlem for some “wonderful soul food” (21). Because Wilber was not religious, he did not participate “in the ritual of holding hands and saying prayers” that was the requirement for obtaining a free meal, “but if you didn’t want to go through the prayer routine you sat at one of the tables along the side of the hall and paid 15 cents for a marvelous meal of collard greens, ham hocks and chitlins” (21).

In 1946, Wilber began to study with Sidney Bechet, who had recently opened “a school of music” out of his “old, ramshackle, three-story house” on Quincy Street in Brooklyn (23). With vivid detail, Wilber recounts his experience as Bechet’s “first and, for a while, his only pupil,” noting that Bechet had a keen interest in teaching and even “wanted to write a book on jazz improvisation because he felt that so many young musicians didn’t understand what it was all about” (23).⁹⁴ Wilber’s lessons with Bechet were, in his words, “everything I had hoped for,” for he found Bechet to be “a marvelous teacher and a wonderful man” (24). When Bechet discovered that Wilber was unemployed and “short of money,” he proposed that Wilber “move in with him at the

⁹⁴ Sidney Bechet, however, claims in his autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*, that he “had quite a few scholars, you know; they were all taking lessons. And that’s when I had Bob Wilber” (185).

house on Quincy Street” (24). Wilber reminds the reader of just how young (seventeen) and sheltered he was at that time with his comment that his “parents came down from Scarsdale to see Sidney at Ryan’s to satisfy themselves that I was in good hands,” and, although Wilber did not know it at the time, “they came to a financial arrangement with him. Such was my rebellious nature at that time, they were probably afraid that I would find out and fling the money back in their faces” (24). According to Wilber, the meeting went well, for Bechet “had a way of making meaningful contact and being at ease with all sorts of people from all walks of life and all stratas of society, many of whom might never have had much contact with a black man or a jazz musician” (24).

In the same passage, Wilber explains that he has included a reproduction of a letter that Bechet wrote to his father explaining his role as Wilber’s teacher in order to offer “the reader a feel for the gentle, kindly side to Sidney’s nature. . . . Although his lack of formal education is evident from spelling mistakes, his charm and dignity shine forth from the page” (24). Wilber pointedly adds that his father insisted that Bechet had written him another letter in which he stated, “I’ve taught Bobie everything I know and now he’s teaching me,” although, as he admits, they had “never been able to find it” (24).

As the above quotes suggest, an intense awareness of race underlies Wilber’s analysis of his parents’ negotiations with Bechet. In his view, his parents were “quickly persuaded” by Bechet’s suggestion that their son live and study with him because “[b]eing Christian and very liberal in their outlook, they saw nothing wrong with my being taken under the wing of this black man” (24). Noting that there was a historical precedent in the family for “this kind of understanding attitude,” Wilber recounts that his

great-grandmother, on behalf of the Ladies' Guild of Cincinnati, had put up Booker T. Washington in her home when he came to address the women's group and discovered that no "arrangements [had been made] for his accommodation. A hotel, of course, was out of the question" (24). In Wilber's telling, the family story becomes a source for outright boasting, with Wilber explaining that, during his visit, "Mr Washington" requested some writing facilities, as he had a deadline drawing near. He was provided with a writing desk in the comfort and privacy of the drawing room. It was not very long after this event that Washington's famous book *Up from Slavery* was published. The family always liked to think that some of its pages might have been written there in great-grandmother's drawing room. It was no different from the courteous way in which my own parents were now dealing with Sidney. (24–25)

These passages clearly reveal *something* about Wilber's own attitudes about race and how they were manifested in his relationship with Bechet, but what precisely? Wilber's portrait of this relationship emerges with greater clarity in his detailed and thoughtful analysis of Bechet's teaching method, which he introduces with an image of student and teacher sitting down at Bechet's "venerable old upright" piano "with his Brush Soundmirror tape recorder alongside"; according to Wilber, whenever they played something that Bechet considered worthy of discussion, he would "swing around and

switch the tape machine on to play back what we had been doing” (25).⁹⁵ Bechet began by teaching Wilber *Raggin’ the Scale*: “It was a way of practicing the scales and yet having fun with them” that involved “making logical variations and swinging. Always, he used to tell me, I should have the rhythm in my head and swing against it” (25). During the lessons, Bechet “would sit there on the piano stool tapping his foot in 4/4 time and making the ‘ting-tink-te-ting’ of the cymbal on his knee with his hand” (25).

Bechet also taught Wilber his approach to song interpretation, which began with “stating the melody and bringing out its beauty” before turning to “variations” that were at first closely related to the melody but that “gradually moved further away,” until they were “new melodies based on the harmony” (25). At the end of his performance, Bechet would restate the original melody “and often, a coda” (25). According to Wilber, Bechet’s approach was all about “telling a story. To tell a story, to grab the listener’s attention, to carry him away on a continuously rising curve of excitement to the inevitable triumphant conclusion, this was Bechet’s musical credo; it was a principle he fervently believed in and practiced every time he lifted his horn to play” (25).⁹⁶

Wilber’s precise explanation of Bechet’s approach to soloing offers an excellent illustration of the practice, planning, and organization that, in combination with

⁹⁵ Although Wilber is not precise here, one may deduce that both he and Bechet played clarinet during the lessons, since Wilber refers at one point to Bechet’s vibrato. Likely Bechet would turn to the piano to demonstrate a particular point of harmony.

⁹⁶ See Paul Berliner’s discussion of “storytelling,” in which he states, “For early jazz players like Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet, and for swing players like Lester Young, storytelling commonly involved such designs for multiple choruses as devoting an initial chorus to interpreting a piece’s melody, devoting the next to expressive liberties varying it, and then returning to the melody or proceeding on to other events such as single-note riffing patterns” (201–05).

inspiration and talent, jazz music requires of its practitioners. In many respects, Wilber and these other jazz autobiographers are simply attempting to explain the process of jazz-learning, especially of jazz soloing, that is at the heart of Berliner's study, although usually without the kind of technical specificity employed by the ethnomusicologist. For example, in addition to explaining Bechet's approach to elaborating on melody and harmony, Wilber also discusses his teacher's practice of playing "composed choruses on tunes," which he used "as the finale or climax to his interpretations." According to Wilber, "They were set things that he would lead up to with improvised choruses. He always had them ready when he was flying and needed something to top what he had already done." (26). Wilber contrasts Bechet's approach with that of "many musicians" who reach the "climax" of their improvisation only to find that "they have nowhere to go, nothing to top what they've already played. Sidney made a point of teaching me all his set choruses" (27).⁹⁷

In Wilber's view, Bechet displayed a harmonic sophistication well beyond "most players of his generation" (25); he notes, for example, that while Johnny Dodds and Jimmy Noone "never advanced beyond the use of dominant seventh chords," Bechet used "augmented, diminished, and ninth chords, and was perfectly at ease with the sophisticated harmonies of Gershwin, Kern, Porter and Ellington" (25–26). Furthermore, Wilber also received invaluable lessons in composition from Bechet, who was working

⁹⁷ Wilber notes that altoist Johnny Hodges, who had also studied with Bechet, had learned "the same chorus that Bechet had taught me" on *The Sheik of Araby*, and that Hodges played that chorus on Ellington's recording of the tune; Bechet, Wilber adds, also recorded the chorus (on tenor saxophone) on his "one-man-band recording on Victor" (27).

on *Voice of the Slaves* while Wilber was studying with him.⁹⁸ At the end of Wilber's daily lesson with Bechet, his teacher "would set up the tape recorder, sit down at the piano with me by his side, and work away on his 'big work,' all the while explaining to me what he was trying to achieve" (26). In an attempt "to approximate all the orchestral parts," Bechet and Wilber "would play piano four hands, with Sidney assigning me French horns, oboes, violins, or whatever." In a tone rich with nostalgia, Wilber remarks that "[n]othing brings back to me more vividly recollections of my teacher than listening to those tapes we made all those years ago" (26).

It is only after Wilber has offered this extensive and sometimes technical account of his experience as Bechet's student that he stops to consider the racial implications of their teacher-student relationship, but even then, his discussion is somewhat circumspect. In 1947, he explains, when Bechet got an offer for a recording date with Columbia Records, he suggested "that half should be with the Wildcats," the New Orleans revivalist band Wilber had formed with other young musicians from the New York area. "We were very excited, but nervous about the prospect of recording with the master," Wilber recalls, "and we rehearsed endlessly in the front parlor at Quincy Street. Musically we weren't in the same league as Bechet; he couldn't really fly in his customary fashion with our stiff rhythm section. Nevertheless, he enjoyed having these young admirers around him, and instead of dominating us all, he played a true ensemble role" (31).

⁹⁸ According to Wilber, "much of the material" from *Voice of the Slaves* was later incorporated by Bechet into "his ballet score *La nuit est une sorcière*," his "attempt to combine spirituals, blues, and ragtime with his own conception of classical music, which was mostly derived from 19th-century Romanticism" (26).

To this point, Wilber has focused on the disparity of age, experience, and talent that separated him and the other Wildcats from “the master” Bechet, but when he opens the door to consider the underlying racial dynamics of the situation, there is a dramatic shift of meaning and significance to their collaboration. In Wilber’s view, Bechet gave so much time and attention to the Wildcats because “[t]he musical ideals that he had stood for all his life were under attack and being ignored by young musicians of his race. Bop was all the rage, and Ryan’s was the only traditional-jazz spot left on 52nd Street. Sidney felt all this very acutely, and I think he believed that through this group of young, willing pupils he could perpetuate his musical message” (31).

Like many of the great New Orleans musicians, Bechet had experienced, with the rise of swing music in the 1930s and then bebop in the 1940s, the bewilderment and frustration of seeing the style of jazz he had mastered usurped and labeled as old-fashioned and irrelevant. By Wilber’s account, Bechet’s willingness to play and record with a group of white adolescents was because of their reverence for him and their devotion to the music he loved. In summarizing his relationship with Bechet, Wilber writes that

Sidney could be utterly unreasonable at times, but with me he was all gentleness and kindness, like a loving father. He was very flattered by my interest in him and my desire to play the clarinet and soprano in his style. I was his protégé and he was proud of me, but of course he never felt threatened by me musically, nor indeed should he have been; he was still at the height of his powers and I was just beginning. (33)

A fuller portrait of Wilber's own attitudes about race begins to emerge when, in a later passage, he pauses to consider Bechet's own racial self-representation, one that Wilber apparently finds peculiar. "Funnily enough," Wilber comments, "Sidney never thought of himself as a black man. He was a Creole, the product of the fusion, generations before, of French and negro blood. Creoles like Bechet and Jelly Roll did not see themselves as black, yet they were not accepted as white men" (48). His inability to be seen as he saw himself, Wilber suggests, led Bechet to make "strange statements" in which he expressed his animosity toward African Americans for behaving in ways that reflected badly on folks such as himself—or, as Wilber quotes Bechet, "Them Goddam niggers, doin' this and doin' that, and givin' us all a bad name" (48).⁹⁹

Yet Wilber also thinks of Bechet "as black"—he repeatedly refers to him as such; moreover, Wilber's anecdote about Booker T. Washington in the same passage in which he describes arrangements for his lessons with Bechet is clearly intended to display the tolerant attitude of his family toward African Americans. Significantly, then, Wilber's discussion shows him to be either unwilling or unable to consider the cultural distinctions illuminated by Bechet's attitudes about race (48). In fact, Bechet's insistence on distinguishing his own Creole heritage from that of the "Negro" culture of New Orleans—and his expressions of contempt for non-Creole blacks that accompanied this—

⁹⁹ Wilber describes his attempt to challenge Bechet for praising "the infamous southern racist senator, the notorious Senator Bilbo," an attempt that fell on deaf ears, with Bechet maintaining that Bilbo was "doin' a fine job" (48). The passage ends with Wilber referring to Bechet as a "most complex character, was Sidney" (48).

was not strange at all, but rather expressive of the attitudes he had learned in the highly stratified New Orleans society from which he came.

We have another opportunity to study this intriguing relationship between Bechet and Wilber from the perspective of Bechet himself, who comments on it briefly in his 1960 autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*. If Wilber has displayed benevolent condescension in his discussion of his family's "liberal" attitudes and Bechet's statements about race, then a complex mixture of avuncular gruffness and cultural snobbery is evident in Bechet's discussion of his role as Wilber's teacher (185–86). According to Bechet, Wilber's parents commissioned him "to look after" their son, and that when "Bobbie" first came to him, "he could read very good, but it was the instrument he didn't know. . . . He wanted to play but he couldn't" (185).¹⁰⁰ In Bechet's telling, there was a period in which Wilber continued to struggle, and so in order to convince his student to keep returning for lessons, Bechet decided "to tell him a lie—I said, 'That's it, Bobbie, that's it. Now you're coming'" (185). Bechet worked with Wilber on putting air through the clarinet—he notes that "[t]his boy, when he first came to me, he thought this old clarinet would blow itself"—and on producing "different tones and growls" (185).

Yet even though Bechet praises Wilber for the excellent progress he made in the time he studied with him, in his view "the trouble was, Bobbie didn't know whether he wanted to be a Jazz, or modern or classic clarinetist. He really could; he had the ability, he was very good at it. And that is very embarrassing and troublesome to you when you

¹⁰⁰ Bechet's comment offers yet another example of the belief that for a jazz musician, the ability to read music was less important than other skills.

really can't find yourself, you know. He would have liked to have played Jazz" (185–86). It is notable that Bechet, in agreement with Wilber, identifies the root of Wilber's problem as his inability to find his own voice and his tendency to copy the sound and style of his teacher. By the late 1950s, the period in which Bechet was working on his autobiography, he had clearly lost touch with his former student: "I haven't seen him in a good while now," he remarks, "and I hope he's doing all right because he was a fine boy and a good musicianer" (186).

Burton Peretti refers to "the older Sidney Bechet"—that is, the autobiographer Bechet—as "passionately separatist," quoting extensively from *Treat It Gentle* to demonstrate Bechet's conviction that the "white musicianers" were incapable of playing "a melody that's come deep out of black people. It's a question of feeling" (192).¹⁰¹ Yet in a later passage Peretti also suggests that many African American musicians of Bechet's generation responded to "admiration" from their white followers

with a mixture of avuncular pride and circumspection, proud of their hard-won artistic status but aware of the continuing precariousness of their economic and social positions. On the positive side, when Louis Armstrong called Bill Davidson, Jimmy McPartland and other white

¹⁰¹ For example, Bechet claims that the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB)—Bechet calls them the Original Dixieland Orchestra—was entirely derivative, that they played "numbers" they had learned from blacks and Creoles in New Orleans. "Those are numbers you've got to do something with . . . you've got to make them original. All these Dixieland musicianers could do was play what they learned from us, and after that there wasn't anything more for them to do. They had played all they knew, and it wasn't any longer a question of them adding something to the music so it could grow" (See Peretti 192; Bechet 114).

disciples “my boys,” or when Willie the Lion Smith tended to “cubs” he nurtured at Pod’s and Jerry’s, they expressed as black men a degree of mastery and authority rarely matched in American race relations. (207–08)

It is possible, then, to imagine that Bechet’s feelings about Wilber were highly ambivalent, and that Wilber’s own interpretation of his teacher’s interest in him and his other white admirers was accurate; that is, that Bechet was, in Wilber’s words, “very flattered by my interest in him and my desire to play the clarinet and soprano in his style” (33), and that through “this group of young, willing pupils he could perpetuate his musical message” (31). At the same time, however, Bechet’s assessment of Wilber’s limitations as a player does indeed offer compelling evidence of his “separatist” beliefs concerning jazz.

Following Wilber’s lengthy examination of his studies with Bechet, he spends a considerable portion of the remainder of his narrative explaining his effort to free himself from his “identification with Sidney Bechet.” By the late 1940s, he admits, he had become increasingly discontent with “living in Sidney’s shadow and always being known as his protégé.” He realized that “[l]arge numbers of fans were coming, not to hear Bob Wilber, but to hear someone who sounded like Bechet,” an experience that left him feeling “like some sort of freak show, and there came a time when I just had to break away from it” (50). Here Wilber’s discomfort with the racial dynamics inherent in his position as Bechet’s “protégé” is more obvious; he recalls that after performing at the Nice jazz festival in 1948, he returned to New York “with an enhanced reputation and

found myself referred to in some quarters as ‘the great white hope of jazz.’ It was all very flattering, but I didn’t approve of the description” (43).

In light of the discussion of Bechet’s “passionately separatist” views discussed above, it is ironic that Wilber uses this opportunity to express his extreme discomfort with the particularist argument for jazz; he charges “some jazz critics” with putting forth the notion “that the white man was merely an imitator of the black man, that jazz was the black man’s music, and that any white man who tried to play it was naturally inferior because he was white” (43).¹⁰² Remarkably, he claims that he had “never heard this idea expressed before, but I recognized it at the time as racial bullshit, just as it is racial bullshit today,” before he adds, from his perspective as autobiographer, “I didn’t buy the racial angle then and I don’t buy it now. Jazz is American music, only nowadays we have musicians from all over the world, of every nationality and color, who can play it” (43–44).

While Wilber effectively conveys his sincerity and disappointment, he seems unwilling to consider explanations for jazz’s long history of contestation along racial lines. Although he has spent his entire career playing an earlier style of jazz in the tradition of Armstrong, Bechet, and Morton, it is worth keeping in mind that he is a contemporary of many of the bebop and post-bebop stylists—including John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Eric Dolphy, and Max Roach, among countless others—whose music was strongly linked to increasing assertiveness and nationalist expressions among African

¹⁰² For a compelling discussion of debates over blackness versus color blindness in jazz, see Monson (2007) 16, 249–51, 315.

American musicians.¹⁰³ Later in his narrative, Wilber repeats his conviction that jazz is universal music—and therefore colour-blind—in his account of a four-concert “retrospective on Ellington” organized by George Wein in the 1970s. When Wein told Wilber that he would have to use a black pianist because there were not “enough black players in the band,” Wilber reluctantly agreed, although he insisted that the replacement was not as good as his first choice, and that Wein’s demand was another instance of “that old racial bullshit. . . . It always astounded me because I have never thought of jazz in terms of color—either you can play or you can’t. I’ve always listened to jazz with my ears, not with my eyes!” (132).¹⁰⁴ At no point in his discussions of jazz as a universal language does Wilber indicate his awareness that Sidney Bechet, his old teacher and mentor, had different views on the subject.

The accounts that Asher and Wilber give of their private music lessons with Byard and Bechet—two outstanding jazz musicians from different eras—illustrate the complex negotiations over racial and cultural difference that took place in the context of interracial

¹⁰³ Wilber is blunt about his dislike for modern jazz: “As I listen to jazz today I hear more notes per bar being played on every instrument, more chords being altered in different ways. Some times the tremendous complexity seems to be just for the sake of complexity. . . . I hear John Coltrane’s dedication in his playing and the work he put into it, but it doesn’t give me a warm feeling; it just doesn’t seem to express any joy” (194).

¹⁰⁴ Toward the end of his narrative, Wilber expresses bitterness about the jazz studies programs that were founded at universities in the United States “during the black studies craze” of the 1960s and which “gave a false picture of jazz, presenting it as the black man’s music, totally ignoring the white musician’s involvement right from the beginning. Jazz history was rewritten to ignore or minimize the contributions of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Bix Beiderbecke, Jack Teagarden, Eddie Condon, Benny Goodman and postwar figures such as Stan Getz, Lee Konitz and Dave Brubeck. Even the contributions of the great black pioneers, Morton, Oliver, Bechet and Bessie Smith, were studied only in a superficial way” (173). Wilber contends that jazz educators believed that their roots “were African, almost mythological” (173).

jazz learning; for a broader range of these experiences, however, it is important to turn to their descriptions—and those of other white jazz autobiographers—as they explore the public spaces where interracial jazz collaborations were forged.

IV. Explorations in Black Musical Worlds

Early in his narrative, Don Asher recalls his first experience of seeing an African American in his deeply segregated hometown, Worcester, when he was nine and “on a downtown shopping trip, hands strung between my aunt and mother” (9). When the person had passed them, Asher recalls his aunt commenting, with “an unnerving whispered urgency at odds with the mild sunny day, ‘Black as the ace of spades’” (10). Her response alerted Asher to the enormous divide between his insular Jewish community and the mysterious world beyond, a world that he would seek with single-minded purpose in his desire to become a professional jazz musician:

Five years later I would find myself on the threshold of a black world, my first step on a frustrating lifelong odyssey to pick the brains, embezzle the rhythms, master the soulful secrets of the race—destined to become a “nigger lover,” as the phrase would soon gain currency in political and artistic circles, to the anxiety of my mother, who was too genteel a lady to express her concerns for my physical safety and cultural welfare in any but the most roundabout locutions. *They’re very fine people, dear, don’t misunderstand me, but they have had a very different background and upbringing . . .* (10, emphasis in original)

Asher's account illustrates the impulse to cross the cultural divide—to learn through immersion in African American musical communities—that he and many other white autobiographers identify as essential to their experience of learning jazz. Their descriptions of their experiences in these communities—from New Orleans' black neighborhoods to Chicago's South Side, from Harlem to Philadelphia, and across the country to Los Angeles' Central Avenue—show them participating in a variety of activities, sometimes as observers or as members of the audience, sometimes as direct participants, dancing or marching or performing in mixed bands and at jam sessions. At times this act of cultural crossing is portrayed as transgressive and even dangerous (as in the above passage from Asher's *Notes from a Battered Grand*), while at other times the portrait is one of interracial understanding and cooperation.

In *Trumpet on the Wing*, Wingy Manone describes his impulse as a youngster to learn from the black New Orleans musicians who played the gutbucket jazz and blues that would shape his own musical style: "I kept goin' across the levee to hear it, and tried it on my horn until I got it" (14). Yet there is little doubt that Manone's music education was only part of his larger exploration of the Crescent City's African American culture; he recalls with great fondness, for example, the tradition of the fish fry, in which the host would hang "a red lantern" to indicate "a fish fry was going on and everybody was welcome," and where "[e]verybody would be happy, eating that delicious fish and doing the mess-around to the jamming of some neighborhood cats" (18). The African influences of "the mess-around" are obvious in Manone's description of "a kind of dance where you

just messed around with your feet in one place, letting your body do most of the work, while keeping time by snapping your fingers with one hand and holding a slab of fish in your other” (18).

In addition, he describes his participation in the “second line” that followed along when there was “a party, a parade, or a funeral going on”—or in his more evocative language a “planting party”—and where he “caught that righteous jazz. For they really played jazz at funerals, and no foolin’” (19). For the most part, Manone’s version of the second line seems to follow the traditional narrative: “moaning and wailing” accompanied by “mournful music” as was the custom for the route to the cemetery, followed by joyful music on the return trip (19–20). His description of the second line “during Carnival time” is especially notable, however, for his proud identification with the city’s working poor; in his words, even though it “was the poor folks’ parade,” it produced “the best bands and the funniest floats and costumes,” outshining the “‘front line,’ or official parade, a square parade” (21). Furthermore, the parade was integrated, with the “best jazz musicians in town, white and black, . . . swingin’ that great Dixieland music” (21). In Manone’s telling, a rite of passage for him was his transition from “tagging along with the second line” to participating, “[a]s I got older, and played better, . . . in that second line myself” (22).

Manone also describes less formal experiences that brought him in close contact with African Americans, as, for example, when he worked

as water boy on a grain-elevator construction job. The colored boys who toted the girders on the job sang while they worked. . . . One boy would

call out, “Put it on the right side!” Then the rest would join in, jiving it up: “Put it on the right side, swing it to the left side,” and go right on making up a tune. It was great stuff for a kid who was nuts about music. (24–25)

Yet even as Manone illustrates his deep engagement with African American culture, he seems to accept without question the rules of social segregation that mark the New Orleans of his childhood. In his account of his efforts—along with the other poor children of his neighborhood—to protect their turf from outsiders, he successfully establishes his close ties to the great black New Orleans jazz greats while simultaneously revealing the cultural distance between them:

We were the bosses in our own neighborhood, though. If any kids from other places came around we’d run ’em out, but fast. Louis Armstrong and Zutty Singleton are famous musicians now, but I recollect that I used to throw rocks at them. Zutty would come around on a bicycle, delivering for Max Sampson’s drugstore, and we’d let him have it. Of course, when we got into Louis’s or Zutty’s territory they rocked us too, and I don’t mean with music. (19)

Manone’s exposure to the African American culture of New Orleans also had a considerable influence on his speech patterns and choice of idioms. He takes credit for his contribution to jive lingo, which he insisted originated “in New Orleans, on bawdy Basin Street” and boasts that in Washington during the late 1930s he “made quite a hit with my jive talk. Of course, the folks had been hearing that Congress double-talk for years, but my stuff was something new” (143). Clearly Manone relished his role as cultural

interpreter, explaining that “[p]eople kept writing into the papers asking for an interpretation, and finally I gave a reporter an interview and set him straight on the meaning of ‘git-box,’ ‘riff,’ ‘killer-diller,’ ‘lick,’ and words that are now well known to anybody except a square from Delaware” (143). As he adds, “My way of talking soon began to be imitated by others” (144).

In Chicago, the white musicians eventually made their way to the South Side. Manone describes his trips there with Bix Beiderbecke, where they “jammed with King Oliver and Louis Armstrong in places like the Sunset Café. The best jamming was on the blues. Louis would start it off by taking a chorus, and give it to Bix. Then I came on for one” (61). Art Hodes’s first significant exposure to a wider black culture came when Louis Armstrong took him and Manone to a barbecue joint on the South Side, where he was “exposed . . . to a bit of the life that these people lived”:

I mean after they got used to you, so you was part of the furniture. They knew you were there but they could still act themselves. I still recall the time I came in there alone and about a dozen colored folks were sitting and singing and I sat down and they kept on singing and I felt good, and it sounded good. I came to be accepted by these people as one of them, and believe me I never abused the privilege. I never messed with their women. I was just plain music hungry. (23–24)

Hodes writes that he would be asked to “‘Play the blues, Art,’ and when I played they would laugh. Not mean, but they would laugh. That hurt, but I couldn’t blame them. I hadn’t as yet learned the idiom. I was entranced by their language but I hadn’t learned to

“speak it” (24). Yet he would return, night after night, “putting my nickels into that piano. . . . Jackson would say to me, ‘Art, I’ll show you how to play the blues; just watch my hands.’ And I’d answer him, ‘No, don’t teach me, just play.’ . . . I knew that I had to feel the blues myself and then they’d flow easily” (24).¹⁰⁵

Hodes’s playing improved steadily, to the point where his playing would hush the noisy crap games at a cabaret where he played. “Those gamblers had stopped playing and were listening. Man, it’s like no other feeling I can describe. Everyone with you, and you’re it. It was like graduating. Jackson took me home with him and I lived at his house for days” (24). According to Hodes, his experience of immersion in black culture was typical of the white Chicago musicians, most of whom “learned from the great Negro players who went there from New Orleans and elsewhere. They inspired us; we came, we listened, we learned. . . . So it went, with most of us not only falling in love with the music but with the Race too” (24–25). As did Bud Freeman and many others, Hodes also learned a particular rhythmic feeling associated with the sounds coming from the storefront church near the barbecue place. “And many times as you walked by you would hear them having religion, and the beat going on, and the after beat. People singing—shouting. A church with that sound coming out of it” (25).

For many jazz musicians, Harlem was *the* jazz mecca. When Chicagoan Bud Freeman discovered Harlem in the late 1920s, he quit his lucrative job with Ben Pollack’s big band, because, in his words, he had “lost all interest in playing music for money. I had

¹⁰⁵ It is following this line that Hodes’s collaborator, Chadwick Hansen, inserts his line, “Eventually, of course, people stopped laughing” (24; see Chapter 1, p. 57).

just come to know Harlem and its wonderful way of life. Harlem was the home of the greatest, most creative jazz pianists the world will ever know” (32). In his descriptions of two of the musicians he met there—Willie “The Lion” Smith and Sidney Bechet—Freeman stresses not only the impact of their music on him, but also the personal friendships he formed with them. “What I felt for his music I could never put into words,” Freeman states about Smith, “but he knew how I felt and we became good friends” (32). He recalls that Bechet “was very kind to me and invited me to play duets with him in his flat” (32). Moreover, Bechet, who was then supporting himself with his own “small tailor shop,” expressed a kind of paternal concern for Freeman, chastising him for his slovenly appearance—“Boy, how do you expect to make any kind of living looking like that?”—and insisting that Freeman take off his pants for him to press (32–33).

When he was in high school Bob Wilber was given permission by his parents “to attend the jam sessions” held at Jimmy Ryan’s in New York City on Sunday afternoons, where Wilber experienced for the first time

the excitement of the crowds, the music, the whiskey, the smoke, people in love and people fighting. The whole thing represented reality to me, and as I grew more involved, the more jazz became the most important thing in my life. . . . [J]azz offered an escape from an environment I didn’t like and an alternative to the problems of growing up. (9)

For Wilber, his travels into New York held particular resonance, symbolizing his move away from his life of wealth and privilege in Scarsdale and toward the excitement and stimulation of the world of Harlem and the jazz music to which he was becoming so

devoted. Moreover, even though he couches his impressions in the fantastic imagery of the cinema, there is the inescapable racial dynamic implicit in his vivid description of himself—a small white teenager with curly reddish-blond hair—traveling from Scarsdale with other privileged suburbanites to Harlem, where they listened with rapt attention to the city’s leading black jazz musicians:

In the film *The Wizard of Oz* you saw Dorothy passing from the real world of black and white into the fantasy world of technicolor. This is exactly what I felt when I traveled into the city on the New York Central railroad. Even the name of the branch line that Scarsdale was on, the Harlem Division, had an exciting appropriateness to it. There was a magic line between Scarsdale and New York, and every time the train approached the 125th Street station in Harlem I crossed the line and passed from black and white into color, and vice versa. (9)

Later Wilber and his friends began making trips into New York City to hear the music on 52nd Street, where one evening they got so caught up listening to Billie Holiday at the Onyx Club that they missed “the last train to Scarsdale”; forced to stay overnight in New York, they returned to 52nd Street at two in the morning, in time to catch Coleman Hawkins performing “Body and Soul” at Kelly’s Stables. In Wilber’s vivid recollection, he and his friend “sat there goggle-eyed, less than three feet away from the great man, as he went through his intricate improvisations on *Body and Soul*. We were in seventh heaven—he was one of our idols. But we were too scared to say anything to him—he was such an awesome figure” (12). Significantly, the following day his parents—knowing

“how much [Wilber] cared about jazz”—responded with sympathy to his explanation of his absence (12).

According to Wilber, New York’s traditional jazz community in the mid-forties welcomed all those who showed due respect and dedication to the music, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. “All my feelings about the musicians of that generation are, without exception, good ones,” he writes. “I can’t remember a single instance where any musician put me down or sloughed me off” (21). He remembers that in that period—the 1930s and 1940s—“there was plenty of work for a good musician; nobody felt threatened economically, although no one was making a lot of money” (21). In his view “there was a camaraderie about it all” based on mutual respect and admiration that leveled barriers of race. “I never felt any racial antagonism from that generation of black musicians,” he concludes. “Maybe I was seeing the world through rose-colored spectacles, but I never had any feeling of, ‘Hey, white boy, what are you doing here?’” (21).

Wilber recalls that he and his friends would “hang out in Harlem all the time, particularly when Bechet started working at Ryan’s in 1947. I would end up playing the whole of the last half of the evening with Sidney, and many a night, being hungry after work, he used to take me uptown to Creole Pete’s to get some gumbo, or to friends of his up on Sugar Hill” (21). Another club that Wilber went to with other members of the Wildcats was a Harlem club “called the Hollywood. Monday night was piano night, and they used to have cutting sessions when all the stride cats came by. . . . The three of us

would be the only white people in the place. Sometimes they invited us to play and we were accepted and applauded” (22).

V. Interracial Jam Sessions

In contrast to the interracial jazz accounts discussed above, which involve earlier generations of New Orleans and Chicago musicians (or in the case of Bob Wilber, a younger musician playing in an older style), Don Asher and John LaPorta came to musical maturity in the years in which swing and then bebop were the dominant languages of jazz. For both of them, their experiences in interracial jam sessions were a critical component of their jazz learning experience, and as such, each focuses considerable attention on musical elements as well as the racial dynamics of these sessions. Asher introduces his experiences in these sessions with a bold suggestion that African American musicians have an innate and fundamental understanding of the language of jazz that he and other white players must struggle to learn. This is not to say that he believed his quest to play jazz was futile; rather, he stresses his unwavering desire to learn to play, and furthermore, to learn from black sources. When he was hired as pianist with a white dance band after he graduated from high school (60), he found himself left dissatisfied musically, haunted by a feeling “that there was a secret I wasn’t privy to” (71):

Now that I had listened extensively to black musicians, I was convinced there was something basic and vital that came easy to them and hard to us. The difference in the levels of rhythmic charge achieved by whites and

blacks felt topographical to me, like the difference between a broad, unrelieved plateau and a spectacular mountain range. The playing of the whites was more even-keeled, linear, lacking the sudden dips and spurts, the coiled-spring tension-and-release and unexpected displacement of meter that sent the beat slamming and teetering down the tracks like a highballing express, generating incredible excitement. (71–72)

Asher’s awareness of a black musical world that held such allure but that was as yet beyond his understanding left him facing “a crucial choice I’d soon have to make: whether to pursue a career in jazz with all its uncertainties, perils, and rivalries, or to steer a less demanding course—over the modulated, civilized terrain of cabaret/country club/hotel with its ordered hours and regular income” (72). Deciding that the direction of his career would be ultimately determined by his ability, he moved to New York in the mid-1940s, determined to see if he could survive in the hub of the jazz world.

Asher admits that not everyone shared his views regarding racial difference—he knew certain African American musicians who reacted with discomfort to “the whole subject of racial-genetic orientation,” because it rekindled “stereotypes and images of grinning darkies dancing for pennies on southern street corners” (73).¹⁰⁶ Yet in the end Asher was “unpersuaded” by their arguments and set his own course to learning jazz,

¹⁰⁶ Pianist Hampton Hawes, for example, with whom Asher collaborated on Hawes’ autobiography, *Raise Up Off Me*, claimed, according to Asher, that music was “color blind. Absolutely. Ofay players occasionally pull my sleeve, talkin’ about their whiteness closing them off from certain secrets of the trade. Listen to me: *There ain’t no secrets*. We all came out of the same alley. How you play has to do with who you listened to when you were coming up, who you hung out with and picked up on” (quoted in Asher, 73, emphasis in original).

which included “pilgrimages in the coming years to the ghetto clubs and after-hours joints . . . , tracking the elusive secret, searching out the passion and sensibility of the black man. Hoping for a miracle of transmutation” (73).

Notably, both Asher and LaPorta report that they found fundamental differences in style, approach, and conception between the African American and non-African-American players at these sessions. For example, Asher observed that, in addition to “racial differences in style and rhythmic propulsion,”

at integrated jam sessions blacks and whites tended to call different tunes. When I’d suggested “Have You Met Miss Jones?” at an after-hours club, a black had scoffed good-naturedly, “That’s one of your white-boy tunes.” A similar judgment was passed on Gershwin’s “Foggy Day.” Blacks leaned toward tunes with relaxed, more fluid structures—“Willow Weep for Me,” “Georgia on My Mind”—written as often by white as black composers. “Willow’s more leisurely and doesn’t sweat,” a black bass player said, “you got time to climb inside it, feel its bones, poke your way around. Your average Causasian tune is boxy, four-squared, forces you into corners.” (72–73)

Tension permeates Asher’s description of his brief and unsuccessful foray into the world of Harlem’s famed jam sessions. His light skin and small stature make him “an easy target for frisky young Harlem bloods” who call out to him, mocking his appearance,

as he walks their streets (74).¹⁰⁷ Inside the club, where the jam session is underway, the atmosphere of hostility remains, and Asher might be describing a war zone rather than a gathering of musicians. Yet he responds with passion to the bebop he hears inside, describing it as “something fierce, uncompromising, and beautiful, an abrasive fiery sound that ran roughshod through all previously decreed rhythmic and harmonic structures. Here were the fabled ‘cutting sessions’ I’d been told about—initiation rites that were in effect pitched battles, mostly black on black, for whites were still chary of joining the fray” (74).

Asher so effectively conveys his anxiety and sense of non-belonging at this Harlem jam session that the reader is struck by his boldness when he asks “about the policy of sitting in,” for the question serves to heighten the image he has drawn of his own vulnerability (75). He sets the answer to his question in free indirect speech—“[I] was told, Anyone can, but you better be able to fly real good or they’ll shoot you down, burn you up”—leaving the answerer anonymous, and perhaps not even a real person but simply the vibes that he feels from the situation (75). Asher wisely chooses not to participate; instead, he watches from the sidelines while

¹⁰⁷ According to Asher, the unfriendly reception that he experienced in Harlem in the mid-1940s was reflective of a changing mood: “Harlem was beginning to put on a hostile face for Caucasian tourists,” he writes. “The years when affluent whites could pass a flavorful evening slumming in the district’s clubs and cafés were nearing an end” (73). Yet as noted earlier, Bob Wilber gives a much more positive impression of his experience in New York’s interracial traditional jazz scene in the same period. It is interesting to wonder, then, to what extent their experiences might illuminate different attitudes toward interracialism in the bebop and traditional jazz communities.

those without strong wings were cut down [by] schooled, confident musicians who had found within themselves a core of calm enabling them to adjust to the roaring tempos and turbulent patterns, a cool and secret site from which to launch their blazing cascades of notes. . . . It didn't take me but a minute to realize I was nowhere near ready for this league; they were lying in wait for the likes of me. (75)¹⁰⁸

After his humbling experience in New York, Asher moved to Boston; his repeated use of the word “search” in this section conveys his ongoing search not only for a physical place to play but also for the musical skills that will allow him to emulate the qualities he most admires in African American jazz (76, 97). In 1952, “his search for the talisman that would infuse my playing with the heart and soul of Africa without altering the color of my skin” led him to an after-hours jam session at a black club on Massachusetts Avenue, where, after returning for a week to listen—“my white friends blanched when I told them where I'd been until four in the morning”—he felt confident enough to ask to sit in (97). This time he found that the musical level was “within my ken”—the tunes familiar, the tempos manageable: “I sensed that one or two of the pianists could play rings around me, but the rings were concentric and not all that wide. I felt I wouldn't be embarrassed as I would have been at the incandescent Harlem sessions” (97–98).

¹⁰⁸ In a section called “Paying Dues as Learners,” Berliner includes examples of the direct, often harsh response at jam sessions to players who lack experience or competence (51–55).

Nonetheless, the experience that Asher describes is a trial by fire: the pianist whose place he took vacated the piano stool without making eye contact, and he heard “mocking, skeptical voices” as he adjusted the piano stool (99). As he joined the band in a standard tune, he sensed a different, “looser” rhythmic conception than that which he had experienced, causing him to feel “the meter sliding out from under my fingers. When this occurred the bass player steadied into a fundamental four-to-the-bar stroll, laying groundwork beneath me” (99). The dancers, though, were less forgiving, “shaking their heads” in response to his unsteady pulse and leaving the dance floor. “I struggled through two more tunes, hands cramping and sweat dropping off my chin onto the keys until the board was slick as an ice rink. The dancers never returned” (99).

After the set, the bass player offered a blunt assessment of Asher’s playing, employing evocative imagery that combined the practical and the metaphorical:

You want a honest critique? . . . The dancers was off balance, that’s why they deserted, they couldn’t pat their feet right or make their proper moves. You was playing rhythmic enough, don’t misapprehend me, but it was too straight-ahead and ricky-tick, if you catch my drift. We’re used to a wider beat, space and margin to move around in. It’s like a woman sashaying down a wide alleyway swinging her hips and buns, used to plenty of leeway, you picture it? . . . Now that alleyway suddenly *narrows* on her and this fine bitch is getting bruised, *hurting*, so naturally she’s going to

cut out. What you got to do is listen to me and the iron and skins [drums] more intensely . . .” (99–100, emphasis in original)¹⁰⁹

Criticism on the bandstand has the potential to serve as an important on-the-job learning experience, even if the recipient sometimes needs time to absorb its import. Asher’s immediate response to the bass player’s advice was that he “knew what he meant, sort of.” Significantly, the criticism caused him to question his own ability to overcome the disadvantages of his “white upbringing” and his current job as pianist in a society band, in which the music was played with a square or “businessman’s bounce” time-feel (100). On a more personal level, Asher wondered why, despite his obvious limitations, they continued to allow him to sit in:

Perhaps they were flattered by my interest in their music and derived satisfaction from the role reversal at a time when there were no black teachers in the public schools; or they may have found amusement in the spectacle of Master Charles getting turned on, trying to dwell in their sunshine—tolerant of me because I was just a skinny, earnest, funny-ass kid and not too obvious a nigger lover. (100)

Gradually, however, Asher began to sense a “a grudging cordiality” as he arrived every night to sit in (100); he relates the good-natured banter—and even praise—that came his way, always accompanied, however, by an intense racial consciousness in which the black musicians and audience signified on racial stereotypes, sometimes happily

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of African and African American influences on jazz rhythmic conceptions, see Berliner 147–58.

reversing them.¹¹⁰ In musical terms, Asher also felt that he “was starting to get it, . . . assimilating the displaced, driving rhythms and crackling improvisational patterns, sharpening my ear and expanding my repertoire” (102–03). For Asher, his perception of his own growing competence was inextricably linked to his ability to emulate a black jazz aesthetic. “My fondest dream, he confesses, “was that the Coffee John’s regulars would one night rise en masse as I came off the stand, shouting, ‘The blue-eyed devil plays black!’” (103).

A key element of Asher’s jazz education in this period was learning concepts of playing “time” from the black musicians—specifically “learning to function at very fast and very slow tempos” (103). This guidance came often in the form of vivid imagery; a bass player taught him that “[a]t slow tempos the beat has to *swell*,” before sharing with Asher the advice he had been given by another player: “It’s like taking yourself a mouthful of good wine, swishing it around, savoring it before you let it go down; the swallow is that beat finally dropping” (103, emphasis in original). Another pianist instructed Asher on playing up-tempo tunes, showing “me how to stay loose and relaxed by visualizing myself riding a train ‘rocketing along at a good clip, ninety miles an hour or more, but it doesn’t trouble you ’cause you’re sitting there cool and collected, your body swaying and rocking naturally with the train’s pulse, which is the drums and bass”

¹¹⁰ Among the comments Asher recalls are “Here comes the gopher in the watermelon patch”; “Where’s the sergeant-at-arms? Who let this white trash in?” “What’s he gonna play for us tonight, ‘Ol’ Man Ribber’ or ‘Short’nin’ Bread?’” (100). One night a singer he accompanied told him that he was “starting to get it, baby. You only got one main obstacle to surmount, as I see it, which is that when I grew up tapping my feet and clapping my hands, singing ‘Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho’ in my uncle’s church, you were singing ‘Abide with me’” (101).

(103). The “supreme lesson,” Asher concludes, “is that ‘time’ should be as natural as a heartbeat pumping pure, fresh blood into a tune” (103).¹¹¹

In John LaPorta’s account of his participation in jam sessions in Philadelphia during the late 1930s and early 1940s, he, like Asher, also distinguishes the stylistic tendencies of white and black players. An important difference in their accounts, though, is that LaPorta—based on his own learning experience—seems more confident in situating himself firmly within the black jazz tradition. Although he participated in various sessions, he quickly discovered that whereas the white musicians were still playing in the older “two-beat Dixieland” style, the black musicians “played with a four-beat swing feel a la Count Basie and Lester Young.” In his words, “I can’t ever remember a Black session where the rhythm section played with a two-beat feel” (18). For LaPorta, the sessions with African American musicians felt comfortable because his own central influences were from the black jazz tradition. “Aside from my original classical beginnings,” he writes, “I learned to play Jazz by listening to Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young and Johnny Hodges” on the “nightly broadcasts of Black bands on the radio”; the music of these black bands “invited me to a world of fresh harmonies and rhythms in a music free of inhibition” (19).

His inclination to experiment with ideas derived from that tradition, he discovered, were out of place in the older Dixieland style, where the harmonies he was most inclined to hear, such as major sevenths and ninths, “seemed right to my ears and

¹¹¹ For an analysis of this passage as evidence of Asher’s fictionalization of black voices in his autobiography, see the Introduction, pages 9–11.

wrong to theirs. They were to become commonplace devices in the arrangements played by White bands shortly after.” LaPorta’s more modern harmonic sense left him feeling that his “style was not in sync with the Dixieland idiom played by the White musicians” (19). By contrast, “[j]amming with Black musicians was an entirely different matter. They accepted me and the ideas I played without question; so my playing became less inhibited. Listening to great Black Jazz musicians was how I learned to play in the idiom, so it was easy to understand why I felt at home playing in Black jam sessions” (19).

VI. Triumphs and Tensions Within Interracial Alliances

As the above discussion illustrates, John LaPorta attempts to establish his own authenticity as a jazz musician by emphasizing his links to the black jazz tradition and his early and positive experiences as a participant in black jam sessions in Philadelphia. As his narrative unfolds, however, he reveals with equal candor the tensions that sometimes arose in interracial situations, tensions that illustrate the degree to which struggles for economic and aesthetic control of jazz during the 1950s and 1960s continued to be contested on racial grounds.

His candor about race, for example, underlies his extensive account of his relationship with Charles Mingus, the celebrated jazz bassist whose public fury over racial injustice and anguished response to his own multiracial heritage forms a central motif of his own autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*. To be sure, LaPorta leaves no doubt of his profound admiration for Mingus and the great benefits he derived from playing with him. “He played string bass with a creative force that provided inspiration to

us all,” he writes. “It was as though someone had removed handcuffs from my wrists. I was musically free to play anything I desired! Free to create intuitively in a musical world promising endless possibilities. This quality remained undiminished throughout our seven years of playing together” (96).

Yet LaPorta also gives a long account of specific musical and personal conflicts that arose in his lengthy association with Mingus. As background explanation, he writes that in 1950 he assembled a group who worked briefly together in the Long Island area, focusing on “new interpretations of standard tunes containing fresh harmonizations, shifting key changes, varied rhythm patterns and pedal points” (95). According to LaPorta, “To my knowledge, we were the first group to experiment with what became later known as free improvisation!” (96). The group “made a demonstration tape” that they sent to Mingus, who had “expressed an interest in hearing” them as prospective clients for a record company he was then “in the process of organizing” (96).¹¹² Months later Mingus returned the tape with a note which contained praise for the music but which deemed “the group . . . not good enough to record” (96). According to LaPorta, the “recorded musical experimentations” would influence “the music Charles Mingus created shortly after!” (96).

This is the backdrop for LaPorta’s account of his participation in two significant record dates led by Mingus in 1954, about two years after LaPorta had sent Mingus his demonstration tape. With undisguised bitterness, LaPorta claims that for the first album—

¹¹² For a brief account of Debut Records, the short-lived record company that Mingus formed in 1952 with drummer Max Roach, see Saul 154–55.

released under the title, *The Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop*—Mingus took “our cooperative concept and made it his own” (117). And although Mingus received credit for writing “all the compositions on the album,” LaPorta disputes this, explaining that on “Getting Together,” a tune based on the Jerome Kern standard, “All the Things You Are,” he worked out “the lead lines on clarinet while Teo Macero and George Barrow weaved counter lines on tenor and baritone saxophones” (117). The result, in LaPorta’s view, “represents one of the first successful attempts at free improvisation,” anticipating the work of Ornette Coleman by several years. “Incidentally,” he adds, “Mingus had heard this concept on the tape of my quartet” (117).

For the second recording date, Mingus hired John LaPorta’s drummer Clem DeRosa, whom LaPorta describes as “an excellent reader. He had to be to play my music. I was then writing all sorts of time figures in my rhythm section parts and good readers were essential for playing them” (118).¹¹³ At the end of a rehearsal that Mingus had arranged prior to recording, Mingus called LaPorta aside and demanded to know why he worked with DeRosa. LaPorta’s explanations did nothing to pacify Mingus, who finally blurted out, “Don’t you know he goes to the wrong church?” (119). Perhaps anticipating that some readers might not understand the reference, LaPorta provides the following explanation:

He was referring to one of the major cultural differences between Whites and Blacks. Starting with church services and continuing through their folk

¹¹³ According to LaPorta, strong reading skills were uncommon among most jazz drummers at that time; he cites the “old wive’s [sic] tale,” apparently held by many of them, “that reading music inhibited a person’s capacity to swing” (118).

music and social events, there is an important difference in rhythmic feeling. Whites raised in a traditional environment feel the first and third beats of music in 4/4 as the strong pulses. In so doing, they agree with the natural strong pulses of that time signature. Blacks raised in a traditional environment feel the second and fourth beats as the strong pulses. This is in opposition to the natural strong pulses occurring in 4/4 time. This opposition to the first and third beats creates a rhythmic tension which is fundamental for them and vital to their music!” (119)

“Although I am White,” LaPorta concludes, “I have gained most of my Jazz experience playing and listening to Blacks. I knew instantly what Charles Mingus’s statement meant!” (119). LaPorta responded with laughter, as he realized that Mingus’s “intuitive assessment of the situation could not really be debated. Our first and only argument was over!” (119).¹¹⁴ The significance of this anecdote, which LaPorta conveys so effectively through indirection, is that *he* clearly attended the “right” church; he adds that his motivation for conveying these experiences in such detail was to insist on his own and others’ contributions to the bassist’s creative legacy:

Circumstance has linked Charles Mingus and the creative movement of that period together. There is little recognition of the help others gave. It is not my purpose to belittle Mingus’s major contribution to the development

¹¹⁴ At the recording session, LaPorta adds, DeRosa arrived with his full drum set, but over the course of the session Mingus “kept telling Clem to play with less drums.” By the end of the session DeRosa had been relegated to playing tambourine, which Mingus instructed him to play “on the second and fourth beats” of the bar (119).

of Jazz. His considerable talent as a composer and performer would have guaranteed world recognition in any event. I just want to set the record straight about the chronology of events that occurred during our times together. (119)

LaPorta attempts to authenticate himself in other and perhaps more subtle ways, as well. For example, on the subject of Mingus's abusive behavior toward certain musicians in his bands, LaPorta notes that "[a]lthough he never directed his abuse toward me, I found these situations to be increasingly troublesome" (121). The unstated implication is that LaPorta's musical skills and strong personality prevented Mingus from trying to bully him.

Having established his own authenticity—that is, his ability to play jazz with an African American musical sensibility—LaPorta seems to allow himself greater authority to evaluate particular aspects of Mingus's musical skills. In particular, he recalls the difficulties Mingus had with the rhythms of LaPorta's composition, "Miles Apart," which featured a non-conventional approach to instrumentation that forced "the rhythm section to play quasi-horn parts and the horns to play quasi rhythm comps" (126). According to LaPorta, "Mingus just couldn't play the rhythms accurately," even after they attempted to go through it several times (126). The source of Mingus's difficulties, in LaPorta's view, was that Mingus routinely practiced "with a metronome" at incredibly fast tempos while his foot moved "four times to each measure"; in other words, he was developing his ability to play fast by feeling the pulse on every beat (or in four parts to each measure), rather than in two, as is the traditional approach to playing up-tempo compositions. While

Mingus's approach may have worked for more straight ahead jazz works, the rhythmic complexity of LaPorta's composition made it difficult for Mingus to maintain the tempo while playing the rhythms with accuracy.¹¹⁵ Aware of Mingus's "volatile nature," LaPorta tried to suggest an effective way "to play the figures," but Mingus dismissed his guidance, insisting, with growing impatience, that they play it again, without success, until the rehearsal "finally came to its dismal end" (126).

LaPorta's sensitivity to the racial dynamics at play in interracial jazz sessions is also evident in a description of a recording session he made with drummer Kenny Clarke for Savoy Records in the mid-1950s. When LaPorta arrived at the recording session, the band launched into "Budo," a bebop composition by pianist Bud Powell that LaPorta "had never heard before" (153). The other musicians "were playing it from memory," and LaPorta describes in detail his anxiety as he tried to learn the intricate rhythms and harmonies with only minutes to spare before the recording session was to begin (153). Finally he leaned over and asked bassist Wendell Marshall to tell him "what the first chord was in the bridge"; with that orientation, LaPorta was able "to hear the rest of the chord progression" (154). Important in LaPorta's telling of the story is that the composition contained an "interlude figure" that was played "as an introduction to each new soloist" (154). The recording session went ahead on schedule, with the customary several takes on Powell's tune.

¹¹⁵ "The rhythm parts I had written used rests, for the most part," LaPorta explains, "with quarter note attacks occurring in different places in the measure. Counting in four is usually more effective when playing slower tempos. However, counting in four at faster tempos causes one to react too slowly making it difficult to play the figures with any accuracy" (126).

Several days later, LaPorta received a call from Savoy Records informing him that they particularly liked his soloing on “Budo” but “did not care for” the solos of the other performers, Horace Silver and Donald Byrd. Savoy had decided, therefore, to cut out the other solos, along with the interlude figure, and to merge LaPorta’s solos from the various takes and release them as one solo. LaPorta describes his feelings of “chagrin” at the decision, wondering how it might effect the musical integrity of the recording and also, perhaps more importantly, the racial dynamics of the session itself. In his words, he wondered “how Donald Byrd and Horace Silver may have felt. Having their solos preempted, under any circumstance, was a condition few people would tolerate. The thought of a White artist replacing solos by two respected Black Jazz artists was unacceptable to me. I’m sure it didn’t sit well with them either. Besides I thought their solos were fine!” (154).¹¹⁶

Yet LaPorta, in his modest and unassuming manner, does not claim that his devotion to African American jazz sensibilities means that he has absorbed all the features of the music he most admires; to the contrary, he is notably willing to point out his own shortcomings as a musician, even regarding basic elements of time and feel. For example, he recalls that in 1948, when he was teaching at the Parkway Institute of Music in Brooklyn, he had a student,

¹¹⁶ LaPorta argued that “pacing, dynamics, use of tension and the shaping of a solo” are clearly affected by its length; on each take he had produced a two-chorus solo following an interlude. The merging of these shorter choruses into one longer solo would produce a disjointed solo that would obviously lack the careful shaping and building to a climax of a longer one (154).

a big strapping Black man who loved to play the tenor saxophone. . . . I was trying to help Frank with his improvising but he had shown little progress after six months of lessons. Once, in the middle of a lesson, Frank stopped suddenly and said, “John, I like your ideas but you don’t swing enough. Listen to me and I will have you swinging your butt off in about six months!” “How do you propose to do that?” was my response. “I’d take you up to Harlem,” he said, “Yeh, six months up in Harlem would about do it!” (81)

In LaPorta’s typically affable way, he concurs with his student: “Going up to Harlem and sitting in at a couple sessions had certainly been an eye opener. So I knew that living there and being totally immersed in Harlem’s active Jazz scene could have made quite a difference in my playing!” (81).¹¹⁷

Later, LaPorta pauses to assess his own experience with changing attitudes toward interracialism in jazz. Until “the mid-50s,” LaPorta recalls, “Black musicians always welcomed me when I sat in with them. I felt at home and learned more playing with them than in jam sessions run by White musicians. We were all equal in spirit. We all had a common goal and that was for us to make music together” (209). But within a few years, LaPorta was noticing a dramatically different response when he tried to sit in with black musicians at jam sessions, which he attributes to changes in the “socio-political atmosphere” (209). By 1958, LaPorta was finding that “Afro-American jam sessions no

¹¹⁷ It is curious that LaPorta does not give details regarding the outcome of this exchange, so the reader is left to wonder if he did go up to Harlem with his student.

longer were a place I could go. The few times I did resulted in negative experiences. Tension prevailed making for difficult playing conditions. Our implicit common goal had disappeared” (209). LaPorta’s response to his own question, “Why did this happen?” reveals his considerable ability to imagine another perspective, rather than simply to react from his own position of vulnerability. “Young Afro-American Jazz musicians regarded Jazz as the music created by Blacks and resented White people’s exploitation of their art form. They certainly had much justification for feeling this way, but it meant giving up something that had been quite special to me” (209).

By about 1940, the same period in which LaPorta was playing in black jam sessions in Philadelphia, Art Pepper was hanging out on Central Avenue in Los Angeles with other young white musicians eager to embrace the music and the lifestyle of the city’s African American jazz community. When Pepper and his friends would go “into bars and ask if we could play,” they found that “people were very encouraging” (40). Briefly he left Los Angeles to play with Gus Arnheim’s “very commercial band” in San Diego, but he quickly discovered that he “didn’t fit in because there were no jazz solos to play—you just read music” (41). Pepper returned to Central Avenue, where, on the recommendation of his friend, Dexter Gordon, he auditioned and won the alto spot in a new band “that Lee Young was forming . . . to go into the Club Alabam” (41). Pepper’s return to Central Avenue is significant, indicating his rejection of the relatively easy path toward success in white commercial dance bands in favour of immersion in the heart of Los Angeles’ black jazz world; his recollection that his audition took place “at the colored union” hall serves as further evidence that he had achieved access to that world (41).

In his account, Pepper emphasizes Young's solicitousness toward him, not only because of his youth and inexperience, but also because of his vulnerability as a cultural outsider. Young, in Pepper's view, "felt he had an obligation to take care of me. . . . To show you what kind of a person he was—I was playing my parts and nobody else would have worried about me. Why go out of their way to worry about a little white boy, you know?" (44). Young also expressed his concern that Pepper, who had become close to Dexter Gordon in this period, might also be heading toward drug addiction. Pepper recalls that Young "sat down with me. He said, 'I've talked to Dexter, man, and he's got a way to go. There's cold awful dues he's got to pay and he's just going to have to pay 'em, I'm afraid. But you, man, . . . I'd love to see you not have to pay those dues'" (44).¹¹⁸

Young's band accompanied the featured black performers at Club Alabam, an experience that Pepper describes in an upbeat, even joyful, tone: "And we'd just be shouting in the background, playing these real down-home blues," he writes. "I'd go in there and play and get so caught up in the feeling that I never had a chance to think about anything bad that might be happening to me or to worry at all. It was such an open, such a free, such a beautifully right time" (43). In the same period Pepper also hung out at the

¹¹⁸ By then Gordon had already begun to use heroin, and according to Pepper, he and Gordon "smoked pot and took Dexedrine tablets" and other drugs (43). In this passage, we learn about Pepper's experience with Lee Young's band not only from Pepper himself, but also from Young, who remarks that "Art was just one of the band. We didn't know any different down on Central Avenue at that time [early 1940s]. It wasn't about 'whitey' this and 'whitey' that. It was about good musicianship and people respecting one another for the talents that they had" (45). Not only did Young recognize Pepper's talent, but he also saw that Pepper had "the right personality. If it's going to be one of you and a lot of another race of people, you could have a problem. . . . I knew he'd be able to get along with the guys" (47).

Ritz Club, which had after-hours sessions where musicians would sit in, including Jimmy Blanton, Art Tatum, Armstrong, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, and Roy Eldridge.

“You can imagine what a thrill it was to be in the same room with those people,” he writes. “I used to go sit in after my job at the Club Alabam and play with them,” and before long Pepper was hired for the “regular band at the Ritz Club,” as well (43).

Pepper’s positive experiences in interracial bands continued when, after his stint with Lee Young, he joined Benny Carter’s big band.¹¹⁹ Carter was generous and helpful to the younger musician, who still “played all my jazz by ear. I was good at reading, but I didn’t know about chord structure, harmony, composition” (48). Because he had little experience playing lead alto, Carter initially assigned him the second alto part, although for “most of the arrangements” he provided him with both the lead and second alto parts (48). On quieter nights at the club, Pepper recalls that “Benny would just get off the stand and let me play his parts. I’d get all his solos. I learned that way how to play lead in a

¹¹⁹ Swing bandleader Charlie Barnet, in an illuminating illustration of the various ways in which interracial cooperation operated within the jazz world, explains that Benny Carter “would sometimes come and sit in with our trumpet section. The lighting was such that nobody could tell who was sitting back there. So you could say that ours was the first mixed band. Benny Goodman had not gotten into that yet” (Barnet with Dance 57–58). And as Barnet explains, it was Carter who “sold the Apollo [Theater] the idea of having me play the week instead of him, the first white band ever to play the theater. . . . It was one of the best decisions I ever made, for it began a long, profitable, and pleasant association at the theater” (61). At a return engagement at the Apollo in 1939, Barnet’s band again did very well and led to the band’s successful engagements “in the other black theaters, which became a kind of private gold mine for me” (94). According to Burton Peretti, “black-owned or –managed theaters in Harlem” for the most part refused to hire white bands; the exception was the Apollo Theater, which “would occasionally hire white bands, and it was not until 1934 that Charlie Barnet’s group began to play there regularly” (Peretti 192).

four-man saxophone section. And I learned a lot following Benny, listening to his solos, what he played against the background” (48).¹²⁰

But Pepper’s expression of warmth and belonging quickly turns to bitterness as he contrasts the hospitality he experienced on Central Avenue in the 1940s with the antagonism that he would later experience at the height of Black Power and Black Nationalism, a period which coincided with his lengthy incarcerations. About his earlier memories, Pepper writes

As soon as evening came people would be out on the streets, and most of the people were black, but nobody was going around in black leather jackets with naturals hating people. . . . There was no black power. I was sixteen, seventeen years old, white, innocent, and I’d wander around all over the place, at all hours of the night, all night long, and never once was accosted. I was never threatened. I was never challenged to a fight. I was never called a honkie. And I never saw any violence at all except for an occasional fight over a woman or something like that. It was a whole different trip than it got to be later on. (42)

Pepper’s descriptions of his various incarcerations reveal both the potential of interracial alliance for hope and healing during periods of tremendous discord, as well as the fragility of that alliance. In a particularly moving account, Pepper recalls that one

¹²⁰ Carter refused to take Pepper along with the band on a tour through the southern US, telling him that “it would be too dangerous” to take a mixed band down there. “I couldn’t understand why I had to leave the band,” Pepper recalls, but Carter showed his kindness by arranging an audition for Pepper with Stan Kenton’s “exciting new band” (49).

Sunday in the Los Angeles County Jail a black prisoner began to sing “Gloomy Sunday”; in Pepper’s experience, Sunday in prison stood apart from any other day:

Instead of all the anger and brutality . . . , on Sunday everyone becomes quiet, and you feel a presence, like, there *is* a God. . . . So it was Sunday, and all of a sudden I heard a voice. I walked out of my cell and looked down the walkway. I heard a voice and it’s singing, “Gloomy Sunday,” of all songs, man. It was a voice like usually only the black men have, almost a feminine voice, high, and very, very pretty, very sensual and warm and very much in tune, with a sweet sound and a nice vibrato, and it’s Stymie’s voice. (173, emphasis in original)

The beautiful tenor voice, Pepper recalls, quieted the prisoners—violent men “who’d done terrible crimes. And everyone was just sitting or standing or leaning on the bars of the tank, looking out the windows, looking out on the parking lot, out at the freeway going toward Hollywood, out at the free people” (174). Pepper was struck by the incongruity of the violence and the beauty together, recalling that

[s]ome black guys started humming along with Stymie, and it was so pretty and so sad that all the ugliness was forgotten and all the hatred, and for that short while we were, like, brothers. And that’s why I talk about Sunday and God and the beauty of music. Everything was wiped away, and we were just human beings sharing a common sadness. (174)

Yet Pepper admits that as a result of his experiences in prison, his own attitudes toward African Americans began to change. When he was at San Quentin in 1961, he

found that he was able to form friendships with Mexican inmates, but not with African Americans. He admits that he “started forming a dislike for them” that seemed, at least in part, fueled by their unwillingness to see him as an ally. He recalls thinking, “‘Here I am, a guy that played jazz, had black friends. Why wouldn’t they talk to me, help me out? Because I’m white? I’m not a Mexican. The Mexicans help me.’ They liked me, and anybody that likes you, man, you like them. People that don’t like you, pretty soon you don’t like them” (271). With obvious discomfort, he recalls the powerful symbol of black militancy and defiance, “the blacks’ sign—that raised fist that excluded me” (271).

Later during his stay at San Quentin, Pepper experienced the growing militancy of the African American prisoners, reporting incidents in which he and other white prisoners were taunted and threatened. “Everyone in prison is consumed with resentment and hatred,” he observes, “and I guess the most convenient target for your anger is some other race of people” (306). Although he claims to understand the causes of their anger, he seems bewildered by the antagonism directed against “whites and Mexicans who have been discriminated against, raised just as badly or worse than they were.” With palpable emotion, Pepper adds, “*We’re* suffering just as much” (306, emphasis in original). Quickly his hurt and puzzlement turn to fantasies of violence and revenge: “So you lock up in your cell and you’re thinking, ‘I wish I could kill all those people! I wish I could drop a bomb in the midst of them!’” (307). By the time Pepper left San Quentin in 1966, he had begun fantasizing about “forming a white vigilante committee. People who’d stick up for the white race and not lay down and take all this hate that’s coming from the

blacks” ; soon, though, he realized that he “had to some way get rid of my hatred or it was going to kill me” (338).

It is Pepper’s wife, Laurie—in her 1994 afterword in *Straight Life*—who offers the final assessment of her husband’s struggle to make sense of his status as a white musician in a period of intense Black Nationalism. According to Laurie, “in Art’s view he had been exiled, by color, from his own world, the world of jazz” (488). Laurie adds that although she first attributed his feelings that black musicians were slighting him to “chronic paranoia,” she later witnessed herself the “sarcasms” and “slights” to which he responded with such sensitivity. In her view, however, “Art’s last years were a period of reconciliation for him. The tension never ended, but during those years it seemed a lot of black musicians became kinder, more tolerant, and Art was always exceedingly grateful” (488). About the quartet Pepper formed with African American musicians George Cables, David Williams, and Carl Burnett, Laurie writes that they were “three black guys with whom Art had found accord” (489–90). Yet she recalls that, even in his relationship with them, sensitivities about race occasionally crept in: “One time, when Art was explaining to George how he wanted a tune to sound he kept using a phrase he often used—it meant funky—he said ‘down home.’ George got irritated, and he finally said, ‘What do you mean, “down home,” man? I’m from Brooklyn!’” (490).

Like Pepper and LaPorta, Don Asher also experienced the fragility of interracial alliances. Even at Coffee John’s, the black jazz club on Massachusetts Avenue where he had enjoyed considerable success in interracial jam sessions in the early 1950s, he learned that cordiality could quickly turn to hostility, especially “when the clientele turned over or

out-of-town musicians dropped by” (103). He would instantly perceive the tension in the room, the glances no longer friendly but “vigilant and somber. When I sat in, a standard tune would be called in a strange key at a murderous tempo—much faster than the regulars would ever kick it off” (103). He recounts a humiliating session during which he “floundered badly” when the other musicians called a tempo beyond his ability to manage. “It was a sobering reminder,” he writes, “that despite the previous air of congeniality and counsel, the barrier was still there and always would be—made up of divergent experiences, humor, temper, restraints—a skin-thin membrane tough and impervious as sheet metal” (104).

Asher also discovered limits to his attempts at a wider black cultural assimilation. One night, when he used African American vernacular to tell the club’s blues singer that he had played well in the jam session—“I scored a touchdown, baby, you didn’t even see the game”—she reproached him for his “nigger talk” and urged him to “be respectful” (104). The experience forced Asher to acknowledge the presumptions he had been making about his right to assume a kind of black identity in his speech as well as in his musical persona, and his need to behave with greater respect, or, at the very least, discretion.¹²¹

¹²¹ According to Asher, “But she was right, the rhythms and idioms of the black culture were permeating my speech patterns as well as the texture of my playing. ‘Ain’t that a bitch,’ I might say, registering surprise, wonder or delight. I no longer departed, I ‘cut out.’ A ‘nickel’ was five dollars, and a ‘dime’ ten. I wore a ‘sky’ or ‘lid,’ not a hat. Someone trying to get my attention was ‘pulling my coat,’ and a musician playing strong and confidently with an element of grandstanding was ‘showing feathers’ or ‘fluffing out his feathers’; if I were great impressed by his performance I ‘wiggged.’ With reference to women, ‘ace broad’ or ‘fine bitch’ were expressions of the highest approbation, but

Perhaps the incident that best exemplifies Asher's experience of interracial hostility as well as alliance occurred in the aftermath of his first experience with marijuana, to which he was introduced by his musician friends at Coffee John's. When the effects of the drug left him unable to drive home, he was forced to return the next day to find his car, only to be confronted by two African American youths who demanded money for cigarettes. Asher handed them the little change he had and then made the mistake of telling them he was a pianist:

The small boy brought something out of the pouch of his sweatshirt, pressed a thumb to it—there was a faint whirring sound—and drew it carefully along the back of my right hand; I thought I heard a soft tearing, like tissue paper parting. . . . With a sigh I dropped my eyes. There was a thin red line across the knuckles, the skin parted delicately like paper. I reclined against the fender of the car, watching the blood suddenly bloom, incredibly bright, bubbling and winking like a ruby chain in artificial light. (109)

At that moment Everett and Wesley, two of Asher's friends from Coffee John's, drove by; as Asher explained to Wesley what happened, Everett cut them off, telling them to “[s]top the damn jabbering and let's go, . . . we got to get this nigger to a doctor” (109). In the car, sandwiched between his friends, Asher recalls that

Charles had better be careful in what context and with what inflection he flaunted the argot” (105).

a tangle of emotions engulfed me. Bewilderment and wonder that the locus of the music that was my breath and heartbeat should also be the source of animosity and venom. It would take courage to venture to this part of town again; the barrier had been raised a notch, made more forbidding, fortified . . . But even as the pain took hold of my hand with the car's jounce and rattle, my spirits began to lift, a small glow of assurance warmed me as Everett's words echoed far back in my mind . . . *Let's go, we got to get this nigger to a doctor*. Within the urgency, the humorous play and idiom, was a suggestion of alliance, kinship, acceptance. (109–10, emphasis in original)

While Asher's moving account reveals his success in gaining a measure of acceptance at Coffee John's, it also reveals the limits of that acceptance, both within Boston's black jazz community itself and within the wider social and cultural sphere of the black neighbourhood in which he attempted to assimilate. "I never scored the big touchdown," he admits, "never made it all the way through to the other side—few of us whiteys do" (110). And yet he seems reluctant to end the story there, but rather to recall another experience that occurred many years later—when he was "house pianist at the hungry i in San Francisco"—that *does* indeed seem to show him on "the other side" (110):

A middle-aged black man approached me in the bar following an entr'acte medley of Duke Ellington tunes. He said he had enjoyed the music and that I must have grown up or spent a lot of time around Harlem to play like

that. I told him I had been born and bred in eastern Massachusetts. “Okay,” he said, “but somewhere along the line you must’ve eaten some okra and sweet-potato pie.” (110)¹²²

If Don Asher’s account of his attempts to cross over into African American musical and cultural terrain—to transform himself from outsider to insider—is perhaps more dramatic and emotional than some others explored in this chapter, I would argue that all of them, to various degrees, reveal this impulse in their descriptions of their jazz learning experiences. The following chapter will attempt to describe another manifestation of this trope of outside and inside, this time through the examination of four Jewish American jazz autobiographers, whose outsider status, as their accounts will reveal, is both multidirectional and impermanent.

¹²² Later in *Notes from a Battered Grand*, Asher reprints a complementary review from the *San Francisco Chronicle* on his engagement as house pianist at a local club called Casablanca; in the reviewer’s opinion, Asher “may not be Sam, . . . but this scribe detected a decided Negro rhythmic influence in his lively excursions” (211).

Chapter 3: Representations of Identity in Jewish Jazz Autobiography

This chapter examines the autobiographies of Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Mezz Mezzrow, and Max Kaminsky with a particular interest in what they reveal about their complex and multi-faceted identities as second-generation Jewish Americans whose lives and careers brought them in intimate contact with African American music and society. In many respects, these autobiographies offer a particularly rich palette for comparison: all four autobiographers were born within about a decade of one another—from the end of the nineteenth century to the close of the first decade of the twentieth—during a period in which Jewish Americans were regarded in fundamental and concrete ways to be, as Karen Brodtkin argues, “‘not-quite-white,’ ‘not-bright-white,’ or perhaps ‘conditionally white’” (60).¹²³ All four were the children of Russian Jewish immigrants who had come to America in the 1880s and 1890s, settling eventually in urban centers—Mezzrow’s and Goodman’s families in Chicago, Shaw’s on the Lower East Side, and Kaminsky’s in Brockton, Massachusetts and then Roxbury, a Boston neighborhood.¹²⁴ With the

¹²³ Mezzrow was born in 1899, Kaminsky in 1908, Goodman in 1909, and Shaw in 1910.

¹²⁴ Although Shaw’s biographer, Tom Nolan, states that Shaw’s mother was “born in Austria and raised in Sambor, near the shifting Polish-Austrian border,” in his

exception of Mezzrow, whose family was middle class, the others were all from working-class families who struggled to stay afloat with the types of low-wage, often menial occupations available to them as newly arrived eastern European immigrants.¹²⁵

It is no great surprise, then, that these autobiographers expend considerable energy recounting childhoods in which their experience of being Jewish and living at a distance—both geographically and psychologically—from Protestant white America seems central to their identity formation. And yet the language and imagery of these texts also suggests that their identities are far from fixed or static; most notably, that their intense focus on themselves as ethnic Jews—as “other”—is complemented by, or even in some instances replaced by, a more general self-identification as “white,” and then, to varying degrees, by a longing to be black, or at least to experience immersion in African American culture. This process is facilitated by their experiences of city life (and in the case of Shaw and Kaminsky, of suburban life, as well), and by their attraction to jazz music and the jazz nightlife—all of which exposes them to the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of American life.

Over the last two decades, scholars of Jewish and whiteness studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the historically fluid and mutable concepts of race, ethnicity, and whiteness in the United States, including the changing ways in which Jewish Americans—along with other European immigrants—were

autobiography Shaw refers only to his father’s Russian-Jewish heritage (Nolan 1; Shaw 135).

¹²⁵ For a brief period Shaw’s parents ran a successful dressmaking business, but soon the business failed, along with several other business ventures that followed (Nolan 2–8).

designated and designated themselves with respect to whiteness, and the implications of that designation on relationships between Jews and African Americans. In *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, Karen Brodtkin suggests that

the history of Jews in the United States is a history of racial change that provides useful insights on race in America. Prevailing classifications at a particular time have sometimes assigned us to the white race, and at other times have created an off-white race for Jews to inhabit. Those changes in our racial assignment have shaped the ways in which American Jews who grew up in different eras have constructed their ethnoracial identities.

(Brodtkin 1)¹²⁶

Although the historical record provides important context by which to consider accounts of self-identity by these Jewish jazz autobiographers, it is instructive to listen for the ways in which their individual voices both support and disrupt that record. For example, does Jewishness as a kind of racialized or “probationary” whiteness emerge in their descriptions of their immigrant families or neighbourhoods, or of themselves as

¹²⁶ Brodtkin’s study is both historical and sociological as well as a personal record of her own family’s experience of living as Jews in America during the twentieth century. She argues that while her generation “grew up as white, middle-class suburbanites, unaffected by the barriers that kept our parents out of certain jobs and neighborhoods,” her parents and grandparents “lived in a time when Jews were not white” (2). Her analysis of the latter is particularly helpful in contextualizing the experiences of the Jewish autobiographers in this chapter. Brodtkin distinguishes between “ethnoracial assignment”—hegemonic classifications by which groups of various racial and ethnic origins are positioned within society—and “ethnoracial identity”—which is constructed by individuals under the influence of their particular ethnoracial assignment (3).

children in the early years of the 20th century? Do they convey an understanding of Jewishness as ethnicity—that is, as white according to the American black-white divide but as culturally distinct from mainstream Anglo-Saxon whiteness? If so, might that reflect the mid-20th-century perspective from which they were writing and publishing their autobiographies?¹²⁷ As we listen to their stories, then, these distinctions are worth paying attention to.

Michael Alexander's *Jazz Age Jews* (2001) and Melnick's *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song* (1999) offer additional ways to consider a number of themes pertinent to this chapter, including relations between Jews and African Americans in large urban centers in the early decades of the 20th century, and the role of popular culture in facilitating and defining those relationships.¹²⁸ Yet in certain respects these studies are at least as important for illuminating the differences between the “jazz age” musicians that are their focus—Al Jolson, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Fanny Brice, and Sophie Tucker, among others—and the jazz musicians who are our focus here. For although Alexander's and Melnick's accounts of Jewish blackface performers, composers, and songwriters of the 1910s and 1920s demonstrate connections (as well as differences) between Jewish and African American music, culture, and history, their Jewish subjects retained generally

¹²⁷ Goodman's autobiography was published in 1939, Mezzrow's in 1946, Shaw's in 1952, and Kaminsky's in 1963.

¹²⁸ Melnick's account of Jewish White Negroism, which will be examined in greater detail below, includes two of the autobiographers under discussion here.

closer ties to Jewish musical, business, and social circles than did the Jewish musicians under discussion in this chapter.

In *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, Eric Goldstein focuses on those groups and individuals most invested in articulating some sense of Jewish particularity. For this reason, although he explores representative views from a wide range of Jewish spokespersons, his attention to the cultural sphere is limited mainly to literature, plays, and movies that comment on themes directly related to Jewish identity, including Jewish racialism, intermarriage, and relations between Jews and African Americans. Jazz, in fact, gets only passing mention, and his discussion of Jewish musicians and entertainers in popular music focuses chiefly, as do the studies mentioned above, on the earlier generation of Al Jolson and Irving Berlin, rather than on the jazz musicians under consideration here.

It would be an error, however, to define these Jewish jazz musicians simply as assimilated Americans with little or no connection to their Jewish identity. In the first place, the term assimilation in this context implies a move into white mainstream society; the accounts of these Jewish jazz autobiographers, however, illustrate as powerful a move into African American musical and cultural spheres. Moreover, as we will see, these musicians retained important, if ambivalent, connections to their Jewish heritage, connections that manifest themselves in their careers and personal lives.

The critical point here is that Jewish musicians from the late 1920s and thereafter who were forging careers in jazz—as opposed to careers in the popular or sweet bands of Paul Whiteman and Ted Lewis, among others—were forced to negotiate an African

American musical and cultural space that the Jewish entertainers of the minstrel and vaudeville eras by and large were not. As a group, then, these Jewish jazz autobiographers open a new path for exploration of second-generation Jewish Americans, with particular attention to their accounts of immersion in African American music and culture.

I: An Unending Search for Identity: Artie Shaw's *The Trouble With Cinderella*

“My background was Russian Jewish,” Artie Shaw said in a radio interview late in his life. “I think blues has a great deal of affinity with the Jewish experience—as it did with the black experience. A minority group is very hip to what the blues are about” (qtd. in White 206). The image suggested by Shaw in his radio interview—particularly regarding his relationship to his Jewish identity and the significance of that identity on his development as a musician—is in stark contrast to that which he draws in his 1952 autobiography, *The Trouble With Cinderella: An Outline of Identity*; as such, it offers important evidence of the turmoil and confusion that was Shaw’s ultimate experience of identity, and which is at the heart of his self-representation in his autobiography.

As an account of a life, Shaw’s *Cinderella* is in many respects more impressionistic than factual; Shaw seems more often concerned with exploring his inner state in the aftermath of his own experience with psychoanalysis than with sharing details of his personal life and career. For example, he offers little insight regarding his own jazz education, his interactions with his own musicians, other big band leaders, Billie Holiday (who toured with his band for nine months), or his opinions about jazz in the various

periods in which he writes.¹²⁹ In addition, he displays little interest—in contrast to many of the autobiographers in this study—in exploring the African American origins of jazz and his own relationship to that tradition.

Instead, Shaw begins with the story of Cinderella as a useful model for dissecting the failures of 20th-century American capitalistic striving, in which happiness is a guaranteed consequence of a particular path of social and economic climbing. In personal terms, Shaw's own meteoric rise to fame and fortune as a big band leader in the late 1930s seemed to have the opposite effect, leaving him both artistically unfulfilled and emotionally unstable, to the point where he abruptly abandoned his band and quit the music business; in his words, “the trouble with Cinderella ... as a working concept for living ... is that nobody lives happily ever after” (6–7). In Shaw's experience, success (which he spells *Succe\$\$*—“to spell it the way I think makes more sense in this context”) and happiness turn out not to be static concepts, but rather like the experience of “a dog chasing a locomotive” (8). His central concern in his autobiography, therefore, is his attempt to make sense of his “own version of the Cinderella Myth,” in which he played “the leading role” (14).

In the brief foreword accompanying the original 1952 publication, Shaw informs the reader “that a great many of my present attitudes stem from a rather special set of circumstances in my past,” yet it is not until Chapter 3 that he begins to divulge the

¹²⁹ Shaw was an exceptional clarinetist—demonstrating a rich, full sound and astonishing technical facility in all ranges of his instrument—as well as one of the most successful and respected bandleaders of the Swing Era. He abandoned the music business when he was still a young man to take up writing, drafting his autobiography, between 1950 and 1952, while he was living on a farm in Pine Plains, N.Y.

precise nature of these circumstances, when he refers for the first time to his identity as the man the public knows as Artie Shaw; while he acknowledges the benefits of this identity, he is also quick to distance himself from it:

I feel I should make it quite clear once and for all that this Artie Shaw fellow has very little to do with me. Although he has supported me for a number of years, sometimes in a manner to which I have not even *yet* become accustomed, still I'd be the last person on earth to tell you I know him. He's a name to me, that's about all, in almost the same way he may be a name to you. There our relationship ends. (16)

So who is this person submerged beneath the assumed identity of Artie Shaw? In Chapter 5, Shaw offers more clues. He tells us that he was born on New York City's Lower East Side in 1910, at which time his parents ran a small dressmaking business that in the beginning they ran out of their home, but as they prospered they moved to a loft "where they employed a number of people and started to go places in the world of women's ready-to-wear garments" (22). Clearly their fortunes did not last long, and when Shaw was six or seven his parents were forced to declare bankruptcy, at which point they decided to leave New York City in search of a "new start" (23).

For Artie Shaw, his family's move from the Lower East Side to New Haven, Connecticut would precipitate an emotional and existential crisis from which, by his own account, he would never entirely recover. That is because for the first time he was forced to confront his "otherness," specifically his identity as a Jew living in "a more or less predominantly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant community such as New Haven" (23). From his

current perspective, he writes, he now understands that “any Jewish kid” encountering life “in the average American town” would come face-to-face with his outsider status, that is, his position as “some kind of undesirable alien” (23). But in Shaw’s case, his experiences of anti-Semitism at his school in New Haven left “a deep and lasting scar” (24) which “had more to do with shaping the course and direction of my entire life than any other single thing that has happened to me, before or since” (26).¹³⁰

His childhood surname—Arshawsky, as he now reveals for the first time—was the source of his first crisis of identity in New Haven. For while the Lower East Side was predominantly inhabited by Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants and their families, so that “any kid growing up [there] is apt to find himself playing with lots of kids with long, foreign-sounding names,” on his first day in school in New Haven he experienced the humiliation of being laughed at when he announced his name in class. “For some strange reason,” Shaw writes, “it appeared that they were laughing at me, although I couldn’t figure out anything I had done to cause it” (27). When the teacher reprimanded the children for their laughter, Shaw’s discomfort only increased. “I couldn’t understand any of it, neither the laughter nor the reason for it, nor, for that matter, what the kids were

¹³⁰ Karen Brodtkin describes her family’s move in the late 1940s from a Jewish, working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn to the suburbs of Long Island as part of the upward mobility that was central to the history of the Jews in the United States during the twentieth century; in Brodtkin’s case, however, unlike in Artie Shaw’s, her experiences of the city and the suburbs were that both were “community-based cultures,” and that the “suburban community was every bit as Jewish in its makeup as the one in which [her parents] had grown up” (8). Shaw’s family moved to the suburbs about thirty years earlier than did Brodtkin’s, in a period in which Jews were far less assimilated into US culture than they would be by the 1940s.

being scolded for. All I knew was that it set me apart in some curious way; and I didn't like it" (28).

Although Shaw claims that the other students eventually got accustomed to his name, this incident, along with another that occurred in the same period, would leave indelible scars. His previous experience of the insect world on New York's Lower East Side had been limited to "a cross-sectional diagram of an anthill" he found at school one day, as well as the cockroaches and bedbugs that cohabited the tenement houses in which his family had dwelled; as a result, his discovery of a real anthill in the playground of his school in New Haven was "one of the high spots of my young and rather bewildered life up to that time" (29). In his glee at his discovery he interrupted a ball game in progress:

Naturally, anything important enough to break up a ball game must be pretty damn important, so it wasn't more than a few moments before I was surrounded by a whole slew of kids, big and little, all staring down intently at where I was pointing. I began hollering again for them to "lookit what I discovered," continuing to point down at the tiny mound of sand. (30)

The children responded, first with incomprehension and then with derisive laughter, until finally to Shaw it seemed as if "[t]he whole yard rang with it" (31). An older boy led a mocking chorus of "Columbus Arshawsky" as Shaw broke down and cried, "and it seemed forever that I stood there with all those kids dancing and shouting and circling round and round me, yelling and jeering in a loud, unending insane chant" (31-32). For the ringleader of the schoolyard bullies, Shaw's wonderment at an anthill provided further evidence of his "foreignness" (i.e., his Jewishness), and he began to

question Shaw about his participation in the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer. When Shaw admitted that he said the prayer along with his classmates, the older boy threatened him with harm if he did not stop. As Shaw ran away, the children hurled jeers and stones at him, leaving him to conclude that "[t]he stones hurt some; but this was one time when the names hurt far more" (33).

For the seven-year-old Arthur Arshawsky, his first blatant experience of anti-Semitism left him badly shaken and uncomprehending, so that he finally decided that the problem must reside with him:¹³¹

That was when I came to the realization that there was something terribly wrong with me, that I was "different" from these other kids, and that for some reason I was this strange kind of creature called "Jew" (and now "kike" and "sheeny" and "Christ-killer" as well) and that there was absolutely nothing I or anyone else could do about it as long as I lived, for this was not a thing that could be changed, as most things could be, when you "grew up" and "became a man." (33)

In a dramatic juxtaposition, Shaw links his experience "of pain and suffering" in New Haven to a passage in which he refers to the rape, torture, and murder of "some *six million human beings*, men, women, and *children*" in the Nazi gas chambers during

¹³¹ Shaw reveals his full childhood name for the first time in Chapter 7, when he describes the "zigzag path" that took "a shy, introspective little Jewish kid named Arthur Arshawsky into a ... jazz-band leading, clarinet-tooting, jitterbug-surrounded Symbol of American Youth" (37). Later, however, he adds that his Hebrew birth name, as given to him by the attending rabbi at his circumcision, was actually Abraham Isaac Arshawsky, but that his mother decided to call him Arthur (92).

World War II, thus conveying a general despair about humankind that seems undoubtedly connected to his own childhood experiences of anti-Semitism (34, emphasis in original). In his words, “I’ve been told any number of times that there has been great progress made. But somehow I find it difficult to believe” (34).

In concluding this portion of his narrative, Shaw emphasizes the stark consequences of his early encounters with the “disease” of discrimination; in particular, he believes that as a result of his experiences he “underwent certain inner changes resulting in tremendous drives toward conflicting goals” (38). One of these goals returns Shaw to his Cinderella theme, best represented by his symbol, \$ucce\$\$, in which he was driven to achieve wealth, public adulation, and a particular social prestige; yet at the same time he experienced “an enormous need to *belong*, to have some feeling of roots, to become part of a community” (38, emphasis in original).

By the time Shaw began attending New Haven High School, his feelings of alienation, of being “an outsider, an out-group member” had become so intense that he was driven to find “some quick way out of a life that was daily becoming more and more intolerable to me” (52–53). He became entranced with the vaudeville shows at Poli’s Palace Theatre in New Haven, discovered ways to get in without paying, and spent hours observing the entertainers on stage, until, one day, he saw for the first time a “small orchestra” accompanying an act and featuring a saxophonist. For Shaw, the saxophonist represented “the ideal version of any Good Life I could imagine,” and in that moment, he decided that music would provide him with the way out that he had been seeking (56).

Shaw's determination to learn first the saxophone and later the clarinet involved a single-minded devotion and discipline over many years in which he routinely practiced "six or seven hours" a day, stopping only "because my teeth ached and the inside of my lower lip was ragged and cut from the constant pressure of the mouthpiece and reed" (64). His drive to learn to play was fueled by his desire to escape the pain of his experiences with anti-Semitism in New Haven. "This saxophone was my Magic Lantern," he writes, "my Open Sesame! To a new life—my way of achieving status, earning a living, getting away from a place where I had so far only been taught to feel like an outcast, a despised underdog, a Pariah" (64).¹³²

In Shaw's narrative, the attitude of his parents toward him and his chosen profession looms large. References to them recur throughout *Cinderella*, and considered in their entirety, they offer important insights into cross-generational relationships within a Jewish immigrant family in turn-of-the-century New York. Perhaps more importantly, Shaw's response to his family's ethnic Jewish identity illuminates his decision to attempt a new identity as Artie Shaw, virtuoso "white" swing clarinetist, and perhaps to his ultimate inability to find peace within that identity. At the heart of Shaw's narrative about

¹³² Historian Burton W. Peretti argues that Shaw's decision to become a musician in response to his experience of anti-Semitism "[i]n one sense . . . had less to do with musical inspiration (although he would become a fine, important musician) than with the general ethnic passion to overcome marginality and to assimilate to what each immigrant's child perceived as being 'America.'" He also notes that, like many of the white Chicagoans, "the 'America' [Shaw] sought was not suburbia, but the urban jazz world" (90).

his childhood, as we will see, is his effort to hide from his Jewishness, even as he acknowledges that desire to be inherently unattainable and even “preposterous” (95).¹³³

Although Shaw’s father appears early in *Cinderella*, it is not until well along that Shaw pauses to offer a fuller portrait of the person he admits to know “very little about” (135). What he does remember about his father, who had been dead for about twenty years when Shaw began writing his autobiography, remains an obvious source of pain. “My earliest memories,” he writes, “are of a surly, disgruntled, and, on the whole, miserable man,” a parent whom Shaw as a young child learned to fear, until his fear evolved “into a kind of rebellious dislike” that dominated their relationship until his father one day simply left his wife and son and moved to California (135).

In hindsight, Shaw adopted “two distinct and separate attitudes toward [his] father”; the first was “almost entirely emotional” and evolved from his early feelings of fear. The second, based on an “intellectual re-evaluation of him,” was more forgiving, for it acknowledged his father’s considerable difficulties in adjusting to his new life in America, difficulties that made it impossible for him to realize his potential and that left him to die alone and “under wretched and poverty-stricken circumstances” (136).

Shaw offers vivid recollections of his father in New York, in the period in which his family was still intact; he recalls his intense presence in their house, with his heavy footsteps and “loud voice” and the “guttural Yiddish” that he spoke with “a thick Russian

¹³³ See, for example, Shaw’s epigraph for Chapter Thirteen, in which he quotes author Carey McWilliams: “. . . until their survival as a people is an assured fact, no person of Jewish origin is spiritually free to disclaim his Jewishness. He simply cannot make a free choice. For one thing, non-Jewish elements will not permit him to do so; but, more important, his own conscience will not sanction such a choice” (93).

accent,” an accent that frightened him but that also fascinated him, so that he tried to “imitate the sound of it” (136). Yet in contrast to his father’s frightening physical presence stands Shaw’s memory of his parents’ relationship—both in their working and personal lives—as one in which his mother was dominating and capable, while his father seemed powerless and a failure. As Shaw recalls, his mother had the previous training and experience in “the business of women’s clothes,” so that in their business venture together she led and he followed—though not willingly, for Shaw remembers his father making several unsuccessful attempts to find other kinds of employment to escape his wife’s domination (136).

The imbalance of power in his parents’ relationship led Shaw as a child to experience feelings of resentment toward his father, both for his failure to earn enough to support the family and for the consequences of that failure for his mother, who had to work day and night in order to make ends meet for her family (137). As he admits, the move to New Haven only served to highlight

the contrast between [my father] and the fathers of other kids I knew. . . . Not only was he unable to make a living, not only did he not “go to the office” as most other kids’ fathers did, but now he became, by contrast with these other fathers, a “foreigner.” He was “a Jew,” he spoke with a heavy accent, which—at the time I was first coping with the problem of Jewishness—seemed shameful and embarrassing. (137–38)

His parents also differed in their attitude about music, and about their son’s efforts to learn to play. While his mother had previously pushed him to study piano (with limited

success), she now tolerated his obsessive saxophone practicing with what Shaw describes as “a determined stoicism” (61). His father, however, did not hide his contempt for what he regarded as a frivolous and self-indulgent pursuit, relenting only when his son, at age fourteen, won the first prize (and five dollars) at an Amateur Night show. This, in Shaw’s view, was because his father, “a practical man, with an earthy, peasantlike approach to money ... had developed a grudging and cynical respect for anyone who had mastered the knack of picking up a dollar by any means whatsoever” (62). Although he later invited his son to play his “blower” for his cronies at their weekly pinochle game, his invitation seemed as much intended to ridicule his son’s achievement as to praise it.¹³⁴

It was soon after this experience that Shaw’s father left his family and moved to California, leaving his son—who from the time he was fifteen was already earning a good living playing in dance bands—as his mother’s chief source of support. In his characteristically introspective and analytical manner, Shaw admits that his early fear of his father caused him to develop “an exaggerated feeling of love for my mother” (138); yet these feelings changed over time, particularly after he met up with his father briefly in Hollywood when he was eighteen, an experience that caused him to reevaluate basic

¹³⁴ As Shaw recalls, after he had finished playing, his father turned to his cronies and said in Yiddish, “Five dollars the boy gets for playing this—you hear it absolutely free,” before adding, “*America gonniff*”; the literal translation of *gonniff* is “thief,” perhaps conveying the elder Shaw’s feelings about his newly adopted country. His son supplies his own translation of his father’s expression: “Very well, then—if people are stupid enough to pay good money to listen to crazy noises coming out of a blower, let them do it, but don’t expect me to take it seriously, because I know better” (63).

assumptions he had made about his parents' relationship.¹³⁵ By that time Shaw realized that his mother's attempt "to assert her parental authority" was entirely at odds with the reality of his position as breadwinner and "*de facto* ... 'head of the household'" (153). Even so, their tumultuous relationship endured several more years of shared residences, and even after Shaw finally moved out he continued to support her.

There is nothing in Shaw's extended account of his childhood to suggest that his own family, or the large and vibrant Jewish community on New York's Lower East Side where he spent the first seven years of his life, satisfied his needs for belonging or answered his most fundamental questions concerning the purpose and direction of his life. To the contrary, his Jewishness, particularly after his experiences of anti-Semitism in New Haven, became increasingly a source of discomfort and shame, to the degree that, when he was fifteen, he made the decision to change the most obvious sign of his Jewishness—that is, his name. Although Shaw makes perfunctory attempts to explain his decision—for example, that Arshawsky was "too long ... unwieldy" and unpronounceable, in retrospect he admits that

That's right—I was ashamed of my name. Not only that, I was ashamed of being a Jew. There you have it. And it's only because I am no longer ashamed, no longer ashamed of being Jewish, *and no longer even ashamed*

¹³⁵ Shaw was in Hollywood, where he had been flown on an all-expenses-paid trip after winning first prize in a national essay-writing, song-naming contest on the topic of the National Air Races. To Shaw's surprise, his father greeted him at the airport and asked him to try to convince his mother to join him in California, a request that surprised Shaw, for it was his "first inkling that their separation had not been entirely a matter of his having 'deserted' my mother and me" (139).

of having been ashamed, that I can speak about it now, after having buried it away for so many years. (91, emphasis in original)

With one dramatic move, then, in what is essentially a second-generation, Jewish American's attempt to "pass," or at least to shed his hyphenated identity and become simply "American," Abraham Isaac Arshawsky became Artie Shaw. "[T]ake a good look at both those names," autobiographer Shaw urges the reader:

Then ask yourself whether a fellow named Art Shaw could possibly grow up to be "the same" as another kid named Arthur Arshawsky, or Abraham Isaac Arshawsky. I think you'll see quite a difference in predictability. For the latter is obviously a Jewish kid, or at any rate some kind of a "foreigner," wouldn't you say? As for this new kid we'll be dealing with from here on— let's see now. . . . Art Shaw. Doesn't *sound* very "foreign." Certainly doesn't sound much like a Jewish kid either, does it? (92, emphasis in original)¹³⁶

When Shaw pauses briefly to consider his appearance, he concludes that he could in fact pass as "almost any nationality," leaving him as the quintessential "American kid," adding that whatever Shaw "sounds" like—perhaps either Irish or English—"[a]t least

¹³⁶ In his interview with biographer Tom Nolan, Shaw cites economic factors as well as questions of belief in his decision to change his name. "As 'Arthur Arshawsky,' I would never have got to first base. . . . In those days, you had to be a Gentile in America, to work. I know it was embarrassing to be a Jew. But I *wasn't*, and I could see no point in going around admitting to being something that I didn't *work* at, that I didn't *believe* in. I don't know if that's rationalization or what it is, but—if somebody said, 'What is a Jew?' I couldn't have answered. I didn't have their religion; I didn't belong to any Zionist movements; anything that had to do with being Jewish, I had nothing to do with. To this *day*, that's true" (Nolan 11, emphasis in original).

he's not a Jew or a 'foreigner,' so that's all right" (92). But quickly Shaw doubts his own assertion—"Or is it?"—and then warns the reader that the answer to the question remains to be seen (92).

This question resounds in the background as Shaw recounts his experiences in the various bands he played with during his teen years; without exception, these memories are marked by expressions of discontent, endless striving, and above all, a desperate sense of loneliness, all of which seem clearly linked to his discomfort with his Jewish identity. His search for friendship and belonging—and his seeming inability to experience through friends or community more than a temporary respite from his loneliness—emerges as the dominant theme of this section, and perhaps even of his narrative as a whole.

As stated earlier, "shame" and "guilt" are keywords in Shaw's descriptions of his complex feelings about his Jewishness, as well as in his descriptions of his attempts to hide from his identity as a Jew. For example, for a brief period when he was still fifteen he ran away from home, joining a group of older teenagers who had formed a band and traveling with them on a brief, unsuccessful venture as a touring dance band. When he quickly discovered that "a number of them ... had no great love for Jews," he "lied" to them in response to their questions regarding his nationality. "I don't remember all the particulars," Shaw writes, "and perhaps that's because I don't specially like reliving this preposterous attempt to run away from myself, or that part of myself which I had been taught to believe was unacceptable to the world" (95). Moreover, Shaw admits that that his pose as "a gentile" left him almost believing in the fiction he had created, except for "an underlying sense of guilt" that haunted him (95).

Later he describes the significant friendship he forged, during his time in Cleveland, with another talented teenager—pianist, composer, and arranger Claude Thornhill—with whom Shaw lived during the time they played together in Austin Wylie’s orchestra. Undoubtedly, their mutual interest in composition and arranging was a significant factor in their friendship, but beyond that, Shaw explains that Thornhill “was the first gentile I had ever known who somehow made it possible for me to speak easily and naturally about being Jewish,” and that prior to meeting him he had felt “an enormous gulf between myself and all gentiles” (148–49). But even though Shaw describes his continuing warm feelings for Thornhill, with whom at the time of writing he had only infrequent contact, he adds that “contacts of this sort . . . are usually far too brief. The life I’ve led has been largely a ships-passing-in-the-night kind of life” (150).

In 1930, Shaw went on tour as a member of Irving Aaronson and his Commanders, a nationally recognized dance band. During the band’s brief time in Chicago, Shaw was drawn to the jazz world of Chicago’s South Side, which he describes as “one of the foremost jazz conservatories in the world” (196). It is striking that this account, which occurs approximately halfway through Shaw’s four-hundred-page autobiography, is his first real discussion of jazz, as well as his first mention of African American musicians.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Shaw’s only previous mention of African Americans was in reference to his first experience in a whorehouse, when he and another young man—both virgins at the time—set out in search of “one of these joints” to bring an end to the hazing they were enduring from their band members. As Shaw writes, “some Negro we had picked up somewhere in our wanderings” led them to the whorehouse, in the kitchen of which “sat a giant of a Negro gravely sharpening a large axe on a stone held between his knees!” (158–59).

Initially, though, he skirts the mention of race directly; instead he simply names the black musicians—Earl Hines, Louis Armstrong, and Jimmy Noone—who played in the South Side cafés, and the many white musicians—including Bix Beiderbecke and Eddie Condon, Benny Goodman and Bud Freeman, among others—who came to listen. But then Shaw makes his one direct reference to race in this entire section, as he explains that every night after his job with the Aaronson band had ended, he “would head for the Negro district to sit in with one of the colored bands,” or to take part in sessions with other players who, like himself, “were making their living . . . in ‘respectable’ bands, but who had to get away once in a while and ‘play some jazz.’” (197). In this way, Shaw writes, he “began to understand the curious musical category called Jazz. For these were the men who were setting the pattern . . . from which the rest of the jazz musicians in the country were taking their lead” (198).

This passage and the one that follows, in which Shaw provides details about some of the “white” Chicago players with whom he played in these nightly sessions, are notable in several respects. To begin with, Shaw makes little distinction between the black and white players in the jazz world he is describing, beyond their individual gifts as musicians. He mentions his “sitting in” with Earl Hines’ band alongside his sessions with these other musicians as if they all, black and non-black together, were equally responsible for this evolution of “a musical pattern” (198).

While the story seems intended to show Shaw’s discomfort with a certain form of masculine performance—he in fact did not have sex with the prostitute, but stayed with her long enough to make the artifice convincing—his description of the African American men in the whorehouse is crude and seemingly even fantastical.

Furthermore, as soon as Shaw begins to write about himself in relation to the black musicians on Chicago's South Side, his own self-identification seems to shift from that of ethnic-Jewish outsider to white American. To be clear, the shift is implied and indirect, for Shaw never mentions his own race or ethnicity directly here, or that of the other Chicago players with whom he played. Instead, he simply names these players, and the order of his naming suggests that they are being distinguished along a black/white racial divide. Thus, he places himself, alongside other Jewish musicians Benny Goodman and Ben Pollack, in the same paragraph as Eddie Condon and Bix Beiderbecke, yet separated from his earlier mention of African American musicians Hines, Armstrong, and Noone.

And when Shaw then attempts to define what he and these other musicians were playing at these sessions, he emphasizes the national, rather than the racial, origins of the music:

Still, whether the word is “bop” or “swing” or just plain “jazz,” the general underlying principle is the same. It’s a bunch of guys playing music together, improvising, exchanging ideas, “digging” one another, picking up a “riff” here and a phrase there; . . . It’s a developing, living form of folk music, . . . one of the few truly American contributions to music itself.
(200)¹³⁸

¹³⁸ After this brief glimpse of his experience of Chicago's vibrant jazz life in the late 1920s, Shaw turns quickly to his simultaneous discovery of another area of “serious” music, that is, his introduction to the music of Stravinsky and Debussy in a record shop in Chicago. In this account, Shaw does not seem to privilege one of these discoveries—jazz

Following his experience in Chicago, Shaw traveled with the Aaronson band to New York, where, shortly after he arrived, he struck and killed a pedestrian while driving; when the plaintiffs sued Shaw and his mother for damages, Shaw was forced to remain in New York, where he was prevented from working due to the residency requirements of the musicians' union. These circumstances—which forced Shaw's mother to work as a seamstress “to keep us in groceries” (216)—only increased his sense of loneliness and despair, which he describes as lasting for months until, in an unexpected turn of events, he found himself in an entirely new situation, one that would have significant ramifications for his future in jazz: “At length,” he writes, “through some accident I can't remember, I found my way to Harlem; and there I found temporary haven, a place to light for a while. Also, I found a friend” (223).

The friend was Willie “The Lion” Smith, one of Harlem's best-known jazz pianists; in an autobiography that, to this point, has been striking for its sparse reference to the black jazz world, Shaw's lengthy description of his close relationship with Smith is particularly noteworthy.¹³⁹ He writes that he returned “night after night” to Pod's and Jerry's, the well-known Harlem club where The Lion held court, explaining that he “had never heard any piano playing like that before in my life” (224). Although he introduces

or classical music—over the other; each seems central to his emerging musical persona as a swing bandleader (200–03).

¹³⁹ My observation here is in agreement with Jeffrey Melnick, who draws attention to Shaw's seemingly dramatic transformation from his restless searching to escape the pain of anti-Semitism to his seemingly complete adoption of, in Shaw's words, “Negro values and attitudes, and . . . the Negro out-group point of view not only about music but life in general” (qtd. in Melnick 137). As Melnick notes, “Up until this point of his conversion narrative Shaw has mentioned one actual, living and breathing African American—his guide to a brothel” (137).

Smith as “a Negro player,” Shaw thereafter betrays a racial consciousness without explicitly mentioning race, instead referring only to Smith’s “dark fingers” as they “ran nimbly over the chipped yellow ivories at the keyboard” (224). Moreover, as he describes his relationship with the African American pianist, Shaw seems to become whiter by contrast; he explains, for example, that when he first met him, Smith “had achieved a certain celebrity in colored musicians’ circles; but it wasn’t until quite a while later that the white musicians got to know about him,” a statement clearly seeming intended to illustrate his own perspicuity in discovering The Lion in advance of other white musicians (224).

Following a rather detailed description of Smith’s playing style, Shaw writes that soon they had “struck up an acquaintance” that gave Shaw the courage to ask for permission to sit in:

From that night on I became a sort of unofficial part of the “entertaining” roster at Pod’s and Jerry’s—unofficial only in that I did not, of course, receive any pay. In every other sense I took my “work” as seriously as if I had been hired, and showed up every night regularly, by the clock. (227)

In his description of his musical experience with Smith, Shaw is deferential; Smith is the master, and the nineteen-year-old Shaw is the student who manages “a good bit of fumbling” in the learning process. Furthermore, as Shaw describes their relationship, Smith seems fully aware of his role as teacher, and he would give Shaw “a kind of arrogant look” while he played a phrase that Shaw interpreted as a challenge to “see you get with that one,” a challenge that Shaw seems only too eager to take up (227).

In fact, there is an intensity and excitement in Shaw's account here that goes beyond any other musical experience he has described to this point, for not only was Smith "far ahead of most of his contemporaries" in terms of his harmonic ideas, but Shaw also found in his nightly sessions "at Pod's and Jerry's . . . the one thing I needed to fill in the emptiness of my life at that time, a sense of *belonging*—a feeling of being *accepted*" (227, emphasis in original).

The intense joy that Shaw reveals here at feeling that he belonged and was accepted in a "little cellar joint" in Harlem offers a vivid contrast to his feelings of rejection and non-belonging, both within his own Jewish community and in the white Gentile world to which he claimed to aspire (223). According to him, Smith "liked the way I played," and would buy him drinks and breakfast when their all-night sessions ended. Now and then he even asked Shaw to accompany him to one or another session, where he would have Shaw take out his clarinet and play along with him, as if he were showing off a prized student to his friends. As Shaw explains, "Whenever I played something they approved of, [Smith] would look arrogantly over at them and announce, 'Tha's my boy—you hear that?'" (228).¹⁴⁰

In his autobiography, Shaw does not reveal certain facts that make his friendship with Willie "The Lion" Smith extraordinarily ironic. Smith's biological father, Frank Bertholoff, was "part Jewish," and, as Smith tells us in his own autobiography, "I favored

¹⁴⁰ Shaw biographer Tom Nolan substantiates the impression given by Shaw that Smith showed particular favoritism toward him: "The Lion, married but childless, had many musical cubs, black and white. None did he favor more than young Shaw, whom he called 'Artie my boy' and escorted to several other clubs" (Nolan 35).

the Jewish religion all my life and at one time served as a Hebrew cantor in a Harlem synagogue. You could say I am Jewish partly by origin and partly by association” (Nolan 36; Smith with Hoefler 12).¹⁴¹ Not only does Shaw omit any mention of Smith’s connection to Judaism in his account of him in *Cinderella*, he also maintained in a later interview that “Willie didn’t know I was Jewish. I didn’t tell him that” (Hentoff 2).¹⁴² Smith likewise makes no reference to Shaw’s Jewish background in his own autobiography, simply introducing him as “a handsome young man named Shaw [who] would bring his clarinet in every night and play along” (Smith with Hoefler 169).

Smith’s acceptance of Shaw had a reverberating effect, and soon Shaw was meeting other Harlem musicians, all of which caused a dramatic and astonishing change in his self-identity. Because of The Lion’s “sponsorship,” Shaw writes,

I was accepted among these Negroes and treated as one of them, and eventually came to feel more like a colored man myself than an “ofay.” . . . There is hardly anything strange about the way I felt. For the most part I was actually living the life of a Negro musician, adopting Negro values and attitudes, and accepting the Negro out-group point of view not only

¹⁴¹ After adding that he had a bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen, Smith attempts to explain his desire to live as a Jew: “A lot of people are unable to understand my wanting to be Jewish. One said, ‘Lion, you stepped up to the plate with one strike against you—and now you take a second one right down the middle.’ They can’t seem to realize I have a Jewish soul and belong in that faith” (Smith with Hoefler 12). For further analysis of Smith’s account of his relationship to Judaism and Jewish customs, see Melnick 66–67.

¹⁴² Shaw’s claim here, of course, deserves closer scrutiny; it is possible to imagine that Smith—with his close personal affiliation with Judaism and his familiarity as a child with “several well-to-do Jewish families” in Newark, New Jersey, for whom his mother “took in washing” while Willie himself helped with “delivering the finished bundles”—guessed that Shaw was Jewish, even if Shaw did not tell him directly (Smith with Hoefler 11–12).

about music but life in general. In fact, on the few occasions when I was forced to realize I was a white man, I used to wish I could actually be a Negro. (228)¹⁴³

Shaw's claim—that his experience with The Lion and the other black musicians he met in Harlem in 1929 was so powerful that he wanted to *be* like them, that is, to be black himself—is remarkable from someone who had previously been unsuccessful, by his own account, in finding comfort in his own Jewish community or any other community to which he aspired to belong. Yet as powerful as this experience seems to have been, there is something entirely unconvincing about Shaw's flirtation with a black self-identity. Unlike Mezz Mezzrow, for example, who also experienced a sense of home and belonging in Harlem, Shaw seems to have spent only a brief time immersed in Harlem's jazz community. And although he remembers that time with wistful longing, his words display the considerable gulf between his world and theirs.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ This is the first time that Shaw uses the term white to describe himself, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon or gentile, as he did in the earlier passages cited. With all of these terms, however, Shaw presents himself not as a white ethnic Jew—as would have been plausible, according to the historical outline that opened this essay, by the period of the early 1950s in which he was writing his autobiography—but rather as a non-racialized, Anglo-Saxon American.

¹⁴⁴ I could go on and on," Shaw writes, "remembering all the friends I made during those few months among these people who took me in at a time when my own world had rejected me. ... [E]very time I have ever run into one of them, there has been that strange and subtle bond between us, that deep feeling of mutual understanding that exists between human beings who remember a long way back to a time when their life-paths crossed. . ." (Shaw 230–31). While my analysis of Shaw's and Mezzrow's responses to their experiences in Harlem is in agreement with Burton W. Peretti, Peretti also suggests that Shaw's experience in Harlem influenced his later attitude toward interracial hiring as a famed bandleader: "While Shaw was not a person to believe for long that he had 'become' black (in contrast to Mezz Mezzrow, for example), the Harlem experience

Among the most illuminating descriptions of this gulf—or black-white divide—appears in Shaw’s own anecdote about his relationship with drummer Chick Webb, who was another of the many superb jazz musicians Shaw befriended in Harlem. Years later, when Webb and Shaw crossed paths in Boston—where the two bandleaders happened to be playing at the same time—Webb began to “drop in” to watch Shaw’s band rehearse, at times even “sitting in ‘just for kicks’” (229). After one rehearsal, according to Shaw,

[Webb] came ambling over to me and said: “You know somethin’, man? Some day I’m gonna be walkin’ up the street one way and you gonna be comin’ down the other way, and we gonna pass each other and I’m gonna say, ‘Hello, best white band in the worl’ and you gonna say, ‘Hello, best colored band in the worl’”—you know that?” (230).

The two of them then shook hands, Shaw remembers, “almost as if we were entering into a solemn pact — and in a way, I suppose we actually were” (230). In his description here, as in his earlier ones about the South Side jazz musicians and Harlem’s Willie “The Lion” Smith, Shaw reveals that while he may have successfully submerged his Jewish identity, he seems to have assumed another one, that of the “white” bandleader, Artie Shaw.¹⁴⁵

crystallized Shaw’s sense of racial equality and justice, which came into play during his years as a bandleader” (Peretti 207).

¹⁴⁵ Perhaps Shaw is selling himself short in his “passing-in-the-night” account of his encounter with Harlem’s jazz community. Noted black author and jazz critic Albert Murray, for example, was generous in his praise of Shaw, whom he claimed was genuinely engaged, both musically and socially, with Harlem. As Murray told Shaw biographer, Tom Nolan, “And of course, the Negroes liked him because—he’s a friend of Billie Holiday’s, and—he liked to hang *out*, in that part of *town*” (Nolan 103, emphasis in original). Later Nolan quotes Murray as saying, “Artie was very present, very open; and he mixed well. . . . he liked the Harlem scene, and . . . he took the whole thing very

Yet nothing, apparently, could satisfy Shaw's search for identity; as the title of his autobiography suggests, at the time of publication he was still searching, and various accounts of his life suggest that that search continued until the end of his life. Earlier in *Cinderella*, Shaw provides insight into his endless but ultimately futile search for belonging, citing John Donne's "statement that no man is an island unto himself" in order to argue that "there are certain respects in which each man is an island, and that the possibility of bridging the terrible void that exists between these islands that we are and live on and within, is far slimmer than most human beings are ever given the time or opportunity to realize" (221). Shaw's inability to find a sense of permanence or security within any community—Jewish or Anglo-Protestant or African American—leaves him as a figure of impossible contradictions, a loner who plays jazz, a highly interactive and communicative music.

II: Black and Jewish Blues: Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues*

If *Cinderella* is the story of Artie Shaw's failed attempt to recreate himself by becoming white or immersing himself in African American culture, then the widely accepted view is that Mezz Mezzrow's 1946 *Really the Blues* tells of another kind of transformation, one in which Mezzrow—a middle-class Chicago Jew—attempts to recreate himself, socially, musically, and perhaps even physically, as a black man. The analysis that follows, however, will argue that Mezzrow's self-representation within the pages of his

seriously. Certainly so far as the relations are concerned, he definitely was as anti-segregationist as you could be. The times I met him, he was in love with jazz, you know? So he liked to be around the source of jazz. . ." (286).

autobiography is considerably more complex and mutable than the above view might suggest, a view to no small degree encouraged in the representation of *Really the Blues* and its author by the text's co-author and publisher— Bernard Wolfe and Random House, respectively.

As Scott Saul explains, Random House published *Really the Blues* to considerable hype, with promotional ads describing it as “an upside down success story” about “a man who ‘crossed the color line, *backwards*’” (41, emphasis in original). Saul, who refers to Mezzrow as “a countercultural pioneer who refashioned the story of the slumming bohemian,” emphasizes the book’s popularity in the years after its publication among jazz fans in general and among the Beats in particular, and several critics cite Mezzrow’s text as an important precursor to, and perhaps influence upon, Norman Mailer’s controversial 1957 essay, “The White Negro.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, in an afterword appended to a 1972 edition of *Really the Blues*, Mezzrow’s collaborator Bernard Wolfe claimed that Mezzrow, after living in Harlem for many years, had actually come to believe that “his lips had developed fuller contours, his hair had thickened and burred, his skin had darkened. It was not, as he saw it, a case of transculturation. He felt he had scrubbed himself clean . . . of every last trace of his origins in the Jewish slums of Chicago . . . and pressed himself into . . . a pure Black” (Mezzrow and Wolfe 390).

While several critics have focused on *Really the Blues* as a “passing” narrative, they differ in their conclusions about what Mezzrow actually believed regarding his quest to achieve the physiological or cultural attributes of blackness, as he defines them in his

¹⁴⁶ See Melnick 50; Saul 40–41; Kenney 113–14; Wald 59; Damon 152.

text.¹⁴⁷ For example, according to Scott Saul, “as he camouflaged himself in the black community, Mezzrow believed, he had soaked up not only the culture that sustained the blues but also some extra melanin as well” (Saul 42). In her chapter, “Mezz Mezzrow and the Voluntary Negro Blues,” Gayle Wald indicates her awareness that Wolfe’s afterword was the source for the assertion of Mezzrow’s belief that “he had actually, physically, turned black” (Wald 56), and she is quick to point to a metaphorical interpretation of Mezzrow’s passing that appeared in *Ebony* magazine in the aftermath of the publication of his autobiography (Wald 56).¹⁴⁸

In agreement with these other critics, Maria Damon seems to accept that Mezzrow’s effort to pass was at least in part successful; in “Jazz-Jews, Jive, and Gender: The Ethnic Politics of Jazz Argot,” she refers to the “jazz argot Mezz loved and prided himself on mastering to the point of being able to pass as African American” (Damon 162).¹⁴⁹ In contrast to these other critics, however, Damon’s analysis of *Really the Blues*

¹⁴⁷ For various interpretations of Mezzrow’s immersion in African American culture, see Saul 29–60; Damon 150–75; Wald 53–81; Ross 80; Melnick 134–40.

¹⁴⁸ The article, Wald suggests, argues that Mezzrow’s “transformation” should be seen as “interiorized and self-authorized,” rather than literal, as her following quote from *Ebony* makes clear: “Physically speaking, . . . Mezzrow couldn’t pass for Negro by any stretch of the imagination; his skin is too white. His conversion to ‘the race’ has taken place largely within himself. In psychological makeup, he is completely a black man and proudly admits it” (qtd. in Wald 57). In his brief discussion of Mezzrow, Andrew Ross argues that Mezzrow’s “almost flawless” “commitment to the hipster ethic” was more important than “[w]hether or not he actually believed” that he had achieved a physical transformation from white to black (Ross 80). William Kenney, on the other hand, writes that Mezzrow “even claimed that his skin darkened as well” (Kenney 107). According to Lewis Erenberg, “Mezzrow eventually considered himself black because of the sense of freedom he witnessed on the south side of Chicago and in Harlem” (Erenberg 10).

¹⁴⁹ In *Really the Blues*, Mezzrow does indeed claim that he emulated African American speech patterns: “In those days [late 1920s] . . . I’d started to use so many of the phrases

focuses primarily on an interpretation of Mezzrow's immersion in African American music and society as a reaction against his own middle-class family's upward striving, rather than as an abnegation of his Jewishness, per se; her reading of several passages that highlight Mezzrow's Jewish background and family relationships, as well as others in which Jews or Jewishness loom large, will prove particularly helpful in contextualizing some of the analysis below.

A crucial point, then, is that although Mezzrow refers throughout *Really the Blues* to his desire to pass for black and his belief that he had indeed succeeded in that endeavour, he makes no claim to the kind of physical transformation that Wolfe describes in his afterword; moreover, a detailed analysis of Mezzrow's self-representation must take into account his many references to himself as white or as Jewish, or as "a link between the races." While Mezzrow's autobiography at times supports a metaphorical, rather than a literal, interpretation of his passing, just as often he seems intent on disrupting that narrative, and in so doing he throws his entire self-representation into question. To what extent, the reader might ask, are Mezzrow and Wolfe contesting the very nature of racial and ethnic identity as portrayed in the pages of *Really the Blues*? Is Mezzrow's pose as a black man sincere, or tongue-in-cheek, or perhaps sometimes one and then the other?

and intonations of the Negro, I must have sounded like I was trying to pass for colored. . . I was going on to twenty-seven, a Chicago-born Jew from Russian parents, and I'd hardly ever been south of the Capone district, but I sounded like I arrived from the levee last Juvember" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 111–12). Mezzrow's claim here is very different, of course, from that which Wolfe describes in his afterword.

In the first pages of *Really the Blues*, we learn that Mezzrow, born Milton Mesirov in 1899, rejected the middle-class respectability of his Jewish family—“loaded with doctors, lawyers, dentists and pharmacists”—for the street life of Chicago’s Northwest Side, where he became part of a gang of tough Jewish boys looking for action: “We picked fights and robbed candy stores,” Mezzrow boasts, “we were known to be the wildest gang this side of hell. . . . We came on like Jesse James” (5–6). He describes disputes between rival ethnic gangs, in which “It took just a whispered ‘kike’ or ‘Jew bastard’ from a member of some rival Polish or Irish gang, and fists were flying between us” (6).

At the same time he recounts key childhood experiences that served to heighten his sensitivity toward African Americans. On one occasion he brought his black friend, Sullivan, with him to his synagogue in Chicago, and, to Mezzrow’s delight, the rabbi told Sullivan “that Moses, King Solomon, and the Queen of Sheba were all colored, and maybe the whole world was once colored” (18). He also writes about his experience in the aftermath of the Eastland Disaster of 1915, in which more than eight hundred people drowned when a passenger steamship overturned on the Chicago River. Mezzrow and his Jewish friends “hopped a freight to St. Louis” with photos of the disaster, intending to “pay our way by selling the pictures as we bummed around” (17). By the time they reached Cape Girardeau, Missouri, “dirty from riding the rails and dark-complexioned to begin with,” they stopped at a lunch-counter, where they were mistaken as African Americans and refused service at a lunch-counter (17–18). “We were given the bum’s rush to the sidewalk, our breadbaskets empty and our nerves jumping,” Mezzrow writes.

“In small towns we hit after that, whenever we saw a sign saying ‘Nigger don’t let the sun shine on your head’ we knew it meant us too, although we didn’t know why” (18).

But as critics have noted, the central experience that initiated Mezzrow’s search for belonging within an African American musical and cultural sphere was his incarceration at Pontiac Reformatory when he was sixteen, after he was caught joyriding with a friend in a stolen car. In an ironic aside, Mezzrow stresses the role of his family in his incarceration, explaining that at the trial, his uncle huddled with the lawyer and the judge and decided that young Milton would benefit from “a dose of reformatory medicine” (10). But Pontiac proved to be a medicine of a sort his family little anticipated, for it was there that Mezzrow first heard the blues, sung by the black prisoners “in low moanful chants morning, noon and night,” and where he learned to play the saxophone while playing in the reformatory’s mixed band (4).

The strictly segregated cells and work details also gave him his first taste of Jim Crow, and his account of a “free-for-all race riot” between “Southern white boys” and a mixed gang with whom he associated seems intended to show his strong identification with the black prisoners (15–16). In the aftermath of the riot, Mezzrow writes, he was hospitalized with dysentery, an illness that he links directly to his emotional response to the riot: “All the time I was stretched out on the infirmary cot I kept looking at the blank walls and seeing the mean, murdering faces of those Southern peckerwoods when they went after Big Six and the others with their knives. It couldn’t have been worse if they’d come after me. I felt so close to those Negroes, it was just like I’d seen a gang attack on my own family” (16).

For Mezzrow, these various experiences together planted the seeds for his lifelong devotion to African Americans and their culture. “By the time I reached home,” he writes, “I knew that I was going to spend all my time from then on sticking close to Negroes. They were my kind of people. . . . I was going to be a musician, a Negro musician, hipping the world about the blues the way only Negroes can.” He went into the reformatory “green,” he tells us, but he “came out chocolate brown” (18).

Mezzrow’s dramatic imagery has undoubtedly encouraged the tendency to focus on his subsequent involvement with black jazz musicians and their world, and yet his account in *Really the Blues* shows him returning to his friends from Chicago’s Jewish working-class community, “Jewish expressmen, cutters in the garment trade, cab drivers—easygoing guys who spent half their lives playing klabiasch, pinochle, and tarok, a funny game that was played with thick Hungarian pasteboards the size of postcards,” while at the same time he observed more ambitious Jewish operators such as Sid Barry, who made a fortune during Prohibition as a bootlegger (20–21). This exposure to Chicago’s Jewish underside gave him the opportunity to reflect on his own ambitions, so that while he admits to getting “my kicks out of rubbing elbows with all those bigtime gamblers and muscle men, . . . I didn’t want to go too far tangent—I kept looking for my kind of music in all the joints we hit in our cruising around” (21–22).

In a memorable passage, Mezzrow describes his first visit to Chicago’s South Side, where he would find his “kind of music” in two different nightspots, one featuring the blues singers Alberta Hunter and Florence Mills, and the other the Original New Orleans Creole Jazz Band, which included Freddie Keppard, Sidney Bechet and Lil

Hardin. “That was my big night,” Mezzrow writes, “the night I really began to live. On my first visit to the South Side I managed to hit the two spots that were making history in the jazz world and I met some of the musicians who were already legends. I figured I had found something bigger and better than all the chicks and bankrolls in the world” (29).

Although Mezzrow’s embrace of the blues and jazz of Chicago’s South Side seems to imply a rejection of the paths leading to his middle-class family and also to the Jewish gamblers and hustlers on Chicago’s Northwest side, his identity as a Jew remains an important part of his own self-representation as well as how others view him. In his account of his second incarceration, for example, he describes himself as a target of abuse from the racist and anti-Semitic deputy warden, who remarks that “you Jews and niggers are always duckin’ work” before assigning Mezzrow to hard manual labour (35); yet his Jewishness is also a source of pride for him in his friendship with an African American prisoner named Red, “the straw boss in the brickyard” (42):

Every night he’d come plodding back singing some chain-gang blues, the kind of wail the colored country folks call river music. He was dogtired but so happy to see another day gone that he’d chant,

Short time, poppa, short time for you and I,

Short time, Jew kid, another one’s gone by. (42)

“The ‘Jew kid’ was me,” Mezzrow writes, “and I didn’t mind it at all, the way he said it” (42).

This passage seems to illustrate Maria Damon’s argument that “many Jewish men” growing up in the early decades of the twentieth century “resolved their anxieties

about ethnicity and community by bonding with non-Jews of color”; in doing so, they were motivated not by “shame about their outcast status as Jews. . . but rather [by] the sense that Jewish American culture, by assimilating upward, was abdicating the special role of critique available to social outsiders” (Damon 155). Mezzrow’s identification with the straw boss Red is one example of such bonding; just as the deputy warden links Jews and African Americans in his racist tirades, Mezzrow links himself with Red in their common struggle against oppression and in their striving for humanity (Mezzrow and Wolfe 35, 42).

Certain patterns, then, become apparent in Mezzrow’s discussion of his own Jewishness and of his relationship with the various Jewish communities and individuals he encounters along the way. His stories about his Jewish family reflect his critique of their upward assimilation, to borrow Damon’s term, or portray them as stereotypically overprotective and emotional, or as unsympathetic toward his interest in music. His mother is the stereotypical “Jewish mother” who “cooked up a big pot of borscht for her returning hero,” after Mezzrow had been rejected by the navy in 1918 because of a heart murmur. “From the reception she gave me,” Mezzrow writes, “you would have thought I’d come home from the wars with the Kaiser in my vest pocket” (19). She also appears, distraught and weeping, during his first two incarcerations, as Mezzrow describes his exaggerated and perhaps insincere attempts to reassure her.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ “Don’t cry, Ma,” Mezzrow writes about his attempt to comfort her. “This is a wonderful place . . . and I like it here. They treat us swell. . . .” (17). Surprisingly, according to Mezzrow, his words not only calmed his mother but were well received by the prison authorities at Pontiac Reformatory, with the judge telling him: “Milton, do you

References to his father are few but also significant. Soon after Mezzrow began to play the soprano saxophone, he went to the South Side, struck by an impulse “to go where people really understand about horns,” and began to play for some “shoeshine kids.” Despite a sudden case of stage fright, he managed to play *St. Louis Blues*, with the children clapping and “keeping time” as he played, and treating him with warmth and friendliness. (30). In a passage not long after this one, Mezzrow trades in his soprano for a tenor, which he tells us he began to practice “until my lungs yelled ouch, and I felt I was getting close to the blues and the jazz idiom” (50). But when his father came home from work and heard him playing, he screamed at him to “Stop blowing so loud—you sound like a fog-horn! . . . That killed my ardor for the tenor sax, because Pops knew so much about music I figured I must be wrong. I sold the horn before I could even play *Come to Jesus* on it (50). Mezzrow’s portrayal of his father’s disapproval—in certain respects a reminder of the portrait that Artie Shaw sketches of *his* father in *Cinderella*—is also striking for its contrast to the acceptance and warmth that Mezzrow felt from the black shoeshine boys on the South Side.

Much later in his narrative, Mezzrow recalls an encounter he had on the New York subway, when an elderly black man reached out to him when Mezzrow was in a state of despair: “‘Son,’ he said to me real soft, ‘if you can’t make money, make friends,’ and with that he stepped out on the platform and drifted away. He saved my life that day”

know why you got such a light sentence? It’s because of the way you acted toward your mother when she visited you” (17). The second time around, his mother again “felt a lot better when she left, but this time I didn’t get my sentence reduced for being a Boy Scout” (40).

(185). In stark contrast to this story of idealized interracial friendship is another Mezzrow tells in the same chapter, in which he writes to his family requesting his birth certificate, which he needs in order to obtain a passport for a trip to France. In a note accompanying the birth certificate, his father instructed Mezzrow, ‘Go anywhere you wish son, . . . but always remember, *sei a mensch*,’” a Yiddish phrase that Mezzrow translates as “be a human being” (188). Although his father’s words have the potential for tenderness and caring, they seem remote in comparison to his face-to-face interaction with the old black man on the subway. Perhaps more to the point, they elicit no comment from Mezzrow; he simply goes on to state, “Then I booked passage for a second-class stateroom on the *Ile de France*” (188). He doesn’t tell us how his father’s words made him feel or think, or in fact, if they had any effect on him at all.¹⁵¹

Mezzrow’s disdain for his family’s upward assimilation seems related to his attitude toward the successful Jewish entertainers of the day, including Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson, and Eddie Cantor, who were, in his words, “beat-up old hamfats who sang and played a commercial excuse for the real thing” (49). Even though he felt pressured to support them in the name of ethnic (or perhaps racial) solidarity, Mezzrow insists that

¹⁵¹ A passage that has received considerable attention from critics—both as an illustration of Mezzrow’s critique of his family’s middle-class pretensions and also of his morally questionable attitudes around specific aspects of gender and sexuality—concerns his sister, Helen, who agreed to transcribe the blues lyrics of Bessie Smith as a favour for Mezzrow, who was studying Smith’s “unique phrasing” (53). Mezzrow writes that in the process of doing this, his sister, who was a secretary, “kept ‘correcting’ Bessie’s grammar,” which so infuriated him that “I’ve never felt friendly towards her to this day, on account of how she laid her fancy high-school airs on the immortal Bessie Smith” (54). As an act of retribution, Mezzrow stole Helen’s “Hudson-seal fur coat,” sold it to “the madam” at a whorehouse, and with the sale bought himself an alto saxophone (54). For compelling readings of this passage, see Saul 46; Damon 160–61; Wald 68–71.

I didn't go for that jive at all; being a Jew didn't mean a thing to me.

Around the poolroom I defended the guys I felt were my real brothers, the colored musicians who made music that sent me I never could dig the phony idea of a race—if we were a “race”—sticking together all the way, even when it meant turning your back on what was good or bad. (49)

And yet Mezzrow's text is far from a universal condemnation of all the Jews he encounters; his narrative includes, for example, two different stories in which orthodox Jews respond with empathy and understanding to jazz and the blues. In the first, Mezzrow ventures down to Maxwell Street, the heart of Chicago's Jewish ghetto, in search of a guitar and stumbles upon a second-hand store

where an old Jewish man with a long beard and a little yomelkeh stood in the doorway, and I heard something there that knocked me out. An old-fashioned victrola setting out on the curb was playing a record, Blind Lemon Jefferson's *Black Snake Moan*, and the old Jewish man kept shaking his head sadly, like he knew that evil black snake personally. (52)

In another story, Mezzrow describes his experience at Minsky's burlesque house on New York's Lower East Side in the summer of 1929, where, in response to the white musicians' inability to play “hot” jazz, he arranges with a “wonderful colored boy” who ran an elevator in the theater to replace the “corny phonograph records” that the Minskys played “over the P.A. system” outside the theater with recordings of Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller. “Man, those records caused a traffic jam for blocks around,” Mezzrow boasts. “All day long the lobby was packed tight with little old bearded grandpas in long

black pongee frockcoats and cupcake-shaped yomelkehs, rubbing their hands behind their backs and shaking their heads sadly at Louis' moans, like they understood everything he had to say" (201).

Although Mezzrow claims that this experience is simply further evidence that the "phenomenon of jazz" could reach people across boundaries of race or class or nationality, for "the language of the oppressed is universal," his actual depiction of the various characters he encounters contradicts his claim: while the religious Jews in his stories are "in the know about jazz and the blues," the upwardly assimilating, middle-class Jews who populate his narrative—including his family and certain successful Jewish entertainers—are not (202).¹⁵² Moreover, while Mezzrow vehemently rejects giving uncritical support for all Jews simply in the name of Jewish solidarity, his narrative reveals an increasing tendency toward unconditional reverence for black people and their culture; in his descriptions of and interactions with them, they seem not so much individuals, but rather symbols of goodness and kindness whose innate musical and

¹⁵² Jeffrey Melnick describes Mezzrow's account of his immersion experience as a "reconciliation of Jewishness and Blackness"; that is, that within Mezzrow's white Negroism an important place is maintained for his expression of his Jewish identity. As examples of this tendency, Melnick cites several of Mezzrow's accounts mentioned above—including the Rabbi's response to Mezzrow's African American friend at synagogue and the Orthodox Jews' to the music of Louis Armstrong—concluding that "a grammar is being worked out within which Jewish attraction to African American music is interpreted as a natural outgrowth of Jewish traditions" (139). Yet Melnick concludes his analysis by suggesting that white Negroism, as well as a more general "racial sympathy" expressed by Jews for "African American forms . . . signaled a renunciation of Jewish heritage" while also granting "the possibility of reunion" (140). I have tried to suggest, however, in agreement with Maria Damon, that Mezzrow's account shows not so much "a renunciation of Jewish heritage" but rather of the attitudes and strivings of the Jewish middle class from which he came.

linguistic abilities far exceed his own or the other white (or Jewish) musicians he describes.¹⁵³

And yet between 1923 and 1928, Mezzrow frequently played in white bands or predominantly Jewish bands, and in his accounts of this period, Mezzrow makes no effort to hide from or deny his Jewishness. To the contrary, he writes about these experiences with a measure of humour and even affection. A variety of Jewish characters appear in these stories, among them his old Chicago friend, Monkey Pollack, who hired him in 1924 to play at a joint in Indiana Harbor at which he hired as bartender a champion sharpshooter named Mac who was a Jewish cowboy from Texas—“that Yiddish Buffalo Bill,” as Mezzrow affectionately remembers him:

Monkey wasn't jiving about that bartender. He wasn't exactly a rabbi, yet and still Mac was an honest-to-God Jewish root-toot-tooting cowboy straight from Peckerville, Texas, pardner, and itchy in the trigger finger. . . . One of the funniest things I ever heard was Mac spieling in Yiddish, because he spoke it with a thick Southern drawl, piling on more “you-all's” than a Geechee senator. “*Was macht ir, you-all?*” he'd say with his nasal twang, and he had us rolling on the floor. (70)

¹⁵³ The following examples illustrate the sort of romanticized and stereotypical depiction of African Americans that Mezzrow employs throughout *Really the Blues*: “In Pontiac I learned something important—that there aren't many people in the world with as much sensitivity and plain human respect for a guy as the Negroes” (15); “I began to collar that all the evil I ever found came from ounce-brain white men who hated the Negroes and me both, while most all the good things in life came to me from the race” (44); “Their wonderful music was only an expression of something that ran much deeper” (145). For analysis of the primitivist and essentialist attitudes that Mezzrow reveals in *Really the Blues*, see Kenney 112–14; Saul 42–43.

The following summer Mezzrow was hired to play at a resort in South Haven (“across the lake from Chicago”) in a band led by violinist Irving Rothchild; he describes the band’s encounter with anti-Semitism in the mainly Gentile resort, and their defiant bid to set up their own café, at which they did brisk business all summer long (86–87).

Not all of Mezzrow’s Jewish associates, however, were quite so benevolent; he devotes considerable attention to the consequences of his relationship with Jewish gangsters and drug dealers, most notably in Detroit, where he was introduced to opium by the city’s Jewish “sporting people.” “They were mostly gamblers and big spenders,” Mezzrow writes about them, “flashy good-natured Jews, dressed in loud checked suits and open-necked sports shirts” (96). Years later, Mezzrow would learn that his opium friends were members of the notorious Purple Gang, a mob composed mostly of Jewish bootleggers that thrived in Detroit during Prohibition. “That Purple Gang must have included in its membership the whole goddamned population of Detroit. . . . I saw the kissers of most all those good-natured sporty guys in the papers. . . . they all got theirs sooner or later” (101).¹⁵⁴

Mezzrow’s portrayal of his own mutable self-identity continues in his depiction of his move to Harlem in the late 1920s, in which he adopts an increasingly insider perspective on black culture; for example, in a discussion about the speed with which news about African Americans reaches Harlem, he refers to himself as if *he* is a member of Harlem’s black community: “Let any of our boys get in a scrape with the pecks down

¹⁵⁴ For Mezzrow’s poignant account of his opium addiction and his lengthy residence in New York’s Bunk, described by Scott Saul as “a den for [black] heroin addicts where Mezzrow spent four half-lit years” (42), see Mezzrow and Wolfe 238–60.

in Memphis or Little Rock, ... and the news buzzed back to us on Seventh Avenue quicker than right now. ... We were planted at the race's switchboard there, the listening-post for the whole planet. We had our earphones on all the time" (207).

But Mezzrow's self-positioning is more complex than the above view might suggest. We learn that he regularly brings white musicians up to Harlem to hang out and listen to music, and that as a result he began "to be known as the 'link between the races'" (208). Here Mezzrow sees his access to both worlds, white and black, as central to his role in New York's jazz community. And although in the previous chapter he had declared that he had moved "body and soul" to Harlem in 1929, in this chapter he reveals that his first wife, Bonnie, who was white, had in fact refused to move to Harlem because "she had her son [by a previous marriage] to think of, so I compromised by moving right next door to Harlem, just across the river in the Bronx, on the Grand Concourse" (209).¹⁵⁵

Notably, it is in Mezzrow's description of his role as the link between the races that his self-representations as white and as black seem to merge, rather than simply vie for primacy. This dual positioning is illustrated in the following passage, in which Mezzrow comments on his role on Harlem's Seventh Avenue, where he tells us he spent

¹⁵⁵ In Chapter 16 Mezzrow writes about his failed marriage to Bonnie, who tells him, "You live in one world and I live in another, and we can't shut our eyes to it any longer" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 283). One night, when Mezzrow was in a café in Harlem, "in walked a colored girl, tall and slender and with a warm smile on her face. . . and when I looked at her I felt funny all over. Her name was Johnnie Mae, and she smiled when we were introduced and looked me straight in the eye and that was that. I wound up divorcing Bonnie, and in July of 1935 Johnnie Mae and I took that big step" (284). Mezzrow moved to Harlem with Johnnie Mae, where their son Milton, Jr. was born in 1936.

“all my waking hours” hanging out and participating in the jive talk that was at the heart of Harlem’s cultural expression.¹⁵⁶

On The Corner I was to become known as the Reefer King, the Link between the Races, the Philosopher, the Mezz, Poppa Mezz, Mother Mezz, Pop’s Boy, the White Mayor of Harlem, . . . I don’t mean to boast; that’s what the cats really called me, at different times. . . . My education was completed on The Stroll [Seventh Avenue], and I became a Negro. (210)

In August 1940, Mezzrow was arrested at the Gay New Orleans nightclub on Long Island with his “pockets full of reefer”; according to Mezzrow, he was simply a convenient target for detectives searching for a dope dealer in the neighborhood (300). After the arrest, the detectives drove him to his apartment in Harlem, where his identity becomes the central focus of their questioning:

It floored them to find Johnnie Mae there, and little Milton, Jr., and on our way back they began to pop questions at me. Was I colored? No, Russian Jew, American-born. How in hell did I come to be living with a “spade”? Well, I had this screwy idea that when you loved a girl you married her, without consulting a color chart. What in Christ’s name did my poor mother and father think about this cross they had to bear? “What in hell

¹⁵⁶ Critics have focused on Mezzrow’s proclamation of his mastery of African American street language, or “jive” talk—for example, *Really the Blues* includes an appendix entitled, “Translation of the Jive Section”—as his way to prove his authenticity and belonging within a black jazz world. See Mezzrow and Wolfe 354–60; Saul 43–44; Wald 72–75.

should they think?" I shouted, plenty worked up. "They're funny people—it makes them feel good to see their son married and happy." (300–01)¹⁵⁷

Not only does Mezzrow make no attempt to conceal his Jewish identity here, he also does an about-face in his portrait of his parents, who now appear as sympathetic supporters of his life in black Harlem. Yet no sooner is this unexpected description of family solidarity revealed than Mezzrow again returns to his black pose, recalling that when he returned to Harlem after he was let out on bail, "girls and fellows" greeted him with hugs and kisses, "going out of their way to show their affection and how they stood behind me. . . . It was an unplanned surge of solidarity, that sprang up the moment one of their boys was in trouble" (303).

At the trial, Mezzrow was sentenced to a term in the city jail on Riker's Island for "drug possession and trafficking" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 300; Wald 55). He begins his account of his stay on Riker's by describing his efforts to convince the deputy that he is black and therefore belongs in Block Six, telling him, "I'm colored, even if I don't look it" (305). Later, while waiting in the line for Block Six, he fell in "behind three real dark colored boys" who reacted with discomfort to his presence, "shifting from one foot to another and exchanging uneasy glances." When other dark-skinned inmates fell in behind

¹⁵⁷ According to Maria Damon, Mezzrow's answer to the police—that he was "Russian Jew, American-born"—illustrates that "he is not above reverting to his ethnicity of origin—if it'll make the cops mad"; in her view, however, his true self-identification is revealed near the end of *Really the Blues*, when he remarks: "I only hope they spell my name right in *Who's Who*, and get the dates of my prison record straight, and don't forget to say 'Race, Negro.'" (Damon 172). The above analysis, however, has tried to demonstrate that Mezzrow represents himself as white or as Jewish as often as he does as black.

them, Mezzrow realized that he “must have looked like a ghost” among them (305). But when he is briefly returned to the white cell for looking “too ‘conspicuous’” among the black inmates in the mess hall, he expresses feelings of alienation and recalls with longing his years spent in Harlem, among people who were “real and earthy.” And when he is finally allowed to go back to Block Six, he describes feeling “glad to be home again, and they were glad to have me back” (307). Taken together, these examples from Mezzrow’s account of his imprisonment at Riker’s offer abundant support for a metaphorical interpretation of Mezzrow’s black self-positioning; furthermore, in contrast to Mezzrow’s earlier description of his exchange with the detectives, the binary invoked in these examples is white versus black, with no reference to Mezzrow’s Jewishness.

In Mezzrow’s self-proclaimed role as a link between the races, his self-positioning is as a white man reaching out to the black world. But in his account of his efforts to organize a mixed (integrated) band on Hart’s Island, where he was transferred partway through his sentence, he positions himself as a black inmate reaching out to the white inmates, thereby suggesting that in his role as a link between the races, he feels capable of speaking from either side.¹⁵⁸ Mezzrow again assumes a black self-representation in his recollection of the prisoners’ response to a radio news flash announcing the bombing of Pearl Harbor: “Frenzy runs all through the division, white guys put their heads together

¹⁵⁸ Mezzrow writes that Dan Leary, a tough white “two-fisted con from way back ... one day ... hears some of us colored boys running over some new Basie orchestrations—sticks his nose in the door, says sort of shyly, ‘Hey, don’t you need a bass for this music?’ We tell him yes, sure, to get his bass and join in” (313).

down at their end, begin to buzz, all agitated; us colored guys slump together at opposite end, quiet, tense, worried” (313).

On Hart’s Island, Mezzrow’s efforts to involve the inmates in music were so successful that the warden formed a choir for the Catholic inmates. Mezzrow’s lengthy explanation of what happened next—in which he seems to be parodying his own denial of his Jewish origins—offers yet another angle on the complexity of Mezzrow’s self-representation within *Really the Blues*:

Along come the Jewish holidays and with them a weird situation. The Jewish boys, not to be outdone by the Catholics, organize their own choir and ask me, a colored guy, wouldn’t I care to lead it. I find out once more how music of different oppressed peoples blends together. Jewish or Hebrew religious music mostly minor, in a simple form, full of wailing and lament. When I add Negro inflections to it they fit so perfect, it thrills me. ... I just sing “Oh, oh, oh” over and over with the choir because I don’t know the Hebrew chants, but I give it a weepy blues inflection and the guys are all happy about it. They can’t understand how come a colored guy digs the spirit of their music so good. ... (315–16)

There are various grounds for concluding that Mezzrow’s stance here is tongue-in-cheek; among them is the passage’s concluding ellipsis, as well as the many references that Mezzrow has made throughout his narrative to his Russian Jewish heritage, including

his vivid childhood memory of visiting his synagogue with his black friend, Sullivan.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, his ironic tone here is consistent with a passage later in the chapter, in which Mezzrow recounts pleading his case before a Justice in the Bronx Supreme Court, where he offered a critique of state laws that prevented a man from supporting his family by keeping him in prison. According to Mezzrow, the Judge—seemingly affected by Mezzrow’s reference to his family—began to examine the papers detailing his case, which were open before him. “And then he must have come to the line about the prisoner’s race,” Mezzrow writes, “because he looked like somebody suddenly hit him in the face. . . . ‘Young man,’ he said, ‘the only trouble is, if I let you go you’ll get right out with all the rest of your people and re-elect Roosevelt’” (319). Mezzrow adds that the judge “may have been joking” and that “the whole court kyaw-kyawed, and back to the Island I went” (319). The laughter in the courtroom, of course, suggests that the judge *was* joking, and Mezzrow’s concluding sentence, “And to think that I never voted in my life,” is further evidence of his ironic stance.

So what were Mezzrow and his collaborator, Bernard Wolfe, seeking in portraying Mezzrow’s identity as so fundamentally unstable—at times Jewish, at times

¹⁵⁹ I argue more vigorously for Mezzrow’s tongue-in-cheek stance here than does Maria Damon, who suggests about this passage that “Mezz has so deeply identified with African American culture that he greets the Jewish music as exotic but appealingly resonant with blues feeling, something he can identify with because of a common understanding of suffering. It is not clear to me whether he is being tongue-in-cheek or straight here; it doesn’t appear to cross his mind that the Jewish prisoners have divined his ethnicity of origin” (Damon 162–63). As discussed above, in Mezzrow’s account of his earlier incarceration he emphasized the response of the warden and the prisoner Red to his Jewishness; there is no reason to assume that his Jewish ethnicity was less apparent in his final incarceration on Hart’s Island.

white, at times black, at times shifting from one identity to the next, at times merging or seemingly interchangeable?¹⁶⁰ While the text itself does not answer these questions directly, Wolfe himself offers clues in two different sources that are worth considering. In his previously mentioned afterword, he writes that when he first met Mezzrow, he knew nothing about his claim to have transformed himself into a black man—a claim that Wolfe refers to as Mezzrow’s “personal mythology”; rather, Wolfe believed that Mezzrow “was simply an odd jazz musician who might be the subject for an interesting magazine article,” but that after spending time with him “on his home grounds in Harlem,” he concluded that “it would take a lengthy book to do his reincarnation myth full justice. This is the book” (Mezzrow and Wolfe 390). In a collaborative autobiography, the collaborator’s attitude or opinions about the autobiographer might reasonably be expected to influence the manner in which the autobiographical subject is portrayed, as well as the ideas or attitudes attributed to that subject. It is significant, then, that Wolfe describes Mezzrow here as “odd,” and Mezzrow’s alleged belief that he had recreated himself as a black man as a “reincarnation myth.”

The other source is Wolfe’s essay, “Ecstatic in Blackface: The Negro as a Song-and-Dance Man,” originally published in Jean-Paul Sartre’s review, *Les Temps Modernes* in 1947, only a year after the publication of *Really the Blues*, and appended, along with Wolfe’s afterword, to the 1972 and later editions of Mezzrow’s autobiography. In “Ecstatic in Blackface,” Wolfe argues that “despite the claims of many whites to an

¹⁶⁰ As noted in Chapter 1, there are conflicting views about authorial control in *Really the Blues*. See page 92, fn. 54.

uncanny sort of racial omniscience, their concept of ‘the Negro as he really is’ turns out to be a coy fiction, designed to camouflage the Negro as the white world sees him and forces him to behave” (393). In his discussion of Wolfe, Scott Saul refers to “Ecstatic in Blackface” as a “pioneering analysis of the minstrelsy embedded in American popular culture” and calls it “[p]erhaps [Wolfe’s] greatest intellectual achievement” (Saul 50). In addition, critics have noted the influence of this essay and others written by Wolfe in this period on Frantz Fanon, who cited them at length in *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹⁶¹ The evidence suggests, then, that “Ecstatic in Blackface” may be read as a vehement rejection of the essentialist and stereotypical views of African Americans expressed by Mezzrow in his autobiography.¹⁶²

One final point toward an interpretation of Mezzrow’s self-representation in *Really the Blues* comes again from Saul’s essay on Wolfe, in which he describes Wolfe’s own notably shifting identity—from Trotskyite college teacher and later personal bodyguard and secretary to Trotsky in Mexico; to immersion in “Greenwich Village bohemia,” where he began his career as pornographic novelist “under the

¹⁶¹ See Saul 49–50; Wald 60. In his afterword, Wolfe himself refers to the impact that his essays made on Fanon: “Some time after they appeared a young medical student from Martinique, a black man named Franz Fanon, showed up in Paris to continue his studies. He was reading everything he could get his hands on that had any remote bearing on race and racist psychology. He dug up the things I’d published in *Les Temps Modernes* and found, apparently, that they related to the problems he was thinking about” (Mezzrow and Wolfe 390).

¹⁶² Although he does not speculate on the implications of Wolfe’s essays on his collaboration with Mezzrow, William Kenney notes that in “Ecstatic in Blackface” Wolfe “systematically dismantled as ‘a coy fiction’ Mezzrow’s entire story of the spontaneous Negro . . . despite his own role as Mezzrow’s amanuensis” (Kenney 114).

recommendation and tutelage of Henry Miller”; to essayist on the subject of “the Negro in popular culture” (Saul 49–50).

Many questions emerge from this brief outline: To what extent did Wolfe’s own notably mutable careers and associations influence his approach to the representation of Mezzrow’s identity in *Really the Blues*? If Wolfe agreed to his role as Mezzrow’s collaborator out of a sense of curiosity about an “odd jazz musician,” and if, as the evidence indicates, he found Mezzrow’s fanatical devotion to African American culture problematic, is it possible to imagine their collaborative effort as simply a free and fanciful exploration of Mezzrow’s identity, an exploration aimed more at effect than at uncovering one particular truth about that identity? The above analysis of Mezzrow’s self-presentation has argued that its shifting and inconsistent nature must surely be interpreted with at least some degree of irony or skepticism or humour, or some combination of all of these. To be clear, the evaluation is concerned only with Mezzrow’s self-representation in his autobiography, rather than with Mezzrow’s real-life immersion in black music and culture, or his lifelong dedication to traditional jazz and racial equality. Whatever truths may be uncovered regarding the latter, in *Really the Blues* it may be argued that Mezzrow—the “Russian Jew, American-born” jazz musician who lived in Harlem as “the link between the races”— may not have been trying so hard to pass after all.

A Note on Jeffrey Melnick’s “white Negroism”:

Jeffrey Melnick, as mentioned earlier, describes Shaw and Mezzrow (and also composer George Gershwin) as white Negroes, emphasizing the role that Jews played in “the history of white Negroism in the American twentieth century” (120). According to Melnick:

A central component of white Negroism is the immersion ritual. Full symbolic identification with the African American, usually initiated by some personal crisis or professional challenge, is cemented by the subject’s entry into a closed social space defined almost exclusively by its racialness and maleness. . . . For most Jews carving out a personal niche within white Negroism, the city (usually Chicago’s South Side or New York’s Harlem) provided all the necessary apparatus. (123–24)

Although Melnick is correct in maintaining that both Shaw and Mezzrow had, in his words, “concrete immersion experiences which solidified their felt connections to African American culture,” the differences between them are substantial and not fully explored in his analysis (136). Melnick notes, for example, that both Mezzrow and Shaw emphasized their knowledge of black vernacular, yet there is a striking difference between them in this regard.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Melnick himself admits that although

¹⁶³ For example, Melnick grants considerable significance to Shaw’s use (and explanation) of the word “ofay,” arguing that “[t]he lexical interruption is vital: the white Negro signifies his achievement of grace not only by the revelation of his faith in things Black but also with acts of Blackness—frequently just this sort of demonstration of idiomatic fluency” (137). For the most part, however, Shaw aims for a highbrow literary

“Shaw’s white Negroism was temporary, Mezz Mezzrow never surrendered his claims on Blackness” (137). Unless one wants to apply the term “white Negro” to all the musicians who describe—at some point in their jazz learning—some kind of immersion experience in African American music and culture, then a more restricted application of the term might restore its particular resonance. Indeed, if Shaw’s immersion experience was temporary, then to what extent did he really adopt “Negro values and attitudes”? Unlike Mezzrow, Shaw never lived among African Americans; in fact, despite his endless musings on the psychological price of fame and fortune, his central associations seem to have been among the wealthy “white” elite of the American music, literary, and entertainment worlds.¹⁶⁴

III: Beyond Horatio Alger: Benny Goodman’s *The Kingdom of Swing*

Ross Firestone’s biography of Benny Goodman opens with Goodman’s frank admission of his reluctance to talk about, or even to think about, his impoverished childhood in Chicago:

style in *The Trouble with Cinderella*, rather than the black vernacular on display in *Really the Blues* or in *Trumpet on the Wing*, by the New Orleans jazz musician, Wingy Manone.¹⁶⁴ Melnick’s characterization of George Gershwin as a white Negro seems equally questionable, based as it is on Gershwin’s brief visit to the South Carolina Sea islands, where he went “to mine that ‘inexhaustible source of folk material’” for his work, *Porgy and Bess* (122). But as he did with Shaw, Melnick qualifies his description of Gershwin, conceding that his “‘Blackness’ was temporary, detachable and merely functional,” and, in a later passage, that “Gershwin’s execution of white Negroism . . . was obviously provisional. During his career he more consistently cultivated a high-art cosmopolitanism far removed from Blackness” (122, 128).

Many times I've been asked to talk in depth about it. But I've resisted. I don't know why. I guess there are things that I simply want to block out. Probably because I never found it all that enjoyable. Growing up poor. Living in certain parts of Chicago. I'm not a great one for remembering.
(qtd. in Firestone 17)

Although Goodman's comments come from a 1975 interview, they help to explain the reticence and even superficiality that mark his 1939 autobiography, *The Kingdom of Swing*. In stark contrast to Shaw's deeply introspective *The Trouble with Cinderella* and Mezzrow's jive talking and reefer-saturated *Really the Blues*, *The Kingdom of Swing* seems a classic Horatio Alger tale, with Goodman as the industrious, optimistic child of Russian Jewish immigrants who leaves behind the slums of Chicago to become the most successful bandleader of his generation. While Shaw and Mezzrow offer sharp critiques of America as a land of opportunity and equality for all, Goodman presents himself as the eager recipient of America's beneficence and goodwill. While Shaw and Mezzrow seem eager to display their cultural sophistication—and, in the case of Shaw, his powerful intellectual curiosity—Goodman's simple style and non-technical discussion of swing music and the significant players associated with it suggest that he might have written his autobiography with his young jitterbug fans in mind. And finally, while Shaw and Mezzrow portray themselves as sharply at odds with their nuclear Jewish families and the larger Jewish community in which they were raised, Goodman emphasizes the closeness

of his working-class Jewish family and their contribution to his development as a musician, and to his ultimate success as a swing bandleader.¹⁶⁵

In certain respects, then, Goodman's reticence presents a particular challenge to an analysis of his self-representation, for missing in *The Kingdom of Swing* is the searching examination of race and ethnicity found in the autobiographies of Shaw and Mezzrow; furthermore, when Goodman approaches these topics, as he does, for example, in discussing his attempts to integrate his bands, his comments are marked by caution and indirection, as if he is always mindful (and perhaps fearful) of controversy. For this reason, the analysis that follows relies on other sources—in particular those from his biographers and the cultural historians of jazz who have written on him—to contextualize Goodman's comments within the prevailing attitudes of the jazz world in which he lived and worked. And yet, even granting Goodman's caution, a careful reading of his representation of his Jewish identity, or of his account of his experience as the most

¹⁶⁵ Goodman dedicates his autobiography to the memory of his father, David Goodman, who died in 1926 after being hit by a car, just as his son was establishing himself as a promising young clarinetist playing American popular music. His death was a severe blow to Benny, who recognized "that this had happened just as [my brother] Harry and I were beginning to do well, and could have given the folks some of the things they never had out of life" (Goodman and Kolodin 71). Following his father's death, Goodman assumed an even larger responsibility for his family, with his mother and two youngest brothers eventually following him to New York to live with him, an arrangement that seems to have continued up to the time of publication: "From that time on, we lived together pretty much, except when I stay at the hotel where I am playing. However we always have dinner together on Sunday when I am in New York, regardless of what else may be happening" (111). Goodman also cites the support of his sister Ethel, who "helped" him in buying his first Martin clarinet and who worked overtime in order to pay for his first tuxedo, which he needed for his gigs (35). Ethel later moved to New York and worked for Goodman's band, living with several other family members whom Benny looked after (191).

famous “white” bandleader of the 1930s, or of his efforts to integrate his bands, reveals his surprisingly complex negotiation of issues of race and ethnicity against a backdrop of the looming Second World War and ongoing struggles within the United States against both racism and anti-Semitism.

The Kingdom of Swing begins with Goodman’s discussion of his humble beginnings on Chicago’s West Side, where he was born in 1909—the ninth of twelve children—to David and Dora Goodman, Russian Jewish immigrants who met and married in Baltimore in the 1890s before moving to Chicago in 1902 to raise their rapidly expanding family (16). Goodman describes Chicago’s West Side around 1918, when he was nine years old, as “a pretty hopeless neighborhood, the Ghetto of Chicago,” populated predominantly by Jews but “with a sprinkling of Italians” (18).¹⁶⁶ Although he seems to have shown little inclination to participate in the tough street life of adolescent gangs that other young Chicago jazz musicians found so alluring,¹⁶⁷ he nonetheless proudly marks himself as poor and underclass, as in his description of a popular childhood game: “One game we played pretty nearly all the time, though, was cops and robbers. A funny thing about this was that the cops always got the worst of it, because in

¹⁶⁶ The Maxwell Street ghetto where Goodman’s family lived, was, in Firestone’s words, “an overcrowded slum near the railroad yards and surrounding factories” which “had long been a breeding ground for violence and crime and was commonly known as Bloody Maxwell,” with Jewish, Irish, and Italian gangs roaming within blocks of one another (Firestone 18, 23).

¹⁶⁷ In his cultural history of Chicago jazz, William Kenney suggests that “Goodman showed less adolescent rebelliousness than Mezzrow and some of the others. While stirred by the restless sensibility of the city, Goodman saw music as a challenging body of knowledge, a craft, and a more creative avenue than factory labor for making much-needed money to support himself and his family” (Kenney 93).

that kind of a neighborhood, the cops represented something that never did much for the poor people” (25).

Goodman writes that his father was a tailor in a factory “when there was work” (15).¹⁶⁸ Clearly, though, the family suffered through periods of severe deprivation, and Goodman recalls “a time when we lived in a basement without heat during the winter, and a couple of times when there wasn’t anything to eat. I don’t mean *much* to eat. I mean *anything*” (16, emphasis in original).¹⁶⁹ Yet Goodman credits his father with trying to steer his children toward a life with opportunities beyond the sweat shop; quickly it became apparent that the path to this life would be through music, which “Pop genuinely liked,” and which he endeavored in various ways to introduce to his children, including taking them to Sunday afternoon band concerts in Chicago’s Douglas Park and arranging music lessons for Benny and two of his brothers at the local synagogue (15, 20).¹⁷⁰ In

¹⁶⁸ Lewis Erenberg—based on his interview with Goodman’s sister, Ida Winsberg—describes Goodman’s father as “a tailor in a sweatshop and a socialist in his politics,” (Erenberg 71; fn. 9, 268). Goodman’s early socialist influences will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Shortly before he died in 1986, Goodman told his friend, Jim Maher, that his family was so impoverished that his father was sometimes forced to work in the stockyards: “He shoveled the guts that were made into lard. And it was terrible. He’d come home in the evening still wearing those high boots, and when he walked in the house, he’d be so tired. . . . The stink was awful. It was sickening.” As Maher told Goodman biographer, Ross Firestone: “It was obviously a horrible, horrible memory for a boy to carry with him through life: his father, a skilled craftsman, a Jewish man who kept a kosher home, forced to slog around all day in the entrails of swine. And now here Benny was on the eve of his death finally able to talk about it” (Firestone 20).

¹⁷⁰ Goodman also emphasizes his father’s respect for formal education—“Pop was always trying to get us to study, so that we would get ahead in the world. He always envied people with book-learning and education”—yet David Goodman seems to have accepted his son’s lack of interest at school (19). Certainly there is no hint in Goodman’s autobiography, in contrast to Shaw’s, that he failed to live up to his father’s expectations.

contrast to Artie Shaw's portrait of his father's disapproval of his playing, Goodman depicts his prospects of a career as a professional musician as a desirable, even respectable, option for him and his poor working-class family, and a way out of the tough life on Chicago's West Side: "As a matter of fact," he writes, "judging from the neighborhood where I lived, if it hadn't been for the clarinet I might just as easily have been a gangster" (31).

In Goodman's account, the ethos of care within Chicago's West Side Jewish community served as a buffer against the material deprivation of its residents; the local synagogue "lent the instruments to the kids" and the band leader provided basic instruction and led rehearsals of the student band, thus providing Goodman and his siblings with their first playing experiences at no cost to the family (20). In addition, he notes that his father "was very much interested in the Workmen's Circle in Chicago" and would take him to meetings there, where sometimes he would be asked to play (23–24). Goodman's passing mention of the Workmen's Circle here is particularly significant, for it is his only reference to his family's link to Chicago's Jewish working-class, socialist community.¹⁷¹ Yet David Goodman was clearly also willing to look beyond his own community for help, so when the synagogue's funds for the band dried up, he enrolled

¹⁷¹ Karen Brodtkin describes the Workmen's Circle—a Jewish fraternal organization founded in New York in 1900 with close links to the American labour movement and which promoted Yiddish cultural and social programs—as one of a number of benefit organizations that "were crucial for integrating immigrants into the worlds of waged labor, politics, cultural life, and the neighborhood" (120). She points out that the historical experiences of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe left them bound to a communal proletarian Jewishness, no matter what their occupational background (107–09).

several of his children in the boys' band at Hull House, the settlement house founded by Jane Addams. Goodman recalls that his father would "put us all on a sled and drag us over for our lessons. He was very proud of our being able to play even a little bit, and whenever somebody came to the house they would have to hear us" (22).¹⁷²

Prior to this, Goodman had began clarinet lessons with the esteemed teacher Franz Schoepp, and during the two years that he studied with him—"the only real teaching I ever had"—he learned "the foundation for a legitimate clarinet technic" (26–27). As significant as Schoepp was to Goodman as a teacher, he also was responsible for Goodman's early social and musical interactions with African Americans, for both Buster Bailey and Jimmy Noone, influential black jazz clarinetists of the 1920s and 1930s, were students of Schoepp's in the same period as Goodman. "As a matter of fact," Goodman recalls,

one of the first things I heard about Schoepp was that he gave lessons to anybody, regardless of color, and I guess that sort of impressed me, because there was plenty of prejudice about such things, even in Chicago. If you remember, they had those terrible race riots there only a little while before, in 1919. (26)

¹⁷² The Hull House band, Ross Firestone explains, was revived after WWI in an attempt "to cope with 'the boy problem'—the wave of lawlessness and crime that swept across the Chicago slums following the end of the war" (23); through its band, Hull House was attempting "to lure the young gangsters-in-the-making away from the lawlessness of the streets" and to prepare them for the viable occupation of dance hall musician (23). Fellow students of Goodman's at Hull House included future jazz musicians Art Hodes and Milt Hinton (24).

For a time Goodman's and Bailey's lessons with Schoepp occurred "on the same day," and Goodman remembers that "we'd play duets, while Schoepp stood over us, counting time and watching that we played correctly" (26).¹⁷³

Although Goodman's earliest musical influences had been the popular white bands—New Orleans Rhythm Kings (NORK), Bailey's Lucky Seven, and the clarinetist Ted Lewis—from the time he joined the American Musicians' Union at the age of thirteen his jobbing brought him in contact with the black musicians who had settled in Chicago from New Orleans and other points South. A characteristic feature of Goodman's narrative—first revealed in the following passage but repeated throughout his autobiography—is his tendency to indicate his debt to the African American jazz tradition without mentioning race directly. During the summer of 1923, Goodman writes, he was playing a date at which a second band had been hired that included Lil Hardin and Baby and Johnny Dodds, among others. "One set and they had played us kids right off the band stand," Goodman continues. "As I recall, it was the first time I had heard [clarinetist]

¹⁷³ Goodman biographers Ross Firestone and James Lincoln Collier both stress Franz Schoepp's role in teaching the young Benny Goodman to look beyond racial difference and to focus all his efforts on his accomplishments as a musician. Collier emphasizes Goodman's fortune in having the opportunity to study with Schoepp, "a man with a social conscience," who taught both "black pupils as well as white, which was a rare, indeed shocking, practice at the time" (Collier 16). Collier adds that under Schoepp, Goodman "got what was probably the best early training of any jazz musician of his generation" (Collier 17). Firestone even claims Schoepp as an influence in Goodman's later decision to hire black musicians, citing "his old teacher's indifference to anything other than exclusively musical considerations" (Firestone 26).

Johnny and I was satisfied to stand around and listen. We couldn't get on the stand for the rest of the night, but nobody wanted to hear us anyway" (37–38).¹⁷⁴

Goodman quit school when he was fourteen; the decisive factor was his ability to earn a steady income as a musician and to “help out with things” at home (41). But as brief as Goodman's high school experience was, it proved invaluable in bringing him in contact with many of Chicago's young white jazz musicians, “The Wild West Side Mob,” as he refers to them, who attended Harrison High—Goodman's school—or Austin High, another West Side school.¹⁷⁵ Accompanied by some of these West Side musicians, Goodman began to hang out in the South Side cafés such as Lincoln Gardens, where he listened carefully to Bessie Smith, Jimmy Noone, and King Oliver's band with Louis Armstrong. Once again Goodman does not refer explicitly to race, nor to the fact that he and the other young West Side musicians were getting their schooling in the African American jazz tradition; he simply describes Oliver's band with Armstrong as “one of our

¹⁷⁴ In a later interview, Goodman explained that even though the bandleader “was really angry” about the crowd's indifference to his band, Goodman's own dedication to learning from these black players overrode any other considerations: “I was fascinated by the music. . . . Johnny gave me one of my most important lessons on clarinet. . . . His tone was clear and beautiful, his ideas exciting, his interpretation of the blues especially moving. . . . I have never forgotten [him]” (qtd. in Firestone 32).

¹⁷⁵ One of these musicians, cornetist Jimmy McPartland, who played “three or four jobs” a week with Goodman while they were still in high school, offers a vivid account of Goodman and his family during that period: “I had an old Ford, and I would drive over to Benny's place to pick him up. His mother always had me sit down with them for dinner. There were so many mouths to feed I don't know how she managed to put food on the table. But there was a lovely family feeling in the house. You could feel the affection there. And I was always welcome. Benny's mother was wonderful to me. I was the nice little Christian boy who got Benny work. After the job we'd stop back at his house and have something to eat. Mrs. Goodman was a real Jewish mother, and she'd make me *gribbenes*—fried chicken fat—and eggs” (qtd. in Firestone 31).

favorites, but I'll never forget the first time I heard Bessie Smith, the great blues singer who died last year. . . . Bessie was a great big woman with a voice that was even larger than she was, and a heart that was bigger than both. When she sang the blues, it took you right out" (42).

In 1925, when Goodman was sixteen, he joined Benny Pollack's band, a significant career move for him, he explains, because it was "the first *large* white band that played real jazz" (62, emphasis in original). In Goodman's view, Fletcher Henderson's band, which used arrangements but also allowed "some leeway for the soloists, "was the model of "real jazz," whereas the bands of Paul Whiteman and Isham Jones "didn't play what musicians called real jazz," for they gave their musicians little "opportunity to stand up and play a chorus out of their own heads" (63).¹⁷⁶ Goodman's explanation here is helpful in illuminating specific aspects of his own emerging musical and personal identity. In the first place, in a pattern that he will repeat throughout his narrative, we see him beginning to define jazz and his own relationship to it by reference to the contemporary black bands he was encountering, either in person or on recordings.

Beyond this, however, Goodman's description of Pollack's band as a "white band" offers an important glimpse into his attitude regarding his own Jewish ethnicity and its relationship to a more generic whiteness, or white identity. This becomes clearer a little later in the passage, when Goodman tells an anecdote that involves him and the

¹⁷⁶ Improvisation, in Goodman's view, is clearly a fundamental aspect of hot jazz that distinguishes it from the popular sweet music of the day, and while he credits African American bands as the original source for hot jazz, he and other "white" jazz musicians are also capable of learning to play "hot".

other Jewish musicians in the band. The Victor recording company sent someone “to hear the band,” just as it was beginning to make a name for itself, as the first step toward a possible recording contract. “Unfortunately we didn’t know what night he was coming,” Goodman explains, “and it was particularly bad since he picked out *Yom Kippur*, when all the Jewish boys in the band . . . were away” (69). At that point in their careers, evidently, the musicians in Pollack’s band felt enough connection to their Jewish identity that they would miss work in order to observe the high holidays, yet they are, in some broader and perhaps more important sense, white. It is worth considering to what extent Goodman’s positioning of Pollack’s band against Fletcher Henderson’s make him and other Jewish musicians seem white—or at least whiter—than if the comparison involved Pollack’s band and say, the Casa Loma Band, or the bands of Paul Whiteman or Glenn Miller. At the least, this passage suggests that in this period, Goodman and his bandmates shifted comfortably between identities as ethnic minority outsiders to members of the white establishment, while at the same time they turned to African American jazz musicians as the model upon which to construct their own musical identities.

Early in 1928, the Pollack band decided to try its luck in New York; for most of the musicians, this was their first experience there, and they made a point of visiting Harlem on their first night in town. Before long, Goodman writes, people began to refer to them as “the only hot band in town,” with the notable exceptions of the bands of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington (85). Other remarks from Goodman in this section point to at least a degree of socializing between white and African American musicians in New York in the late 1920s; for example, during the time he shared “an

apartment house” at the Bender Court with other musicians, he recalls seeing “Bing Crosby about the place quite a bit” as well as Louis Armstrong, who “came over when he was in town” (95).

And yet many years would pass before Goodman performed and recorded with African American musicians. By his own admission, the person who most encouraged him in this undertaking—one that would significantly contribute to breaking racial barriers in jazz—was John Hammond, the renowned jazz critic and record producer whose love for black music and abhorrence of racism led him to reject his background of upper-class privilege and devote his life to promoting social justice through music and a host of Popular Front causes.¹⁷⁷ In 1933 Hammond arranged several recordings featuring Goodman with “mixed bands,” including a date with Billie Holiday (her first recording), and later dates with Coleman Hawkins, Teddy Wilson, and Bessie Smith (her final recording) (126–28). As with Goodman’s earlier discussion of the influence of the black musicians he encountered in Chicago, he approaches the subject of race cautiously, first offering details of the tunes and personnel on the various sessions before turning to the significance of the racial integration of these sessions.

“It was during these months, around the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934, that I first began to make records with colored musicians,” Goodman writes. “For this the responsibility must be given almost entirely to John Hammonds [sic], who really put me

¹⁷⁷ For excellent accounts of Hammond’s transformation from “a pampered child of the wealthy Anglo-Saxon elite” (Erenberg 122) to his significant yet controversial role during the 1930s and 1940s as radical critic and activist for jazz and other domestic and international causes associated with racial and working-class justice, see Erenberg 120–149; Stowe 50–72.

back in touch with the kind of music they could play.”¹⁷⁸ According to Goodman, Hammond frequently took him up to Harlem to listen to music there, and on one of those visits they came across Billie Holiday singing “in a little dive on 135th Street. Nobody had to convince me, with my background in Chicago, about their ability,” Goodman adds, eager to remind the reader of his own origins in the city to which African American musicians had flocked, and where he had first encountered King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Bessie Smith.¹⁷⁹

For the previous “seven or eight years,” Goodman continues, he “had gotten out of touch with them”—that is, black musicians—other than hearing them “in a night club or on records.” And because there had only been a handful of jazz recordings prior to this point that had featured a mixed band, “the idea of working with them had never come my way before, nor, for that matter, had there been much opportunity” (129). While the opportunity to perform in public with a mixed band remained limited, Goodman stresses the benefits that have resulted from the recording of mixed bands. “Some of the things that have given me the greatest pleasure as a musician would not have come about otherwise” (129–30).

This view is consistent with Goodman’s account of his own efforts, beginning in 1934, to form a big band—specifically, in his words, a big “white band”—that would

¹⁷⁸ Erenberg argues that Hammond played a central role, along with other “jazz critics and impresarios,” in giving jazz “a specific ideological content. . . . The rise of a broad left-democratic commitment to swing as part of an authentic ‘people’s culture’ placed the music at the forefront of challenges to the music industry and to American society” (122).

¹⁷⁹ Goodman’s phrasing here seems to leave Holiday standing in for all the African American musicians he has come across and admired in Chicago.

freely incorporate the musical conceptions of African American big-band jazz as it established its own identity; this borrowing would include hiring black bandleader Fletcher Henderson to arrange for the band, and eventually hiring black musicians Teddy Wilson, Lionel Hampton, and Cootie Williams. As Goodman recalls telling John Hammond, “There were practically no hot bands using white musicians at the time. . . and more than a few musicians were just sitting in on regular dance bands, waiting, or hoping for something to break” (133–34). In his view, Goodman adds,

no white band had yet gotten together a good rhythm section that would kick out, or jump, or rock, or swing (all these expressions being ways musicians have of describing the life and vitality that comes from music that is played at just the right tempo with a lot of enthusiasm and unified rhythmic snap), using arrangements that fit in with this idea, which would give the men a chance to play solos and express the music in their own individual way. (135)

In this carefully constructed explanation of his ideal band, Goodman situates himself as a white bandleader whose music is modeled on the characteristics of the best black bands of the era—the bands of Henderson, Basie, Webb, among others— whose bands “kick out, or jump, or rock, or swing.”

In 1934 Goodman experienced the biggest break of his career to that point, when his recently formed band landed the top spot on the “Let’s Dance” program, sponsored by the National Biscuit Company and broadcast “for three hours from coast to coast” every Saturday night by the Music Corporation of America (149–55). Henderson’s

arrangements for the band, Goodman maintains, were crucial to shaping its distinctive sound and swing, as well as its success on the airwaves. Here, as in his earlier discussions of black musicians, Goodman implies Henderson's race without mentioning it directly, but rather by situating him within the African American jazz community: "There's hardly a fine colored musician who hasn't worked for Fletcher at one time or another, and they all owe a lot to him" (156). He adds that Fletcher Henderson's "King Porter Stomp," and Horace Henderson's "Big John Special" were "[a]s far as I know, . . . the first time they had been played by a white orchestra—and it was one of the biggest kicks I've ever had to go through these scores and dig the music out of them, even in rehearsal" (157).

In his detailed account of Henderson's wide-ranging abilities as an arranger—both on the "big arrangements" and "on melodic tunes"—Goodman seems to be going out of his way to highlight his debt to him, as he does when he concludes, "Without Fletcher I probably would have had a pretty good band, but it would have been something quite different from what it eventually turned out to be" (162).¹⁸⁰ His acknowledgment of African American musical influences goes further; for example, in order for his band to

¹⁸⁰ For example, Goodman attributes his decision to call "out some of our big Fletcher arrangements" during the second part of the historic 1935 concert at the Palomar in Los Angeles with inspiring the listless crowd as well as his own band, who "dug in with some of the best playing I'd heard since we left New York" (198). Lewis Erenberg suggests that Goodman, by hiring Henderson and other outstanding black and white arrangers, "cemented a union of black and white musical traditions as it tied jazz more firmly to the mainstream of American music and youth culture" (Erenberg 74). At the same time, however, he acknowledges that the discriminatory practices that dictated the entire music industry—for example, that Fletcher Henderson, because he was black, could not get a commercial sponsor on radio—"favored white entertainers, and Goodman was no exception" (74). As Erenberg concludes, "Together the two brought African American music to national prominence, but in a segregated society, Goodman became the idol" (Erenberg 75).

“find its groove” before it began its weekly broadcasts on “Let’s Dance,” the musicians went up to Harlem to play at the Savoy on nights on which there was no scheduled program. “Playing on the stand opposite us was ‘Chick’ Webb, whose orchestra has always played with tremendous drive,” Goodman writes; playing against Webb’s orchestra gave the Goodman band “a wonderful opportunity to compare our playing with his, to try to match some of the guts he got into the music, without trying to copy him in any other way” (158).

When Goodman hired Fletcher Henderson as arranger for his band, it was one step toward breaking down racial barriers in jazz; it was, however, in many respects an easy step, analogous to the interracialism taking place in that era on radio or in the recording studio, in that Henderson’s presence was invisible to the public at large. But Goodman’s decision to perform on stage with his “mixed” trio of Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa took interracialism in jazz to another, much more public, level, and it is little surprise that caution and allusion mark his description of “the great response from the audience” to the trio’s first public performance:

The thought of a white and colored group playing in a hotel room was pretty revolutionary at the time, but we worked it out so that Teddy played intermission piano (while the band was off the stand) and the trio was made a part of the floor show, spotted separately. After a few days’ trial, it was apparent that the thing was a natural from every standpoint, and it has been a part of our organization ever since. (214)

What Goodman only hints at, but does not say directly, is that Wilson's appearance with his full big band would have gone beyond what the public or the hotel management would tolerate—in other words, it would have been beyond “pretty revolutionary.”

Later Goodman addresses the controversy created by his mixed bands more directly, noting there “there has been talk about the problems of presenting a band with a mixed group like the trio and the quartet. However, I have found few places where the crowds have not been wonderfully responsive to Lionel and Teddy” (228). The quartet did encounter problems during a stop in the Southwest, when a racist cop prevented a waiter from delivering champagne sent by an admiring fan to Lionel Hampton. “Well, we were up against it,” Goodman writes. “We didn't want to complain because the fellow might have gotten some of his boy-friends together and really made trouble for us—and at the same time, we couldn't stand for any jive like this” (230). Another policeman, this one “a jazz fan,” was enlisted to help straighten out the dispute. Goodman seems confident that his strategy of resolve combined with diplomacy was achieving the desired result; he ends his account on a note of optimism, insisting that despite some setbacks, in the end “nobody cares much what colors or races are represented just so long as we play good music. That's the way it should be, and I certainly hope that the time will come when any band can play anyplace, as long as it delivers what the public comes to hear—music (231).

But Goodman's musical influences extended beyond the swing world—white or black. He, like Artie Shaw, performed and recorded music from the classical clarinet repertoire—“legitimate clarinet music,” in Goodman's words— even after he had become

one of the most successful swing-era bandleaders (166). Sometimes the two worlds overlapped, as it did in his description of a classical recital he performed with a string quartet (that included John Hammond on viola) at the East 91st Street home of Hammond's parents; the recital, performed in the mansion's "large music room and ballroom" was followed by a jam session upstairs in Hammond's room, with Mildred Bailey singing, accompanied by Fletcher Henderson, after which the group headed uptown to Harlem to make the club scene there (167–69). Goodman's evocative description reveals perhaps what was his most important contribution to the swing era: his role in breaking down, or at least blurring, the distinction between highbrow and popular, between black and white swing bands, and even between ethnic American and Anglo-Saxon American musicians.¹⁸¹

And yet while Goodman reveals his willingness to challenge overt racism in jazz (and in American society in general), at times he also implies that black musicians have benefited from, and perhaps have even required, the assistance of white managers and agents to achieve commercial success. In a passage in which he extols the virtues of the Basie band, he notes that "only three years ago Basie and [bassist Walter] Page were plugging along in some cellar joint in Kansas City, working for starvation wages, with just about no hope of ever getting anyplace. . . . It was only right that somebody should do

¹⁸¹ Lewis Erenberg supports this view, suggesting that swing music in general served an egalitarian function: "In fact, part of swing's appeal lay in bringing the egalitarian urban jazz world to the middle and working classes. What counted was how one played. As a result, swing bands were profoundly cosmopolitan, including Italians, Irishmen, Poles, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. Goodman's urban Jewish roots and 'Negroid' accent were a primary part of his appeal" (Erenberg 81).

something about seeing that they got a hearing” (236). That somebody, of course, was John Hammond, perhaps equally admired and reviled in his position as the most influential critic, record producer, and manager of the swing era—and also, as it happens, Benny Goodman’s future brother-in-law.¹⁸²

In the end, even as Goodman spends considerable effort paying tribute to the African American sources of swing music, he reveals himself most clearly as a progressive willing to do his part to break down discrimination in jazz, but with a pragmatist’s awareness of the limitations of his time and place. Thus, in a passage in which he discusses the title of “king of swing”—a title by which he was increasingly known by the mid-1930s, especially following a glowing article about him that appeared in *Time* magazine in late 1935—he explains that he resisted the title “because I didn’t know how long this was going to last, and I didn’t want to be tied down to something people might say was old-fashioned just because they got tired of the name, in a year or so” (209). There is no sense in this passage that Goodman felt undeserving of the title, or

¹⁸² Benny Goodman married Alice Hammond, John’s sister, in 1942, and the couple had two daughters. According to Ross Firestone, Goodman’s marriage to Alice Hammond was “improbable” because of the “vast difference in social backgrounds. . . . Benny’s great success in the music business had made him at thirty-four a very wealthy man, but he still had a lot of rough edges, and from the haughty perspective of the Protestant elite, there was no overlooking his immigrant Jewish origins. . . . Marriage to Alice smoothed off a lot of Benny’s rough edges and broadened his interests beyond music to give him a fuller, richer life” (308–09). Several critics have suggested that Goodman’s marriage to Alice Hammond signaled his own desire to move up the social ladder and achieve official recognition within white Protestant America.

that for example, the African American bandleaders he credits as central influences in his own development—Henderson, Basie, or Webb—were the real kings of swing.¹⁸³

In Goodman's career as a swing bandleader, his Jewish ethnicity continued to influence his choice of and approach to his material. In the late 1930s, he made hit recordings of the Yiddish tune, "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" and his trumpeter "Ziggy" Elman's klezmer-based melody, "And the Angels Sing."¹⁸⁴ Absent from his autobiography, however, is any discussion of this material, or more significantly, any discussion of what his Jewishness meant to him as the famed bandleader Benny Goodman. Rather, as his childhood in the heart of Chicago's Maxwell Street ghetto receded into the distant past, and as his status as "the king of swing" replaces the earlier images of him and his Jewish bandmates in Pollack's band missing a playing engagement to observe Yom Kippur, he seems to grow progressively "whiter."

So how does Goodman's self-representation in *The Kingdom of Swing* compare with the critical assessment of his role in breaking down racial barriers in jazz, and of the implications of his association with Popular Front causes in the late 1930s? Goodman biographer Ross Firestone stresses Goodman's cautious pragmatism at several key

¹⁸³ In his discussion of the controversy among jazz followers regarding Goodman's crowning as the "King of Swing," Ross Firestone quotes "an irate reader" of *Metronome*, who wrote a letter to the journal in which he stated, "I certainly don't think Goodman is all that he's proclaimed to be. 'King of Swing'—fuie! . . . Although I am not colored, I believe the colored boys ought to get piles of credit and praise" (Firestone 158).

¹⁸⁴ "Ziggy" Elman, born Harry Aaron Finkelman, was steeped in the Jewish dance tradition of the "frayliches"—"lively dance tunes associated with celebratory events" and derived from klezmer music (Erenberg 90). Elman first recorded his melody under the name "Frailach in Swing" in 1938; the tune, with the addition of Johnny Mercer's lyrics and recorded as "And the Angels Sing," became the number one hit in the United States in 1939.

moments when Hammond was pushing him toward integration in the studios and on the bandstand; he quotes Hammond's claim that Goodman initially balked at his suggestion to record with mixed bands, saying, "If it gets around that I recorded with colored guys, . . . I won't get another job in this town" (qtd. in Firestone 80). In later references to Goodman's role in integrating jazz, however, Firestone suggests that although "Benny may have had some initial reluctance" to integrate his band, once he made up his mind "he committed himself fully"; this despite the fact that, in Firestone's view, "maintaining a racially integrated band was never a cause for Benny as it was for John Hammond, and black musicians came and went like anyone else" (183, 312).

But whereas Firestone maintains that "Benny had no discernible politics," attributing Goodman's involvement in Popular Front causes solely to his association with Hammond, Lewis Erenberg credits Goodman with an independent political consciousness (Firestone 211). He challenges Goodman's own statement that he saw himself not as a "crusader for colored musicians—just a crusader for music" by suggesting that Goodman's upbringing, as well as his early association with black musicians, contributed significantly to his racial outlook and his later support for Popular Front causes.¹⁸⁵ Citing contemporary newspapers, Erenberg suggests that Goodman's mixed bands became

¹⁸⁵ "He had played with black musicians as a youth," Erenberg writes, "and been inspired by so many black jazz greats in Chicago that he was predisposed against racial prejudice. He also grew up in a left-wing environment; his father supported socialist Eugene Debs and unionism, and his sister Ida became a Communist. If nothing else, his close friendship with Hammond shows an open mind about politics. In addition, he participated in many Popular Front causes. . . . These Popular Front activities attracted the FBI, which described Goodman as 'an ardent Communist sympathizer'" (Erenberg 129).

“symbols of interracial cooperation in black newspapers and the leftist press” and provided the example for other bands to follow (129–30).

Yet Goodman’s decision to integrate his bands by no means met with universal approbation; it is important to realize just how controversial his decision was, if only as a guide for interpreting the caution and delicacy with which Goodman approaches discussions in his autobiography of his role in countering segregation and inequality within the swing community. In David Stowe’s analysis of “the politics of swing” (74), he examines the role of *Down Beat* magazine in airing Goodman’s mixed-band controversy. Although Stowe identifies *Down Beat* as the first American magazine to give “regular attention to African-American music,” as it boasted about its own colour-blind “editorial policy,” he notes that Goodman’s move to integrate his bands provoked a passionate and divisive response from the editors and readers of the magazine (75–76). While *Down Beat* supported Goodman’s decision to hire Teddy Wilson for his trio, Stowe writes that the magazine “seemed to back away from the prospect of an integrated big band,” responding to Goodman’s decision to hire Charlie Christian and Fletcher Henderson for “his regular big band” with “a symposium titled ‘Should Negro Musicians Play in White Bands?’” According to Stowe, “The editors themselves claimed a position of neutrality on the issue, stating their intention to get musicians to ‘*think* about [the issue] instead of feeling about it,’ and noting critically that most musicians opposed to integration refused to give their names” (76, emphasis in original).

In this context, it is easier to appreciate the significance of Goodman’s veiled remarks quoted earlier regarding his trio with Teddy Wilson, in which he explains that

“the trio was made a part of the floor show, spotted separately” in order to appease those hotel patrons who would find Wilson’s appearance with Goodman’s big band unacceptable. It is important to keep in mind that Goodman was constructing his explanation of his role in pushing the acceptable limits of integration within jazz at the same time as he was dealing with the repercussions of his actions in his daily life; the close proximity of the publication of *The Kingdom of Swing* to the events of the mid-to-late thirties Goodman describes might offer sufficient explanation for his reticence.

In *The Kingdom of Swing*, Goodman refers to his famous Carnegie Hall concert of January 16, 1938 without mentioning the picket line that formed outside of Carnegie to protest his support for “the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War” (Firestone 211).

Furthermore, David Stowe reports that in 1939 Goodman “delivered a lecture on jazz at City College of New York,” where an “anti-Nazi protest meeting” was ending when Goodman arrived at the auditorium. According to *Metronome* magazine, which carried a story on the event, Goodman began his lecture with the comment, “What just went on here is important too, and I’m sorry I wasn’t here” (qtd. in Stowe 71). Picket lines and anti-Nazi protests were beyond the interests of *The Kingdom of Swing*, but evidently not beyond those of its author.

IV: Ambivalence and Borscht Belt Humour: Max Kaminsky’s *Jazz Band: My Life in*

Jazz

Trumpeter Max Kaminsky first came to prominence in the late 1920s, when he moved to Chicago and began his association with the white jazz musicians there who were working

out the ensemble style often referred to simply as “Chicago style.” Although he achieved neither the public acclaim nor financial security of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, or many of the other big band leaders of the Swing Era, he earned a reputation in that period as a reliable sideman and exciting hot soloist, working in the big bands of both Goodman and Shaw, as well as in Mezz Mezzrow’s short-lived band. Kaminsky offers his recollections of these other Jewish jazz autobiographers in his own autobiography, *Jazz Band: My Life in Jazz* (1963), which he co-authored with V. E. Hughes; moreover, his detailed and candid explorations of his own identity as a Jew, and of his involvement with “white” and black jazz musicians from the 1920s through the Swing Era and beyond, provide another rich source for examining self-representation within Jewish jazz autobiography.

Kaminsky was born in 1908 in Brockton, Massachusetts, one of seven children of Jewish immigrants who came to the United States during the 1880s from southern Russia. His large family, like Goodman’s, was impoverished; he writes that his father “owned a grocery store most of his life in America, and we were poor most of the time” (2). But whereas Goodman, Shaw, and Mezzrow spent their early years in predominantly Jewish and other European immigrant neighborhoods, Kaminsky lived for a time in the mainly black Boston neighbourhood of Roxbury, where his family dwelled “in an old tenement on William Street in the heart of the colored section” (2).¹⁸⁶ Through this experience,

¹⁸⁶ According to Eric Goldstein, “[b]ecause Jews had a long history in Eastern Europe of trading among peoples of different backgrounds, they did not resent living in an African American neighborhood in order to make their living. . . . When immigrant Jews did come into contact with African Americans, they often exhibited little consciousness of themselves as white. As merchants whose very location in black districts arose from their

Kaminsky gained an early exposure to black music, recalling that “[o]n Sundays my sister Rose would take me to the colored church to hear the gospel singing, and I still remember the street cries of the Negro pushcart men on summer nights, as they hawked their wagonloads of watermelon or fresh-caught crabs...” (2–3). Kaminsky’s evocative description establishes his own origins as poor and working class, while at the same time it illustrates the coming together of two disparate cultural groups, African American and Jewish, linked by poverty and by their shared engagement with musical expression.

Kaminsky’s early exposure to music dominates his account of his childhood in Massachusetts; his sister’s husband “played trumpet in a symphony orchestra,” and Kaminsky “had been brought up in a house filled with music” so that he “just seemed to know instinctively how a band should sound” (2, 5). He recalls that he “always wanted to play the trumpet” and that in exchange for making his brother-in-law a crystal radio set he received a cornet, which from the beginning he seemed to know how to play: “The first time I blew it I got that sound out of it. The next morning I woke at dawn, hopped out of bed, and played ‘Flow Gently, Sweet Afton’ on my new cornet, reading the notes. I’ll never forget how nice it sounded to me” (2). And when Kaminsky was a teenager his sister Betty “bought a phonograph,” and he heard for the first time the classic blues and jazz performers “on the ‘race’ records that came with it as a bonus,” and which he remembers his sister singing along to “while she dusted the furniture and mopped the

own marginality in non-Jewish society, they presented themselves as Jews and not as ‘white men’” (76).

floors” (10–11). Through these memories, Kaminsky conveys not only the general level of musicality within his family, but also their receptiveness to African American music.¹⁸⁷

Kaminsky’s parents clearly retained strong connections to their Jewish identity, for when he was four or five, his family moved to Dorchester, “which was a nicer neighborhood and closer to the Jewish section, where my four sisters, now in their teens, could meet eligible young men” (3). He recalls the tensions between the Irish and Jews in Dorchester, tensions he experienced firsthand when he was a mascot for a boys’ baseball team and witnessed “many a fight when the Irish kids started stoning the synagogues, which were very poor ones, quartered in empty stores” (4). Kaminsky found himself a victim of these ethnic tensions, experiencing daily attacks “by a gang of Irish kids” as he walked to school, and he explains his strategies to defend himself. “The trick was not to show fear in any way. I used to lie awake nights and figure out how to fight, and I had learned very quickly to attack first and ask questions later” (4).

¹⁸⁷ It is instructive to compare the stories that Kaminsky, Goodman, and Mezzrow tell about their sisters. In Kaminsky’s story, his sister Betty is an active participant, along with her brother, in African American cultural expression, “singing her favorite blues from a Maggie Jones record” while she cleans the house (Kaminsky 11). In *The Kingdom of Swing*, Goodman credits his sister Ethel, through her wages as a bookkeeper, with helping to buy his first clarinet and tuxedo; thus, while she enables her brother’s participation in African American music, he does not portray her as a direct participant (Goodman and Kolodin 35; Firestone 20). In *Really the Blues*, as mentioned earlier, Mezzrow expresses particular animosity toward his sister Helen, whose training as a secretary led her to correct the grammar of Bessie Smith’s lyrics, thus displaying her utter failure to participate in or appreciate African American cultural sensibilities (Mezzrow and Wolfe 53–54). These stories also illustrate the way in which labour—both domestic and wage-earning—was sharply demarcated along gender lines that shaped the worlds of these male autobiographers, none of whom was expected to clean their homes or to learn bookkeeping or secretarial skills.

Kaminsky devotes considerable attention in *Jazz Band* to exploring his attitudes toward race, religion, and economic and social standing—issues of central concern for him as he struggles with his conflicting desires to be a jazz musician but also to achieve some measure of financial security and social respectability. These conflicting desires seem directly connected to his Jewish immigrant upbringing, in which values of piety and commitment to family compete with a model of upward assimilation and the outward manifestations of material success. For the most part, his own immediate family holds to the former values, and Kaminsky portrays them with affection and humour, as for example, when he describes how he and his mother hid from his “very pious” father the fact that he was working during the Jewish holidays:

I used to stroll nonchalantly out of the house, my coat collar flipped up to hide my tuxedo, and as soon as I was safely outside I’d whip around to the side window, and my mother would hand me my trumpet case. We weren’t really fooling my father, of course, but he never said anything as long as we did it behind his back and didn’t involve him in it. (57)

Eventually, Kaminsky adds, his father came to accept his choice of career: “My jobs were a big help to my parents, and when he saw how I loved the music, there was never any argument about it” (57). His mother was also supportive, recognizing his desire to apply himself to his music rather than to his formal education— “[m]y high school career at best was a very sketchy one”—because she “knew what music meant to me and she understood I wasn’t running wild” (14). For Kaminsky’s poor immigrant family, as

for Benny Goodman's, a career as a musician was not considered disreputable, but rather a path toward personal fulfillment and economic security.

In most respects, then, Kaminsky represents himself as the quintessential Jewish son, hardworking and dutiful, who by the time he had reached his teens was making an important contribution to his family's finances; in contrast to the middle-class model of upward assimilation, however, Kaminsky was accomplishing this by playing the cornet, rather than by going into business or one of the professions available to Jews in that period.¹⁸⁸ Although he moved to Chicago in 1928, he returned to Boston when his sister wrote him "saying that my parents missed me and wanted me to come home" (42); as he admits, his reluctance to leave Chicago blended with his own homesickness and concern about his parents, and so he returned: "At home I found my mother and father living in a couple of dark little rooms in back of Pa's grocery store. Within a day I found a comfortable, bright little apartment" where his parents remained for the remainder of their lives (42). Following the death of his father in 1934, Kaminsky again returned to Boston where he remained for "most of the next year, since I didn't want to leave my mother all alone after Pa's death" (74); later he tells us that he is almost thirty before he leaves Boston for good (109).

Unlike Mezzrow's Jewish mother in *Really the Blues*, however, Kaminsky's mother is more than a mere stereotype, and he seems eager to show her willingness to embrace a broad range of experiences; these include buying gin for musician Pee Wee

¹⁸⁸ For a discussion of restrictions on employment faced by Jews and other immigrants in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Brodtkin 60–64.

Russell during the Prohibition years—“You think you’re the only one around here has big connections?”—and accepting her son’s relationship with a married woman because, in his words, “My mother couldn’t stand narrow respectability any more than I could” (54, 104). Nonetheless, in certain respects she represents a particular type of Jewish mother: on the one hand overly proud and boastful about her son’s accomplishments while on the other seemingly unaware of what precisely he has accomplished. It is this latter impression of his mother that Kaminsky conveys as he remembers her in the aftermath of her death:

She had been so proud of my playing, and she had loved to hear the crowds applaud when I played in Boston’s Symphony Hall. . . . I kept remembering how I used to play Louis Armstrong records around the house night and day when I was home in the thirties and how my mother was convinced it was I who was on trumpet. . . . “That’s Maxie, but he doesn’t want to tell me because he’s so modest,” she’d say knowingly to Rose, and then turning to me she’d say, “You needn’t be ashamed. In fact, it’s very good!” (173–74)

Yet throughout his narrative Kaminsky struggles with another life model presented to him as a Jewish American male, one based on a particular framework for advancement through economic and social achievement that was beyond his reach as a jazz musician, but which he represents in the character of his friend, Jackie Marshard, who appears throughout *Jazz Band* at particularly significant moments. Kaminsky tells the story of their first meeting as young boys in Dorchester in some detail, for it reveals

important clues about their contrasting temperaments and outlooks, and even about their future paths through life.

Kaminsky explains that when he was eight, he became friends with an orthodox Jewish boy whose family lived directly below his own in their house in Dorchester, and despite their religious differences, he began to accompany him and his family to synagogue on Friday night (4). But one night “three new boys came in”; among them was Marshard, “a big kid [who] began acting tough and making a racket, mocking the Holy Roller family” (4). Standing up in defense of his friend, Kaminsky challenged Marshard to “show a little respect for the house of God”; in response, Marshard, whom Kaminsky describes as “two heads taller” than himself, challenged him to settle the dispute outside. Afraid that he might be judged cowardly, Kaminsky followed him outside, and wasting no time, “I hit Jackie fast and knocked him out with one punch. . . . I couldn’t believe I had done it and neither could the crowd. There was a second of stunned silence, and then they burst into cheers, and while they were cheering I got the hell out of there before Jackie could get up and start over. It was four years before he caught up with me again” (5).

At their next meeting, Marshard immediately challenged Kaminsky to settle their old score, but Kaminsky persuaded him instead to take a job as drummer in the band he had formed, dangling the potential of prize money in a contest the band had entered. At first Kaminsky appears to gain the upper hand: he teaches Marshard, who had never played the drums, basic rhythmic patterns for a waltz and fox trot, and although Marshard was not musically talented, the band nonetheless “won first prize in the contest” (6).

When the children were packing up their instruments, however, the snare drum was knocked to the floor, and although it was not damaged, Marshard insisted on collecting the \$2.50 prize money in order to buy a new drum. According to Kaminsky, “Jackie spoke with such overwhelming authority that without a word I handed the prize money over to him and walked off the stage. Outside I told the other boys in the band and they accepted it too” (7). His decision, he explains, was based on two factors: compassion for Marshard, whose family was left impoverished after the death of his father, and “a kind of embarrassment” for his behaviour “that kept us all silent” (7).

Marshard’s winning of the prize money ended his desire to fight Kaminsky and fueled his lifelong interest in “the music business,” which would eventually lead him to the world of society bands. But shortly after this incident, Kaminsky experienced a humiliating setback, when the members of his “kid band”—which had enjoyed brief success as a novelty item—decided that they would do better with Marshard as their leader: “To be fired from my own band was more than I could take,” Kaminsky writes; he ran home to his mother, who comforted him and shared the following view on human nature with him: “People are bad, ... but they’re bad to themselves and all the harm they do is only to themselves. Wait, and you’ll see this is true” (9). The intervention of Kaminsky’s mother at this point is significant; she encourages her son to adopt a moral path through life that is compatible with his desires to play music and to treat others with fairness, and which does not place undue expectations on him to be a leader at the expense of others.

But as Kaminsky portrays him, the latter is precisely the kind of character Marshard seems to represent. Kaminsky runs into him again in 1936, when Marshard, who was “well on his way to success as a society band leader,” came to hear him at a club in New York, and after expressing dismay at discovering him playing “in a dive,” he offered him a spot in Boston in his society band. In response to Marshard’s parting comment to him—“Money is the most important thing in the world”—Kaminsky replies, “I couldn’t feel like that, even if he was right, but he was so certain about it that I could find no words to tell him that life . . . was for everyone and all things, not just for him and his money” (7).

Yet Marshard’s continuing presence in *Jazz Band* underscores Kaminsky’s own ambivalence about the path he has chosen. In one respect, Marshard functions as an important symbol of the type of Jewish man Kaminsky could not himself be but about whom he experiences envy—the non-artist who attaches himself to the music business to make money but who lacks the creative impulse and dedication of the artist. As Kaminsky recounts his years of financial and creative insecurity as a jazz musician through the Depression, the decline of small-band New Orleans and Chicago-style ensembles, the rise and fall of the Swing Era, the recording ban during WWII and the rise of bebop, Marshard hovers always in the background, serving to remind him (and the reader) of Kaminsky’s dedication to playing jazz in the face of considerable struggles.

Kaminsky and Marshard meet again during the Depression, at a point when Kaminsky was really scuffling and Marshard was playing drums in society bands in Boston and deciding if he should continue to play or become a businessman in the music

world. In this story the tables appear to be reversed: it is Marshard who is doubting the path he has chosen and seeking advice, while Kaminsky appears to recognize that he has made the right choice in pursuing a life as a jazz musician. “[I]t was hard to picture him struggling and scratching the way I knew you had to in order to stay with the music,” Kaminsky explains. “‘You’d better go into the business end,’ I told him, sticking my hands in my pockets to hide my frayed cuffs. ‘You haven’t the heart to suffer with the music. If you really wanted to be a musician you wouldn’t have to ask anybody’s advice’” (61).

By the late 1940s, however, Kaminsky’s confidence was at a low ebb; playing opportunities were scarce, and he felt the responsibility of providing for his young family (by that time he was married and had two young children). In desperation he calls Marshard, who had grown wealthy from his business ventures in the music field, and Marshard promptly invites him to come to Boston to “see what I can work out for you” (177). Although Kaminsky feels gratitude toward his old friend, the desperate situation that drove him to seek his help made his visit “one of the hardest things I ever had to do” (177). He describes himself as “a little half-pint, crowding forty, beat, scared, and broke,” in contrast to Marshard, who “not only looked as fit and handsome as ever, he seemed actually to glow with prosperity and well-being” (178).

Yet once again Marshard unburdens himself to Kaminsky, admitting that his success in business has left him unsatisfied, and that he was “turning more and more to religion as his business affairs grew more and more successful.” Kaminsky responds with a dig at his old friend: he reminds him about their first meeting at “shul,” when Kaminsky

had challenged Marshard for his disrespectful behaviour toward Kaminsky's religious neighbours (179). Although Kaminsky reacts with emotion to Marshard's willingness to hire him and to give him some much-needed cash, the story is clearly intended to illustrate the limitations of monetary success and to contrast once again Kaminsky's own steadfast determination to earn his livelihood through music, despite the hard times, with Marshard's clearly unsatisfying experience of prosperity. Shortly afterwards, Marshard dies in a car crash, and Kaminsky reflects on the irony of their two lives: "He had worked hard, and had just started to live and drink and enjoy life, enjoy his money, and here I had come to the point of giving up all I cared about so I could do something for my family. No, money isn't everything, but this is a hell of a way to win an argument" (182).

And yet even after Marshard's death, Kaminsky seems haunted by what might have been, in terms of his own career, if his friend had not died: "I began to feel then that if Jackie had lived he would have backed me in a jazz band. Jackie loved to create business and success, and had he been managing the business end of things, he would have made me, but that wasn't to be" (182). In some sense, then, Kaminsky has tied his own success as a jazzman to the success of his lifelong friend; in so doing, he shows himself to be still ambivalent—torn by competing desires to provide a secure and respectable life for his family and to play the music he loved best—jazz. In the end, Kaminsky chooses to compromise—for twelve years he played the "society-band circuit three times a year" in order to supplement his work as a jazz musician (183).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Kaminsky's description of his experience playing in society bands conveys a self-conscious awareness of his status as a Jew, as he positions himself and the other Jewish

Although Kaminsky's examination of his Jewish identity is a central theme within his narrative, he is also eager to situate himself within the wider social and cultural context of his life as a jazz musician, including his broad range of experiences in small ensembles and big bands, both "white" and integrated. For example, he describes his relationship with the Austin High Gang and other white players he befriended when he moved to Chicago in 1928—"white musicians who were to contribute so much to jazz" (32)—praising in particular their good sense of time, which was so unlike the "nervous, ragged, ricky-tick beat of the white dance bands of the twenties" (33).¹⁹⁰ He attributes this to the fact that they, like Kaminsky, had learned to feel time from the great black New Orleans jazz musicians, so that "inexperienced as I was, I had the innate feeling of the beat and of playing the melody simply and purely without all the little flutings and corny licks that were regarded as 'hot' in those days" (33). In this passage Kaminsky reveals his eagerness, like the other jazz autobiographers discussed in this chapter, to establish his link to the black jazz tradition.

musicians in these bands as outsiders passing in a white Protestant, upper-class world. Typically, these descriptions employ humour, as in his story about "the bandleader who, when asked by a dowager if he was Jewish, smoothly answered, 'Not necessarily, madam,' without his baton losing a beat" (183). Kaminsky also makes no attempt to hide his contempt for the music he was forced to play in these bands: "There is no beat like the society beat. For seven or eight hours, the society bands will grind out some five hundred songs like an unending chain of link sausages, all at the exact same lively, brisk tempo, which is so marked that you have to be stone deaf, or stoned, not to follow it" (183–84).

¹⁹⁰ Kaminsky identifies the ensemble improvisational style, in which several horns played simultaneously, as the key contribution of Chicago-style jazz; while the black bands swung, "their swing was always based primarily on rhythmic riffs ... rather than on ensemble improvisation" (111).

Kaminsky's desire to link himself to that tradition—which, as has been argued elsewhere in this study, is a means to authentication for non-African-American jazz musicians—is revealed most clearly in his account of his relationships with Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday. In the late 1920s, Kaminsky went to hear Armstrong in Harlem, shortly after Kaminsky had been left stranded by an unscrupulous manager in Binghamton, who failed to pay him after a week's engagement. "Although I had met Louis only a couple of times by then," Kaminsky explains, he came by his table "to say hello," and Kaminsky told him about his experience in Binghamton. "You just naturally spill your troubles to that warm-hearted man, but I was completely unprepared for him to put his hand in his pocket and pull out some bills" (48–49). An intricate song-and-dance follows: Kaminsky refuses Armstrong's money, Armstrong insists that he take the money, and Kaminsky finally agrees, with the stipulation that Armstrong will allow him to "pay him back." The following year, though, when Kaminsky runs into Armstrong again and attempts to pay off his debt, the roles are reversed: "Now it was his turn to refuse and mine to insist, until finally he growled that he'd take it on one condition—'if you autograph it for me, daddy.' I felt as big as Rockefeller as I carefully wrote my name on a ten spot, which Louis gravely tucked away in his wallet" (48–49).

Although on the surface the passage is about Armstrong's generosity, there is also the clear implication that Kaminsky is deserving of that generosity; even though the two had met only "a couple of times" prior to this encounter, Kaminsky had obviously made a sufficient impression on Armstrong (as a musician or as a human being or as both, Kaminsky does not say) that Armstrong wanted to help him. Much later in *Jazz Band*,

Kaminsky recounts his experience of being selected—on Armstrong’s recommendation—to tour Europe and the Far East in 1957 as a member of an all-star jazz band.¹⁹¹ The previous summer he and Armstrong had appeared with different bands at the Carter Barron Amphitheatre in Washington, D.C., and, as Kaminsky tells the story

Louis would listen to our band each day over the speaker in his dressing room while he was getting ready for his own set, and reports came buzzing back to me so thick and fast about how much Louis liked my horn that I stopped in one afternoon to thank him and to return the compliment. “Man, it’s very similar, very similar!” Louis said, pumping my hand enthusiastically. I guess there is no higher praise from Louis. He meant, of course, let me add for the uninitiated, that the feeling was the same, not the licks. (203)

The central purpose of these two anecdotes, beyond showing Kaminsky’s respect and even deference toward Armstrong, is to highlight Kaminsky’s own skill and mastery and his relationship with the African American jazz tradition.

In another evocative passage, Kaminsky recounts meeting Billie Holiday at the Famous Door on 52nd Street in the summer of 1936 and telling her that he remembered seeing her up in Harlem several years earlier “singing and waiting on tables at the Alhambra Grill” (87). As he explains, “The fact that I had heard her uptown made us good friends because she was a colored girl downtown in the white section and she felt

¹⁹¹ “Louis couldn’t go because of other commitments,” Kaminsky explains, “but he said to Joe Glaser, ‘The cat to send is Max Kaminsky. He’ll blow up a storm over there’” (204).

good knowing I knew about Harlem, and when I heard her sing again I knew why I had remembered her name” (87). He describes her striking physical presence that combined “dignity” and “shyness,” and the feelings of “joy as well as sorrow” that her singing aroused in her listeners. “Her voice *was* the blues,” Kaminsky writes, “but she could make you feel so happy, too” (87–88, emphasis in original).

With obvious pride, Kaminsky takes credit for recommending Holiday to Artie Shaw, whose big band he had joined in 1937. “If we get Billie, . . . she’ll make us,” he told Shaw, who had sufficient confidence in the trumpeter’s judgment that “he hired her on sight, without auditioning her” (97).¹⁹² In Kaminsky’s view, Holiday’s nine-month tenure with Shaw was an unqualified success: “Billie Holiday loved that band, too. It was a happy band for her. This was the first time a colored vocalist had a full-time, regular job in a white band” (101).¹⁹³ Kaminsky seems at pains to show that his relationship with Holiday went far beyond their presence together on a bandstand, that they were in fact “good friends.” This seems to be the purpose, for example, of his description of bringing an ill Holiday to his mother’s house when Shaw’s band was performing in Boston.

¹⁹² Kaminsky and Shaw had first met in the late 1920s, and for several years they were good friends, making trips up “to Harlem together to hear the real thing” (94). Kaminsky gives a detailed account of his tenure in Shaw’s band, describing his role in shaping “a great swinging band with terrific fire” (101), and his subsequent falling-out with Shaw, which he attributes to Shaw’s jealousy about his prominent position in the band (97–105).

¹⁹³ There are various other assessments—both positive and negative—of Holiday’s relationship with Shaw and of her stay in his band, including several from Holiday herself. In Holiday’s autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, her view about Shaw is generally laudatory, as she insists that “[t]here aren’t many people who fought harder than Artie against the vicious people in the music business or the crummy side of second-class citizenship which eats at the guts of so many musicians” (Holiday with Dufty 92). Elsewhere, however, Holiday and others offer a harsher view of her experience. See, for example, Clarke 140–49; O’Meally 126–28; White 58–64.

Kaminsky writes that his mother “took one look at her and exclaimed, ‘Why, you look just like my Betty! Come, sit down. Rest,’ and in two minutes they were so deep in conversation that when I eventually drifted off into another room no one even noticed” (105).

Betty, of course, was Kaminsky’s sister, whom he had earlier described singing the blues while she tidied the house. Kaminsky offers no specific details of Holiday’s illness, simply attributing it to “the rough time she had on the road” (105). In *Lady Sings the Blues*, however, Holiday describes the long bus trips with Shaw’s band as they drove from one engagement to the next, often through states where she was not allowed to use the facilities or eat in restaurants. Suffering from “nervousness and strain,” she went to a doctor, who misdiagnosed her as having gonorrhea. Kaminsky’s mother “went to bat” for her, Holiday claims, setting her up with “a woman’s specialist” in Boston who diagnosed a bladder infection. “After I’d gone through three months of torture, this specialist had me on my feet in three days” (Holiday with Dufty 86–87).

While Holiday was recovering in Boston, Kaminsky came to visit her bearing a gift, “an Orthophone phonograph, one of the finest record players made in those days” (106). He put on a Lester Young recording, and his account of Holiday’s response conveys his pride at having access to a private, even intimate space within jazz’s inner circle:

The phonograph sounded marvelous in that big room, and I was more than rewarded by hearing Billie sing along with her records. ... [S]he listened to her own voice with closed eyes, but when Lester’s horn took off on its

own, Billie would take off with him. As great as Billie sang a regular song, to hear her sing along with Lester Young while he was playing a chorus was something to make your toes curl. No words; she just scatted along with his tenor sax as though she were another horn. I listened, knowing all I was hearing, and it was quite a while before I realized that my mind was echoing its own accompaniment, right in time with the beat: “God bless you, girl, God bless you.” (106)

But sometimes Kaminsky does more than highlight his personal involvement with the black jazz tradition and its best-known practitioners; he also comments upon the attitudes and desires of African Americans as if convinced of his authority to do so. In a chapter in which he recalls his early experiences in New York, he suggests that Harlem during the late 1920s was a place of “hope” for southern blacks who had come north after World War I, for even though they continued to be “held down, they had the hope of better times. In the twenties, the colored people of Harlem were just glad to be living—never mind for the moment about the freedom” (45). In the same discussion, he maintains that he and other “white” folks were welcomed in Harlem, for “[i]n this stage of their struggle, the people of Harlem were not only cheered and elated at the idea that they had something that white folks admired, they naturally welcomed the nightly flood of cash customers the music attracted” (46). The passage ends with Kaminsky’s image of jazz as

a site of interracial harmony that reflected “the innocence and the optimism of the twenties” (46).¹⁹⁴

Kaminsky goes to some lengths to emphasize his own role in breaking down racial barriers in jazz; he takes credit, for example, for introducing black trumpeter Hot Lips Page to Artie Shaw, who hired him for his band in the early 1940s, a decision that Kaminsky claims left Page forever indebted to him:

Lips never forgot that I was responsible for his getting the job with Shaw. Forever after, I was Buddy to Lips, and years later, whenever we ran into each other he would relate the story to everyone within earshot. “I was never so happy in my life,” he’d say, his eyes shining at the memory, “and this is the man who got it for me.” (125)

If the above passages illustrate Kaminsky’s tendency, along with the other Jewish autobiographers discussed in this chapter, to self-identify as white rather than as Jewish when he is positioning himself in relation to black musicians or black bands, in contrast to these other autobiographers he displays a far greater attachment to his Jewish identity, even after he has become a professional musician working within the pluralistic world of American popular music. In other words, although he may refer to himself as a white musician working in white bands, his identification as an ethnic outsider remains central to his worldview. He recalls, for example, that as he struggled through the tough years of the Depression, he would find himself reflecting on the fact that he was “just a little guy

¹⁹⁴ Kaminsky, however, does express his scorn for “certain white artistic circles” that indulged in a “phony cultural mystique of the Negro” and found “titillation at the sight of black and white partners on the dance floor” (46).

with a name like Max Kaminsky, living in Boston, the deadest city in the world, and the only thing I know about is playing the trumpet, and ... maybe someday I can make it and people will like me in spite of my name and how I look” (56).

Not surprisingly, he reflects his most intense awareness of his Jewishness in his discussion of the impending world war, recalling, for example, that in the late 1930s:

Kate Smith began ending her radio programs by singing “God Bless America,” and I started to stay up till dawn to listen to Hitler’s speeches over short wave, as though hearing him first hand would give me some new insight into the madness that was swallowing up Europe. Here in America, despite my name being Max Kaminsky, I was knee-deep in compliments, while in Germany, because of my name and my faith, I would have been in a concentration camp on my way to the gas chamber. Was human dignity a matter of geography? (119).¹⁹⁵

And in sharp contrast to Mezz Mezzrow, who shows an unflinching attachment to black street culture, Kaminsky shies away from the street life of Boston’s black neighborhoods, retreating to the comfort and security of his Jewish community and his close relationships with his childhood Jewish friends.¹⁹⁶ In fact, Kaminsky’s vivid

¹⁹⁵ Kaminsky’s remarkable account of his military service from 1942 to 1943 as a member of Artie Shaw’s Navy band, and his subsequent diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁹⁶ Kaminsky recounts an incident involving his friend, Slappy Wallace, a black dancer from Boston, in which they ended up at the apartment of two young black women, dancer friends of Wallace, “in the heart of the colored section.” A murder in the neighborhood earlier that evening has left the police “jittery,” and they responded to the sounds of music and dancing by bursting into the apartment “with drawn guns” (58). Although the cops

recollection of Mezzrow's attempt in 1933 to put together a big band offers an excellent illustration of his own inclination toward a kind of middle-class Jewish respectability and comfort that Mezzrow eschewed. As Kaminsky recounts, he and several other musicians were forced—due to their own lack of funds—to stay with Mezzrow in his one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx, along with Mezzrow's first wife and her son. Quickly Kaminsky realized that he had no impulse for the life of a starving artist: “[I]t was awful. . . . I don't know how his wife stood it, because even I couldn't stand it. . . . [T]here was no money and no food” (62). Kaminsky's modest desires for food and privacy, and his inability to tolerate “the gypsy-caravan life,” soon found him leaving Mezzrow's apartment and moving to a “room with a family on 144th Street” that Mezzrow found for him (62–63).¹⁹⁷

Mezzrow serves again as a useful counter to Kaminsky's comments, much later in *Jazz Band*, about his friendship with the legendary bebop saxophonist, Charlie Parker. Although Kaminsky, like Mezzrow, was generally critical of bebop, he was not as vehement in his rejection of the new music as was Mezzrow; in particular, Kaminsky appreciated Parker's skill, and he even boasted that he “blew the first note” at the opening of Birdland in December 1949, where Kaminsky's band was booked to play, along with

were on good terms with Slappy and simply broke up the party, Kaminsky admits that he was shaken: “That little episode cured me for a while from seeking any social life, and I went back to my solitary walks and to driving around Boston and talking about life till all hours of the night with my two buddies, Louis Rosenthal and Sidney Epstein” (59).

¹⁹⁷ It is worth wondering to what extent Mezzrow's inclination toward street culture and Kaminsky's toward middle-class respectability was a reaction against their respective middle- and-working class backgrounds.

“a wide array of talent,” including Parker, Stan Getz, and Lennie Tristano (192).¹⁹⁸

According to Kaminsky, it was his experience with the “Torah singing” that he had heard at synagogue all through his childhood that provided the most important link for him to Parker’s music, and which enabled him to hear Parker’s bebop wailing as familiar and even accessible.¹⁹⁹ Kaminsky describes this familiarity in the following passage, which stands in vivid contrast to Mezzrow’s ironic portrayal (discussed earlier in this chapter) of his involvement with the Chanukah choir during his imprisonment on Hart’s Island:

Charlie Parker’s music never bothered me the way some of the other music did, with its bad tone and taste and intonation, for as far as the “modern” chords are concerned, I’d been listening to them in the classical music ever since the late twenties—in fact, I’d been hearing that kind of atonal melody in the Torah singing ever since I was a child, and when I first started to improvise on the trumpet as a kid, I used to go off into those atonal intervals that I had heard in the temple chants simply because they were so familiar to me and so easy to do. (193)²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ About his relationship with Parker, Kaminsky writes, “I couldn’t drink the way he did and I didn’t know his friends and never went out with him on any parties, but musically we became good friends. He and Lester Young were the only two musicians [at Birdland] who would go out of their way to speak to me, and they always made a point of coming over to the table and talking about something musical” (193).

¹⁹⁹ See Melnick 191.

²⁰⁰ In his discussion of “the Jewish sacralization of ‘Black’ music,” Melnick suggests that the ability of Jews “to depict their involvement in African American music as an outgrowth of their own religious traditions . . . served the dual function of purifying both the Jews and the music in question, and thereby easing the pressures caused by the thorny issue of secularization” (168).

Although in their respective passages Mezzrow and Kaminsky both acknowledge the link between black music and Jewish music, their attitudes toward this connection are, of course, markedly different. As accepting as Kaminsky seems to be of his Jewish heritage and its influence on his own development as a jazz musician, Mezzrow seems to feel as strong a need to distance himself from that heritage—either through humour or irony or even expressions of anger and disdain.

In the final analysis, then, among the four Jewish jazz autobiographers discussed here, Kaminsky seems most comfortable with wearing his Jewish identity openly and proudly, and seemingly without ambivalence. Unlike Benny Goodman, who admitted to finding his childhood memories of poverty so painful that he was only able to discuss them in mostly superficial and unreflective terms, Kaminsky does not shy away from examining those memories, both good and bad, that force him to confront his own values, such as his relationship with his Jewish friend, Jackie Marshard. Unlike Mezz Mezzrow, whose scorn for his middle-class Jewish background causes him to turn to African American musical and social aesthetics as a model for his own life, Kaminsky seems to find a happy compromise between seeking some measure of social and economic security that corresponded to a middle-class Jewish model he learned as a child and looking for creative fulfillment as a jazz artist. And perhaps most notably, unlike Artie Shaw, Kaminsky expresses no shame or anguish regarding the fact that he is Jewish, nor does he attempt to hide his identity in perhaps the easiest way to imagine—by changing his name, as did Shaw, to one that sounded “Irish, wouldn’t you say? Or maybe English?” (Shaw

92). In fact, not only did Max Kaminsky remain Max Kaminsky, he used his name as a proud and visible symbol of his position as “other,” and even as a source for humour.²⁰¹

Conclusion:

Significantly, both Michael Alexander and Eric Goldstein take issue with some of the central arguments within Whiteness scholarship briefly outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Alexander rejects the assimilationist model that traces the path of Jews and other European immigrants from racialized outsider to insider within mainstream white America. In his view, “Jews will not fit easily into a larger American tradition of whitening and Americanization based on racism”; instead, he proposes that scholars

respect the rather pronounced longings among the descendents of Eastern European Jewry for ethnic identity and group feeling in America, rather than impose assimilation, acculturation, whiteness, or any other model that suggests that Jews decided to change into something other than themselves because in America they could. (173)

In a related way, Goldstein argues against the tendency within whiteness studies “to posit a fairly uncomplicated embrace of whiteness by immigrant groups” (4). Rather, he focuses on the ambiguous response of Jewish Americans to their shifting racial and

²⁰¹ With obvious glee, Kaminsky tells the story about American comic actor Arnold Stang, who replied, when asked on a radio program if he had heard of Kaminsky, “Why I knew him before he changed his name!” According to Kaminsky, he has “been using that remark ever since when people ask me why I haven’t changed my name—a question I am constantly asked. ‘But I have changed it,’ I say, ‘You should have heard what it was before!’” (158).

ethnic status, describing his book not “as a study of how Jews *became* white, but as one that explores how Jews *negotiated* their place in a complex racial world where Jewishness, whiteness, and blackness have all made significance claims on them” (5, emphasis in original). In particular, he opposes scholarship that stresses “the unmitigated benefits” that whiteness “confers on the holder . . . that are attained primarily by the exclusion of African Americans and other peoples of color”; suggesting that the “American Jews’ struggle with whiteness” points to a much more complex response to the process of “racial assimilation” (5).

Many of the objections raised by Alexander and Goldstein resonate to some degree with the accounts of these Jewish jazz autobiographers, yet none of them adequately describes the specific conditions of interracial contact and immersion that were central to the development of jazz in the first half of the 20th century. As Jewish musicians learned to play jazz, they eagerly embraced African American music and culture as a way of establishing their authenticity as jazz musicians; far from seeing “acculturation” as an imposition, or their new-found status as white as conferring on them particular authority in respect to African American jazz musicians, they immersed themselves in black music and culture willingly, as an essential part of their jazz education.

To be sure, Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw seemed to accept without qualms their designation as white bandleaders, thus establishing their place within whiteness in the black-white divide of American society; in addition, they both strengthened their hold

on whiteness through their marriages to non-Jewish women.²⁰² Nonetheless, the culture of jazz, as the accounts of these autobiographers so clearly reveal, created and necessitated interracial and interethnic mingling to a degree rarely seen in the mainstream society out of which these stories emerge. Their mutable self-representations, then, seem an accurate reflection of the effects of this rich exposure to an urban American immigrant, interracial stew, rather than to a wholesale rejection or embrace of any one single identity. In this respect, these autobiographies provide a valuable source for reevaluating concepts of assimilation, ethnic particularity, and relations between Jews and African Americans in the early decades of the 20th century.

²⁰² Shaw married eight times; I have only been able to establish with certainty that one of his wives was Jewish: Elizabeth Kern, the daughter of composer Jerome Kern. Goodman was married to Alice Hammond, John Hammond's sister. Yet Mezzrow flouted the path to upward respectability by living in Harlem with his African American wife, Johnnie Mae, and their son Milton, Jr., who was born in 1936 (Mezzrow and Wolfe 284).

Chapter 4: Soldiers for Uncle Sam?: Depictions of Military Service in White Jazz

Autobiography

While the previous chapters have focused on accounts within white jazz autobiography of the search for authenticity, often through immersion in African American music and culture, this chapter steps back to consider what happens when these same musicians are called upon to serve their country as soldiers. How, in other words, do white jazz autobiographers position themselves in respect to their nation's mainstream values, when they are conscripted or enlist to serve their country during the Second World War, or in periods of heightened nationalistic feeling, such as during the Cold War? Do they respond with patriotism to their nation's call to arms, or do they feel removed, as jazz musicians, from the nationalistic and imperial impulses of their own country or those of foreign countries? To what degree do their responses to conscription and service correlate to the representations of identity they have constructed of themselves as jazz musicians? What effect does their close association to African American music and culture have on their willingness to serve in the segregated US military?

For historians of the Swing Era and of bebop, the Second World War and its aftermath provide a crucial backdrop for their explorations of jazz in mid-20th-century United States. As Scott DeVeaux notes in *The Birth of Bebop*, when the United States

entered the Second World War, “the preponderance of professional musicians were young men between the draftable ages of twenty-one to thirty-five” (241). DeVaux examines the impact of the war on the music industry, on the leading big bands, and on the lives of individual musicians, but he is particularly concerned with its consequences for African American musicians. In Sherrie Tucker’s *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s*, Tucker uncovers the history of hundreds of “all-girl” bands whose existence had been virtually obliterated from swing and jazz historiography. She sets out to reconstruct the story of several of these bands, both white and African American, whose increased status during the war years was directly attributable to the loss of young male musicians to the draft.²⁰³

In their cultural histories of the Swing Era, Lewis Erenberg and David Stowe make important contributions to our understanding of the triumphs and limitations of swing music as a symbol of American pluralism and democracy during the Second World War. According to Stowe, “[m]usic was a crucial component” of the attempt within American cultural and intellectual spheres to link “the democratic ideology with a sense

²⁰³ As Tucker explains, however, although women musicians found greater opportunity for work as men were drafted, there was also the perception and expectation that their jobs were temporary. She compares the image of women musicians during World War Two to that of Rosie the Riveter: “When men returned, women musicians would be ‘sent home’ (or to the typing pool)” (20). Yet these women, Tucker points out, were skilled, experienced, and not temporary; many of them, in fact, had been playing professionally since the 1920s, and they felt justifiable frustration and resentment over this image. Furthermore, most did not enjoy the luxury of the possibility of not working, and careers as musicians provided African American women with a way out of their limited job opportunities as domestics, teachers, or cooks (33–69).

of American identity” (143).²⁰⁴ In a related argument, Erenberg makes the case for the music’s role “in the American campaign against Nazism and racial supremacy” while conceding the gulf between the ideal of swing as the cultural expression of American “racial pluralism” and the “images of a home front that was increasingly depicted as white and private” (xvi).

As this chapter will attempt to illustrate, the military accounts of white jazz autobiographers offer an important contribution to the above-mentioned discussions, sometimes in unexpected ways. It should come as no surprise that these musicians—all of whom were born in the first three decades of the 20th century—were drafted or volunteered to serve during the Second World War or in the years immediately following; nor is it surprising that they portray the prospect of serving or their accounts as enlisted men as significant, sometimes even life-changing, experiences. Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Charlie Barnet, and Woody Herman were at the height of their fame and fortune as the leading bandleaders of their generation when they were drafted. Chet Baker was a high school truant when he enlisted in the US Army on an impulse in 1946, just after the end of the war; Art Pepper was a young bebop musician struggling with drug addiction when he was drafted in 1943. Bud Freeman, Max Kaminsky, and Bob Wilber—whose accounts suggest that they had less difficulty adjusting to their roles as soldiers

²⁰⁴ Although Stowe acknowledges the continuing reality within US society of racism and gender discrimination, in his view “the swing industry was clearly in the forefront of the new ideology of pluralism and racial tolerance, demonstrating the virtues of integration in a highly conspicuous way. It set a standard that other sectors of American society—the military and professional baseball, for example—took years to match” (144–45).

than many others—nonetheless faced the upheaval caused by having their lives and careers abruptly derailed.

In their wide-ranging and extremely various responses to the call to serve their country, these white jazz autobiographers challenge some of the assumptions about patriotism and idealism offered in these earlier jazz histories. For example, in his assessment of the war's impact on African Americans versus white Americans, DeVeaux suggests that "For most white Americans, military service was a force of democracy, the great leveler. Men from all parts of the country and from all walks of life found themselves forced together in life-and-death situations that compelled cooperation" (245). He contrasts this with the experience of African Americans, who faced the wrenching prospect of serving in a segregated military for a country fundamentally divided by racist laws and practices (244–48). Although DeVeaux rightly points to the vastly different experiences of blacks and whites in the military, his distinction glosses over a more complex response to military service by white Americans, including the white musicians examined in this chapter.

Both Stowe and Erenberg seem inclined to categorize the response of swing musicians to the war into two distinctly opposing stances: namely, the desire to serve, either as a combat soldier or in a non-combat capacity, or the desire to evade service. Within the former category, they outline various ways that many swing musicians participated in the war effort—and thus fulfilled their patriotic duty—other than by joining a combat unit; these included enlisting or being drafted and serving in military bands, or for several prominent bandleaders—including Goodman, Basie, Calloway,

Ellington, and Armstrong—playing “USO tours, bond rallies, and concerts at bases and hospitals” (Erenberg 184–85). In a similar vein, Stowe asserts that “[s]wing’s most prominent artists, including Fats Waller, lent their services to selling war bonds” (148); he also outlines the crucial role in “the militarization of swing” of the “V Disc” program, established by the army in September 1943 to record and distribute swing band recordings to foreign and domestic bases (153).

Erenberg grounds his analysis by highlighting individual musicians whose participation in the war resonated with particular aspects of American patriotism. Not surprisingly, he gives considerable attention to the role played by the war’s most popular musician enlistee, bandleader Glenn Miller, who joined the service after “disband[ing] his successful swing orchestra” in 1942 (181). According to Erenberg, not only was Miller responsible for “lifting morale and encouraging recruitment,” he also “created a model of patriotic duty and a web of connections between military obligation and an American way of life embodied in swing and understood by millions of young people” (181).²⁰⁵ Miller’s particular “achievement” was to make swing accessible to “the less experienced white dancers” who would certainly have found the hard-swinging Goodman band—not to mention the black bands of Ellington and Basie—a formidable challenge (185). Significantly, Miller insisted on creating a band that represented ethnic and religious, but not racial, diversity; although he hired “black arranger Eddie Durham for some of his uptempo numbers,” there were no black musicians in his band (188). Miller’s “personal

²⁰⁵ Erenberg includes a quote from Miller in *Down Beat* magazine, in which Miller argues, “I, like every patriotic American, . . . have an obligation to fulfill. That obligation is to lend as much support as I can to winning the war” (181).

preferences,” Erenberg concludes, “fit well with army policy, which was to maintain strict segregation in service bands. In this ‘whitened’ version of the all-American team, blacks stayed on the bench while polished black music played a prominent role” (189).²⁰⁶

Both Stowe and Erenberg also describe various attempts by jazz musicians—both black and white—to avoid service (Stowe 149).²⁰⁷ Although many enlisted and served in military bands, Stowe observes that “there were others who received deferments, sometimes against their will but often because they sought a 4-F classification. . . . Musicians leery of military service exchanged tips on how to evade conscription” (148–49; Erenberg 184–85). Many African American musicians—disgusted with their government’s participation in a war to defeat Nazism and Fascism abroad while it continued to support a system of brutal racism and legalized segregation within its own borders—threw their support behind “the Double V Campaign for victory abroad and victory at home” (Erenberg 204; DeVeaux 245). For these musicians, Stowe adds, the Second World War exposed “the gap between American ideals of racial toleration and the experiences of African-Americans both in the military and as civilians. Nowhere were these contradictions posed more starkly or played out more vividly than within swing.

²⁰⁶ Yet Erenberg also stresses Goodman’s contribution; he explains that President Roosevelt, in his effort to combat “Aryan supremacy,” argued for the role that music might play to “promote tolerance of minority groups in our midst by showing their cultural contributions to our American life.” Roosevelt’s choice of Benny Goodman “as the popular music chair of Russian War Relief acknowledged swing’s importance as a symbol of American pluralism” (184).

²⁰⁷ In *The Birth of Bebop*, Scott DeVeaux focuses on the strategies of African American jazz musicians for evading the draft (246–47).

Racism remained the dominant experience of the many black musicians inducted into the service” (156).²⁰⁸

These basic models of service and evasion provide important insights into the attitudes of many jazz musicians faced with conscription during the Second World War, including some of the autobiographers in this study. A more complex range of responses also emerges within these autobiographies, however, which is insufficiently covered by the models outlined above. As the following accounts will reveal, some musicians served in the military unwillingly after trying without success to fail their physicals. Conversely, some insisted on enlisting after being given every opportunity to avoid service. Some detail their response to serving in the military with earnestness and gravity; others depict the mandatory physical that determined fitness to serve as an occasion for humour. In some accounts, expressions of patriotism combine with candid critiques of US military policy; in others, memories of drug addiction, stockades, and brothels dominate. The discussion that follows, then, aims to explore the *attitudes* as well as the specific circumstances of these autobiographers as they are forced to deal with the reality of conscription and the abrupt disruption to their own lives and careers. In this way, this discussion hopes to advance a more nuanced and less ideologically driven portrait of the ways in which individual jazz musicians responded to notions of patriotism and service.

²⁰⁸ As Stowe explains, “The experience of average enlisted personnel, and of the entertainers brought to them through the USO, was defined by the need for maintaining strict segregation” (157). The tragic military experience of saxophonist Lester Young exemplifies Stowe’s assertion that black musicians had a harder time than white musicians getting into “service bands” and were therefore “more likely to join combat units and have their musical careers seriously disrupted” (157–58).

The military experiences of musicians drafted in the period after the United States entered the Second World War following the bombing of Pearl Harbor provide the central focus of the discussion that follows. (The experiences of Chet Baker, who served in the army in 1946, and Bob Wilber, who was drafted during the Korean War in 1952, will also be considered.) In addition, this chapter also considers the postwar experiences of two of these musicians—Artie Shaw and Max Kaminsky—who would again find their patriotism tested during the 1950s, although in dramatically different ways.²⁰⁹

I: Not Fit for Service: Accounts of 4-F Classification in White Jazz Autobiography

According to David Stowe, bandleader Woody Herman “had a doctor induce a hernia to help him avoid service, later claiming to have believed that he would be contributing more to the war effort as a bandleader than as a gun carrier” (Stowe 148). Herman’s own version of this experience in his autobiography differs from Stowe’s in significant respects. First, Herman begins his account with a reference to the threat that conscription posed to the survival of his band. “Beginning in 1942,” he explains, “we began losing guys to the Army” (Herman and Troup 36). When Herman received his notice to report for his own physical, his booking agency—fearing the potential collapse of Herman’s band—sent him to a doctor “at an Army training camp in Maryland for a pre-physical” (36–37). Although Herman does not say so directly, the implication is that the doctor was

²⁰⁹ Shaw would be called to testify before the House on Un-American Activities Committee in 1953, while Kaminsky would participate in a US State Department sponsored jazz tour of the Far East from 1958 to 1959.

in some way connected to the agency and was helping musicians under contract to avoid service.

As Herman recalls, the doctor began the examination by asking Herman about any previous medical problems he might have had; when Herman replied that he had recently “had a hernia operation,” the doctor examined the scar and commented on the surgeon’s skill before sending Herman for a round of tests. According to Herman, throughout the day “the first young doctor would stop by and say, ‘I hope we can find something, because I don’t believe you should be in the Army’” (37). When Herman asked him why he believed that, the doctor replied that Herman was “doing more good on the outside than you could ever do in the service,” to which Herman responded, “I certainly wanted to believe him, so it wasn’t difficult to” (37). By the end of the day, the doctor had apparently come up with a plan; he asked Herman to stand on a chair and “lunged at [him] with his finger,” causing a hernia “on the other side” (37). The doctor then gave Herman additional instructions to ensure that he would be rejected at his physical in New York.²¹⁰ Unlike Stowe, who makes Herman responsible for planning and executing a strategy to avoid military service, Herman himself attributes the plan and its execution entirely to the doctor. In so doing, he salvages his patriotism: he is not evading service, but rather he is serving in the way that most benefits his country, by continuing to lead his big band.

²¹⁰ According to Herman, the doctor instructed him to walk, rather than take a cab, “from Penn Station to Grand Central. And when you get there, jump up and down a little bit, to be sure it’s down and hanging” (Herman and Troup 37).

No such patriotic impulse—either hidden or overt—is evident in Charlie Barnet’s account of his several brushes with military service in his autobiography, *Those Swinging Years*. Barnet, one of the leading bandleaders of the swing era, earned a reputation as a progressive for his hiring of African American musicians at a time when the big bands were predominantly segregated. He was as well known for his drinking and womanizing, however, and for his breezy and defiant, don’t-give-a-damn attitude. It is the latter that emerges in full force as Barnet recalls his decision “to have a predraft party” when he received his induction notice in 1943.²¹¹ “Scotch whisky was already hard to come by,” he remembers, “but I had scored for a whole case and put it in my dressing room closet. . . . We really tied one on, and I arrived at the induction center feeling no pain. As a result, I was sent home with no reclassification” (120).

Several weeks later, Barnet was ordered to appear on Governors Island, “for observation and, I guess, to make sure I wasn’t full of scotch” (120). His surreal report of his session with the psychiatrist there establishes the fact that he is a prodigious drinker and unfit for combat, but Barnet continued to be held for observation.²¹² Badly in need of a drink, Barnet arranges an elaborate scheme to have whisky delivered to him and

²¹¹ Barnet had previously received a deferment because he was supporting his fourth wife, from whom he was estranged, and their young son (120).

²¹² According to Barnet, “The interview went something like this: ‘Tell me, Mr. Barnet, you are a drinking man—how much do you consume in a day?’ ‘Hell, I’ve never kept track of things like that.’ It was finally established that I drank at least a quart a day, whereupon the shrink closed the interview with another question. ‘Tell me, Mr. Barnet, apparently you are very successful in your chosen field—why are you such a bum?’” (120). As Barnet makes clear, however, the contempt was mutual; months later, he adds, “this same shrink was found leaving the men’s room at the Statler Hotel stark naked. He had flipped, removed all his clothes, and was headed for the lobby when they apprehended him” (120).

explains his various ploys to hide it from the authorities—including storing it in a bedpan and stopping for “a little taste” when the mood hit him. By the time the doctors arrived the next morning, they found him badly inebriated and were forced to send him home again “with no reclassification” (121). Later Barnet was approached about going overseas as part of the United Service Organizations (USO) shows. Barnet readily agreed, although he warned the official that “the guys couldn’t pass any physical, that they were mostly 4-F”; the official reassured him that “the examination was very loose and they mainly wanted to see if we were all breathing” (123). After Barnet sent several of his musicians to be examined, however, he received a call from the official, telling him that there was no point in sending any more. Barnet suspected that “the doctors were afraid to see the rest of the band” (123).²¹³

When Barnet was drafted again in 1945, he was convinced that he “would now be inducted for sure, but fate intervened once more” with the announcement that the war had ended in Europe. As Barnet dryly comments, “That was the last I heard from the draft board” (134). In the same section of his autobiography in which Barnet discusses his draft experiences he also refers to the interracial composition of his band in this period, which included five African American musicians. Barnet was indeed ahead of mainstream American society in terms of his stance toward interracialism and his willingness to take financial and personal risks to maintain a mixed band. As he insists, however, his concern was not “to change the social order” or start “a racial revolution,” but rather to create and

²¹³ Barnet claims that among the musicians who had already been examined, they had “found three dangerous paranoiacs, two dope fiends, a manic depressive, and a few other misfits” (123).

maintain a highly skilled swing band (122); to this end he sought to emulate certain African American musical traditions and to hire talented black musicians. Beyond this, his autobiography reveals him to be a person of little insight or introspection.

Although Barnet's draft evasion during the Second World War seems to illustrate his flagrant contempt for notions of patriotic duty, he offers a starkly different perspective in a story he tells later in his autobiography. In the early sixties, when Barnet and his wife traveled extensively overseas, he recalls that he "noticed a decidedly antagonistic attitude toward the U.S. in almost every country we visited. I felt that our nation had to stay strong, because it didn't seem to me that we could look for much sympathy or help if we needed it" (168). During the Cuban Missile crisis, Barnet even had "an elaborate bomb shelter built at our home in Palm Springs . . . equipped with supplies, air systems and filters." Did Barnet seem aware that his plan to protect himself in a nuclear disaster was ludicrous? Perhaps to a degree—he notes that "[t]he way in was through the wine cellar, so I felt that even if we only lived a couple of weeks after an atomic attack, we would at least die happy." Yet even after he states that the basement was primarily used for "functional" purposes, Barnet seems sincere in his assertion that "it is still capable of affording protection" (168).

Humour also plays an important role in Eddie Condon's description of his draft experience during World War Two, yet his attitude differs from Barnet's in significant respects. Condon's account comes late in his autobiography, by which point he has left the reader with little doubt regarding his fitness for military service. As a result of a congenital defect he was deaf in one ear; he also had poor vision, drank heavily, and had

almost died in 1936 as a result of pancreatitis; furthermore, he was already in his late thirties when he received his draft notice in 1942. Yet Condon—with the help of his collaborators—creates an autobiographical persona that is both patriotic and yet stubbornly defiant of convention. Both Condon’s patriotism and his subversive impulses are apparent in his discussion with his friend, the author John McNulty, about “Eddie Condon’s Jazz Concert,” Condon’s radio program which ran between 1944 to 1945 but was cancelled despite its immense popularity among American armed forces stationed in Europe and the Pacific. (See Chapter 1, pages 64 for another reference to this passage.)²¹⁴

This passage serves as an early clue that Condon did not in fact serve in a combat capacity in World War Two, but rather that he contributed his music to the war effort, as did many other jazz musician (3–4). Yet Condon provides a lengthy account of his response to Pearl Harbor and to his draft physical, which occurred several months later; in these passages he seems to delight in creating a comical portrait of his broken-down body and the absurd workings of the draft board and the physicians who served the military establishment. After hearing the news of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Condon went to Nick’s, the jazz club in Greenwich Village where he played regularly, to see how the “incident . . . was affecting business” (278). He and Nick put back “several” drinks and then “a few more,” all the while discussing the consequences of the bombing:

²¹⁴ Condon emphasizes the positive response of the ordinary soldier to his music and attributes the decision to cancel the show to the whims of the new network executives and perhaps to his unwillingness to stick to the program notes that he filed before each broadcast (2–4).

Nick was of the opinion that the Japs would not give us too much trouble.

A people without jazz, he figured, couldn't be very dangerous.

"I'll let you know after I've taken a crack at them," I said.

Nick blinked. "You?" he said, "How are you going to get into the army?"

You can't see past my nose and you hear out of one ear."

"I can fight at night," I said. "It only requires a sense of smell." (279)

It is worth noting that Condon does not portray his expression of patriotism as absurd; rather, it is his insistence that he will fight despite his extensive physical problems that stretches the readers' credulity. Thus he manages to draw himself as an eager American patriot, even as he makes it clear that there is no realistic chance of his seeing active duty. Condon's conversation with Nick establishes the tone in which he describes his military physical, at which he is seen by several different specialists, all of whom are presented with evidence of his various ailments. Again, Condon delights in the absurdity of the situation. "I couldn't read the chart with either eye," he explains, but "the eye man" described his vision as "almost perfect" (285). Moreover, "the ear man . . . paid almost no attention to my left ear, with which I do my hearing. The right one intrigued him; he poked, pulled, blew, probed, and tapped; finally he wired it for electric light" (285–86). When Condon suggested that the doctor's investigation was pointless because his right ear had "no drum" and "hasn't heard a sound in thirty-six and a half years," the doctor "roared—I could hear him with my other ear—I'll decide that! It's what I'm here for" (286). On Condon's chart, his hearing was also reported as normal.

The next two doctors “recommended rejection,” based on Condon’s age and “medical history,” yet Condon’s experience would not be complete without the compulsory interview with a psychiatrist (286). Like Charlie Barnet, Condon takes pleasure in making fun of the perverse preoccupations of psychiatrists. “He asked me whether I liked boys better than girls,” Condon recalls, “whether I wet the bed, and whether I talked in my sleep.” This doctor, also reluctant to make the final decision, sent Condon “to see another psychiatrist in another booth” (286). This last of a long parade of doctors proves to be the soulmate Condon had been seeking all day. “I could tell he had been to a bar; he looked relaxed, amiable, my kind of a guy” (286). After a long wait he is summoned by the doctor, whose reassuring smile and manner convince Condon what he should have known (and likely did know) all along: “I could do more for the war effort by staying out of the army—we had been playing for the boys at camps, and I had seen what the music meant to them” (287).²¹⁵

In Condon’s telling, the psychiatrist is a sympathetic figure; although he is interested in exploring the nature of Condon’s drinking problem, he does not judge it. “You could stand a drink now, couldn’t you?” he asks Condon at the end of his examination, to which Condon answers in the affirmative.²¹⁶ “You’ll be out of here in a

²¹⁵ Like Woody Herman, Condon uses a doctor—that is, a figure of authority—to justify his contribution to the war effort as a musician, rather than as a combat soldier.

²¹⁶ When the doctor asked Condon why he drank, Condon replied, “I work in a saloon. . . . I’m a musician. . . . I can’t stand the customers when they’re drunk if I’m sober, so I drink too. It creates a mutual tolerance” (287). The doctor nodded his understanding and asked Condon how much he drank. “I don’t count the highballs,” Condon replied. “I occasionally check on the cases or barrels, but that’s all.” When the doctor tested the

few minutes,” the doctor reassures him, before writing on Condon’s papers, “This man needs a drink right now” (288). Two more officials saw Condon before his papers received their final stamp. “I had been rejected for military service by the United States Army,” Condon writes. “Twenty minutes later I was at The Boar’s head. Half an hour after that I was at Allan’s [the psychiatrist’s bar of choice]. I ordered two drinks, one for me and one for my guy. I drank them both” (289).

Why, then, does Condon go to such effort to dramatize his rejection by the US military? In his introductory essay, Gary Giddins describes Condon as “a radical in his youth and a reactionary ever after” (Condon and Sugrue v). Here he is referring to Condon’s musical impulses—to Condon’s early desire to emulate the African American jazz and blues styles of New Orleans and Chicago and to his adamant rejection of the stylistic innovations that came after his beloved Dixieland jazz. “In recognizing the genius of authentic jazz players,” Giddins suggests, “Condon and friends were siding with a style of music that was decidedly left of respectable” (vii). Yet their music, once innovative, became “a conservative backwater.” In Giddins’ view, “Condon’s personality mirrored his music. He worked hard at perfecting a mask of cynicism to hide the sentimentality lurking just below the surface” (vi).

Condon’s account of his failed physical exemplifies these contradictory impulses of cynicism and sentimentality: cynicism for the trivial regulations of military life, sentimentality for the American flag that drives him to justify in such detail his 4-F

steadiness of Condon’s hand by having him spread his fingers, “the dance was on. My hand shook like an electric washing machine” (288).

categorization. During the summer after his rejection, Condon and his band “played at camps, participated in service broadcasts, and made V-discs and transcriptions to be sent overseas” (289). Condon explains that he had no trouble recruiting other musicians to contribute their part to the war effort; he simply had to call the local bars that were their hangout, and he “could round up a band for any purpose in a few hours.” Again he observes “the tremendous enthusiasm with which the soldiers received our music” (289). For Condon—perhaps more than for some others—his music became a way for him to *be* a soldier, to fulfill his patriotic impulse and sense of duty.

Condon spent many hours of his life ensconced in the hyper-masculine worlds of Dixieland jazz and the saloons that crowded mid-town Manhattan, sharing drinks and repartee with the musicians and writers who formed his inner circle; he ran his own nightclub, Eddie Condon’s, for more than two decades. Yet while his choice of occupation and lifestyle were in certain respects unconventional, there is no indication that his values or beliefs were.

II: From Those Who Served: Pride, Cynicism, and Despair

From stories of musicians who avoided military service, this section now shifts to consider a range of responses from white jazz autobiographers who served their country in various capacities during World War Two. In the following accounts, widely varying attitudes emerge: from contentment and pride to fear and trauma; from skepticism and doubt to outright despair. The intention here is to look beyond the images of military band

musicians in their crisp uniforms and practiced poses and to listen to individual stories, stories that will encourage greater caution in mapping musical genre onto notions of patriotism or political inclinations.

i. The Brief Army Career of the Young Chet Baker

Chet Baker had two stints in the US Army; both of them, it seems, were a result of attempts by his family or the authorities to keep his wild behaviour in check, although neither was ultimately successful.²¹⁷ Baker's notably sparse and impressionistic memoir, *As Though I Had Wings*, opens with his recollection of the first of these, in 1946. At sixteen, Baker was under the legal age for service in the army, so shortly before he completed his basic training in Fort Lewis, Washington, "the company commander" sat him down and gave him the opportunity for full discharge. In his phlegmatic style, Baker writes, "I declined his offer and returned to my unit" (3). It is only later in his memoir that Baker explains that his first enlistment came after some "family discussions" with his parents, who were upset because he was cutting classes and spending his days "on the beach or along the cliffs of Palos Verdes diving for abalone. My truancy didn't sit too well with my folks" (22–23).²¹⁸

During his basic training Baker befriended an older teen, Dick Douglas, whom Baker admired for his athleticism and intelligence—an intelligence manifested primarily

²¹⁷ From a young age, Baker gravitated to drugs, fast cars, and petty larceny (Gavin 42).

²¹⁸ James Gavin elaborates on Baker's motives for joining the army, suggesting that Baker, "like his father, craved escape. He found it when he saw a military recruitment poster with Uncle Sam pointing a finger, inviting him to 'join the army and see the world.' Impulsively he decided to do just that" (20).

through his ability to shape the extent and terms of his military experience (3–9; Gavin 23–25). According to Baker, Douglas “had enlisted to keep from being drafted. If you enlisted, you pulled down your eighteen months and you were finished, but if you were drafted, you had to serve two years, and had no choice regarding your assignment” (8). Douglas turned down an opportunity to go “to officers training school” but instead focused his energies on making money. Before long he “was doing a tremendous black-market business” (8). Douglas, a classic anti-hero, is clearly a role model for Baker, for whom any sense of patriotic duty or pride is notably absent.

After basic training Baker was sent to Germany, where he was stationed in Berlin (4–5). Initially he was assigned as “a clerk typist,” but before long he had earned a spot in the 298th Army Band (6–7). For almost a year he donned the “honor-guard uniform” and performed with the Army band at Tempelhoff Airport for arriving politicians or military brass. Baker clearly found his assignment boring and uninspiring; he complains that the musicians were kept standing for hours on the runway in the cold and snow while they waited for the dignitaries to arrive, “most of whom really could not have cared less about the music that awaited them” (7). Notably, Baker also reveals a racial consciousness that is rarely found in these accounts of military service; he remembers wondering “why those guys [in the honor guard] are all black and there are no black dudes in the band?” (7).²¹⁹ Baker’s first stay in the army ended abruptly when he was hospitalized with appendicitis and discharged soon after his recovery (19).

²¹⁹ See also the accounts of Art Pepper and Bud Freeman in this chapter.

Baker reenlisted in 1950, this time “directly into the Sixth Army Band up in San Francisco, a three-year commitment” (38).²²⁰ Quickly he realized that he could fulfill his military duties and still have plenty of time for sitting in at jam sessions and clubs around San Francisco. In this period he met and played with many of the leading West Coast jazz musicians, including Cal Tjader, Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond and Frank Foster; he also reconciled with Charlaine, the woman with whom he had quarreled before his reenlistment, and on “a three-day pass” they went to Las Vegas and got married. “From then on,” Baker explains, “being in the Sixth Army Band was like a day gig. Each day I’d make it for reveille (roll call), make the morning band rehearsal, and usually be free in the afternoon to go home and crash” (41).²²¹ At midnight he would leave for Bop City, where he would jam all night before returning to the base again. After some months of this routine, however, Baker writes that he simply “had enough of the Army, and devised what I felt was a workable idea to get a discharge” (41).

Baker’s description of his efforts to leave the army has much in common with the accounts (described earlier) of jazz musicians who attempted to avoid serving in the first place. (The perspective, of course, is fundamentally different: Baker is on the inside

²²⁰ In *As Though I Had Wings*, Baker claims that he reenlisted because of problems he was having with his girlfriend, Charlaine (38). According to Baker’s biographer, James Gavin, however, Baker later claimed that he didn’t “know what made me go back in the army” (42). Gavin also includes an explanation from Baker’s high-school friend, Bernie Fleisher, who explains that Baker had just been convicted for marijuana possession—at that time a serious offense. In Fleisher’s view, “[t]he judge gave him a choice of reenlisting or going to jail . . . This was during the Korean War, and the judge probably thought he was giving Chet a death sentence” (qtd. in Gavin 42).

²²¹ As James Gavin explains, “As a married man, Baker could live outside the Presidio [the military base where he was stationed] as long as he reported there for duty” (43).

trying to get out, while the others are on the outside trying to remain outside.) Inspired by the success of “two flute players [who] had managed to get out” by feigning mental illness, Baker devised his own elaborate scheme to convince the young post psychiatrist that he was unfit to serve (41–42).²²² For weeks before his appointment, he began to use the bushes “that ran along the back of the barracks . . . as [his] own private toilet,” and at his appointment, he emphasized his discomfort with using the washroom in the barracks with the other soldiers (42). In the lengthy questionnaire he was required to complete, Baker deliberately chose what he believed to be “the most feminine answer”—as, for example, in the question ““If you had your choice, would you rather be a forest ranger, a mechanic, or a florist?”” (42).²²³

Although the psychiatrist told Baker that he would be in touch to let him know “what the outcome would be,” Baker was instead abruptly “transferred to Fort Huachuca, Arizona.” As he explains, “an order came down from some brass somewhere that a band was to be formed of all bandsmen who could not pass a sight-reading test or who were fuck-ups in some way, like being suspected of smoking grass or playing crazy” (43). Baker, as it happens, fit the profile to perfection. After two months in Arizona, he finally “couldn’t stand it anymore and went AWOL,” returning to Los Angeles where he spent

²²² The truthfulness of Baker’s account here, according to Gavin, is certainly in doubt; as he suggests, “[f]or the rest of his life, Baker boasted in great (and possibly apocryphal) detail of having plotted his own release” (45).

²²³ Some of Baker’s friends would remark on the seeming hypocrisy of his “ploy,” particularly because they believed that his “later homophobic outbursts” were “evidence of repressed gay tendencies” (Gavin 45–46).

the next month with his wife before he turned himself in at the military base in San Francisco (43, 47).

For going AWOL, Baker was put “in the stockade”; his description of this experience is sufficiently surreal as to inspire incredulity. He recalls that the other prisoners got high every night by “shov[ing] a towel into a truck gas tank,” a recollection that stirs his own memory of getting high when he was “a kid” by siphoning “gas out of some guy’s car” (48). According to Baker, these memories caused him to drift into a state of “daydreaming” such that he “got caught up completely” and had to be “lifted and supported” by the guards before being placed in “a private cell” (48). From there Baker was transferred to “the closed station off the neuropsychiatric ward” and placed in a cell with someone “suffering from shell shock” (49). After being held for three weeks, during which time he received daily visits from a captain who would question him and “write things down on his little pad,” Baker was “granted . . . a general discharge, which meant that I was deemed ‘unadaptable to Army life.’ I was immediately transferred to the regular outpatient open ward to await discharge” (49–50).²²⁴

The extent to which Baker’s account is a “truthful” representation of his army experiences is less important than its revelation that he was a notably poor candidate for military service. His conduct while he was in the army reflects his indifference, if not his outright scorn, toward the ideals of patriotic pride and service that were featured so prominently, for example, in the standard narratives of the military big bands in the

²²⁴ James Gavin acknowledges the difficulty in assessing the veracity of Baker’s account of his experience in the stockade. “Had he really had a breakdown,” Gavin wonders, “or was he faking, as he could do so well?” (47).

Second World War. Yet there are important differences between Baker and the three musicians whose 4-F accounts opened this chapter: Charlie Barnet and Woody Herman were star bandleaders when they were drafted; Eddie Condon was at the height of his career playing and spreading the word about Dixieland-influenced jazz. As their draft stories reveal, their prominence as musicians certainly helped them to manipulate their military status to their own advantage. Baker, on the other hand, was an unknown teenager the first time he enlisted, and only beginning to establish himself as a professional musician when he reenlisted. As a high-school dropout who was experiencing family problems and run-ins with the law, Baker had perhaps viewed the military as a good choice, perhaps even the only choice, at the time.

ii. “I Couldn’t Believe that I Might Die with These People I Hated”: Art Pepper’s Army Experience, 1944–1946

In *Straight Life*, saxophonist Art Pepper offers a wrenching, often deeply disturbing account of his experience in the US Army during and just after World War Two.²²⁵

Pepper was only eighteen when he was drafted near the end of 1943; he had been married for only six months—his first experience of love, he writes, after “seventeen years of loneliness” (52). For Pepper, going to war evoked feelings not of patriotism or pride but rather of fear and dread. He had read the newspapers with their daily “casualty lists” and

²²⁵ Pepper’s recollection of his experience in the army, with its mood of despair and sadness, is in fact consistent with the tone of his autobiography as a whole, in which Pepper details the cruelty and neglect of his early life, his lifelong struggles with drug and alcohol addiction, and his difficult and abusive relationships with women.

had seen “newsreels of bodies” at movie theaters. “I was praying for some miracle,” he explains, “I was just one little person. Maybe they’d make a mistake and overlook me. And then I got the greetings” (53).

Pepper took his efforts to evade service to extreme lengths. He had already become a heavy user of alcohol, marijuana, Dexedrine tablets, and poisonous strips from inhalers; now he added other dangerous forms of self-abuse. He recalls that he would “shower on a cold night, put my clothes on, and, still soaking wet, walk around the block barefoot so I’d catch TB or something. I stopped eating. I stayed up for days at a time” (53). By the time Pepper reported for his physical, he was barely able to stand, and he “blacked out” during the examination. Yet the draft board passed him, anyway, and in early 1944 he “was inducted into Fort MacArthur,” an army installation at San Pedro, Los Angeles (53). Almost all the other inductees were from the south, and Pepper became a target of their taunts and ridicule (54). He would lie awake at night and cry. “How can I be here?” he recalls wondering. “I couldn’t believe that this could be happening to me. I couldn’t believe that I might die with these people I hated” (55).

Although Pepper would not die in combat, nor even serve in a combat role, experiences during his army tenure would leave permanent marks upon him. After basic training, he was sent to Camp Butner in North Carolina, where they put him “in the combat engineers” (58). One Saturday night he went into Durham to hear his former bandleader, Benny Carter, who was performing there with his band.²²⁶ Pepper was

²²⁶ Chapter 2 of this study touched on Carter’s role as an important early mentor to Pepper. Carter had hired the teenager for his big band in Los Angeles and had guided him

surprised to see the word “loge” on his ticket; when he inquired about it, he was told that he had to sit upstairs. Pepper protested, explaining that he had played “with this band: they’re old friends of mine and I’d like to be close to the stand, where I can say hello to them” (58). The ticket seller’s terse reply—“Whites aren’t allowed downstairs”—reminded Pepper of something Carter had tried to explain to him earlier: “When Benny had told me I couldn’t go with the band down south I didn’t understand it. I had been all around Central Avenue for years as a kid. I couldn’t understand what he was talking about, and my eyes were still closed at this time” (58).

In his brief description of the auditorium’s segregated seating, Pepper displays an almost childlike naivety about southern racial etiquette. “The whole bottom floor was black. The people upstairs were white” (58). His response to his pain was to drink; the alcohol emboldened him, and impulsively he went downstairs, overcome by the feeling that “I had to see them”:

I snuck through the dancefloor. I walked real fast and as I approached the stand I could feel the people staring at me, and then they started moving and all of a sudden they just closed me in. . . . [T]here was a circle of black people around me and they were saying, . . . “What are *you* doing down here, white boy?” I said, “I used to play with this band. I want to say hello.” They said, “You get outta here!” And they all started yelling. One

through fundamental aspects of harmony and composition that Pepper had never learned (Pepper and Pepper 48). Yet Carter, aware that it would be extremely dangerous to take a mixed band down south, refused to keep Pepper in his band for his upcoming tour; instead, he arranged an audition for Pepper with Stan Kenton, for whom Pepper was working when he was drafted (49).

guy screamed, “You killed my grandparents, you son-of-a-bitch, you white bastard!” . . . I said, “I didn’t kill anybody! I didn’t do anything!” (58–59, emphasis in original).

Pepper grew more agitated, even after he was warned to leave. Quickly the mob surrounded him, and soon people were grabbing at him and punching him, and Pepper began to scream and swing back. He called out to Carter, who jumped off the bandstand and directly into the middle of the mob scene. Pepper’s pleading and tearful words to Carter: “What *is* this? . . . I just wanted to say hello!” again emphasize his innocence and serve as a vivid contrast to Carter’s wisdom born of experience. “This is what I was talking about before,” Carter scolded him. “I though you knew about these things.” When Pepper began to cry, Carter told him that there was nothing he could do, and that Pepper would have to wait until after the show to see the band. “We’ll see you outside, around by the bus” (59). Pepper realized that if he stayed he might kill someone or be killed. Instead, he left “and wandered around the town,” drinking heavily from a jug, overwhelmed by feelings of anger, hurt, and confusion. (59).²²⁷

Even though Pepper was a star soloist in Stan Kenton’s big band at the time he was drafted, he had a difficult time getting into a military band. By 1944, he explains, the military “needed people for combat, not for bands” (59). Nonetheless, he arranged for his

²²⁷ In her Afterword in *Straight Life*, Laurie Pepper confirms the strong impression that this incident in Durham made on Pepper. As she explains, he had had the experience of “hanging out, actually working on Central Avenue from age fourteen. He was accepted and admired in a world he loved. Then he was suddenly rejected by that world. That’s how he saw it, at age 18, when he experienced racism for the first time in North Carolina” (488).

horn to be shipped to him, and he would practice “out the window” of his barracks so that the 225th Army Ground Force Band, which was stationed next to him, would hear him. “They ran over and just wiggled out when I told them who I was,” he recalls. “They had all heard of me because I’d been with Stan Kenton, and they started a campaign to get me into the band” (59). The campaign succeeded, according to Pepper, in part due to the “warrant officer in charge of the band who played oboe and really dug me” (59). Due to the persistence of this warrant officer, Pepper was transferred just before his outfit was shipped overseas; most of the men were killed a short time later, in the Battle of the Bulge (60).

Yet this same warrant officer who likely saved Pepper’s life also deceived him. Pepper was granted a furlough to return to Los Angeles when his wife went into labour, but when he requested “an extension” to remain there for the birth of his child, the warrant officer wired him to say that “if I came right away he’d guarantee we’d stay in the U.S., but if I didn’t come back I’d be AWOL and I’d probably be transferred into another outfit and sent overseas” (60). Pepper returned to the base at once, only to find that the band was preparing to leave for overseas and that the warrant officer “wanted me to go with them” (60). Pepper found himself on a boat headed for France; two weeks into the voyage, the convoy that the band was crossing in was “infiltrated by German submarines” (61).²²⁸ Pepper describes in considerable detail the raw terror of this experience, during which he and the other men believed “at any moment a torpedo was

²²⁸ Pepper describes the convoy as consisting of “about twenty-six ships and there were six navy destroyers with us” (61).

going to hit us” (61). The convoy finally made it safely to Le Havre, but the musicians, kept in the dark about their final destination—were held back on the ship for five days, until they were sent on to Southampton. From there they were loaded onto trucks that took them “to a convalescent center in an old city in England, a huge camp filled with people who’d been wounded in battle.” The function of the band, Pepper explains, “was to play for these people and give them a little entertainment, a little joy” (62).

Pepper spent many months at this convalescent center, entertaining the wounded soldiers and watching the German rockets bomb London. Most of the musicians were sent home by the end of 1945, but Pepper had not served long enough to qualify for discharge. Instead, he was assigned to the Military Police—a particularly unlikely role for him—and sent to London. Pepper leaves no doubt that he was simply going through the motions of his new assignment, and the remainder of his war account focuses on the central preoccupations of his young life—women (and Pepper’s fear of sexually transmitted diseases), drugs, and alcohol (66–71).

In many respects, the hostile and detached image that Pepper constructs of himself as American soldier meshes well with a standard narrative of bebop and its practitioners, who were commonly viewed as outsiders by choice and design.²²⁹ Yet as the following accounts will illustrate, jazz musicians’ stylistic preferences and public and private

²²⁹ Perhaps the most famous expression of this view may be found in LeRoi Jones’ classic 1963 study, *Blues People*, in which he describes bebop as a “willfully harsh, *anti-assimilationist*” music (Jones 181, emphasis in original).

personas do not always correlate with their attitudes toward military service, nor to their engagement or detachment from mainstream American values.²³⁰

iii. Bud Freeman: Artist and Soldier

Perhaps more than any other white jazz autobiographer, Bud Freeman portrays himself as an artist whose lifelong pursuit of cultural knowledge and expression placed him outside mainstream America's strivings for economic prosperity and middle-class respectability. According to Freeman, his father, a widower who worked as "a garment cutter," encouraged him and his brother to explore their interest in the arts and did not pressure them to take jobs to contribute to the family income (Freeman as told to Wolf 2). "The neighbors kept badgering him," Freeman recalls, "saying, 'Why don't your sons go out and get jobs like other boys? Why do you let them run around?' Dad would say, 'My sons are not like other boys. They're artists'" (17).

For this reason, Freeman's account of his service in World War II—in which he conveys a sense of patriotic duty and even extols the benefits of military training—seems

²³⁰ In his autobiography, *Raise Up Off Me*, for example, African American jazz pianist Hampton Hawes provides a fascinating contrast to Pepper in his account of his own military service during the Korean War. Despite his obvious outsider status—he describes the bebop music he played as a form of non-violent rebellion (8)—he begins the chapter on his military experience with an evocative description of his patriotic impulse: "Ever since I was a kid reading *Terry and the Pirates* I've always dug uniforms. I dug football uniforms, the clash of team colors against each other, and the heavy German uniforms in World War II movies; I dug braid and insignia, Ike jackets were very cool, and air force suntans. Whenever I drew a picture in school it was of an air force pilot in smart tans with wings and ribbons. My greatest desire was to fly a P-40 over Europe and come back and have my parents say, 'You were a bad motherfucker up in that sky.' I think deep down I must have been a really patriotic cat" (Hawes with Asher 42).

somewhat surprising. Freeman was thirty-six years old when he was drafted in 1943; by then, he remembers, “[e]verybody was in uniform and I felt embarrassed being in civilian clothes” (56). After leading “a post band” at Camp Grant in Illinois, he was sent to Fort Meade for “five months of combat basic training” (56). Freeman “came to love” this experience, which he describes as “the real thing, gas masks and all that, including infiltration exercises, where we crawled under live bullets and over mines.” He recalls that he “never felt so healthy in my life,” shunning alcohol and eating the basic army food with moderation, so that he “became pretty hard” (57).

Despite his extensive training, however, Freeman did not see action (58). Instead, he was assigned bandleader of “the 38th Special Service Company” and sent on a tour of “the Aleutian chain and then . . . the Alaskan mainland” as part of a revue (57). Freeman admits, in fact, that he “was very thankful to have the band and not have anybody shooting at me,” acknowledging the privileges that went along with his position (57–58).²³¹ Like many other jazz autobiographers who saw service, Freeman emphasizes the role of music to diffuse stress and lessen tensions and antagonisms during wartime. Whenever a problem arose, he recalls, the band would be ordered to play:

The music always saved things for us. A most incredible thing, the power of American dance music. There were radar men who had been stuck in the Aleutian Islands for some four years, . . . and they would break down and cry when they heard the band, they loved it so much. (58–59)

²³¹ “I was made a T-4, which was equivalent to a buck sergeant,” Freeman recalls. “Being a bandleader I had the same privileges as a warrant officer. I had entrée to all the officers clubs” (57).

Yet even as Freeman embraces aspects of military life, he also voices his disapproval of the unsavory behaviour that he witnessed firsthand during his stay in the Aleutians. He describes the scams and rackets run by American troops as well as higher-level military personnel, careful to differentiate his own behaviour—"I stayed out of all of that"—from the actions of those who "were cleaning up" (58). Significantly, he expresses admiration for author and socialist Dashiell Hammett, who—while stationed in the Aleutian Islands from 1944 to 1945—edited *The Adakian*, a daily newspaper. According to Freeman, Hammett published an exposé revealing the involvement of the military brass in the black market; Hammett escaped disciplinary action, in Freeman's view, because of his renown and financial prosperity (57–58).²³² The American troops, Freeman adds, "were running plenty of other scams," such as selling watches and rum to the Russian soldiers at greatly inflated prices (58).

Moreover, Freeman is one of the few white jazz autobiographers who served in the US military to comment directly on its policy of segregation and the discrimination experienced by its African American soldiers. He recalls a situation involving "a black cannon company" stationed on the islands, explaining that there were "a lot of very prejudiced white people on the islands, and occasionally there were small outbreaks of trouble" (60). In response, he and the other members of the band decided to go and play for the black troops. Their plan met with resistance from "a couple of very prejudiced

²³² Hammett's stories attracted the attention of the general in charge "of the Alaskan command," who asked him why he had not written "about the progress of the American forces? All you write about is the Russians" (57). According to Freeman, Hammett replied "General, our newspaper, the *Adakian*, has a policy not to publish any advertising.' The general threw up his hands and left" (58).

sergeants in our company, very ignorant men,” but the musicians “took our show over anyway and played for this cannon company and they really loved it” (60). Freeman notes the friendships that came as a result of this small gesture: “Several times when I was walking along the road they saw me and picked up and took me over to their mess hall for dinner. It was a great feeling to make friends with them” (60).

The source of the racial discord, Freeman argues, were southern soldiers who “were poorly educated and had been taught that the black man was some creature that didn’t belong with the rest of us” (60). In his view, “the jam sessions and the shows” disarmed the potential for interracial discord in the Aleutian Islands during the time he was stationed there. “They were marvelous to us because they realized we cared,” Freeman writes about the response of the black soldiers. “And do you know that I ran into many of those black soldiers after the war in different towns during tours and they would come backstage to see me. I’ve never forgotten that” (61).

iv. Bob Wilber: Left Wing at Fort Dix

When reed player Bob Wilber was drafted in 1952, he faced, in his words, “the appalling prospect of donning a uniform, perhaps even ending up in Korea” (55–56). Nonetheless, he reports his basic training as a positive experience for him, taking him far away from the privileged, upper-class world of his childhood and the sheltered experience of his apprenticeship with Sidney Bechet. “It was an education mixing with a cross-section of America,” he recalls. “I saw how other people thought and lived, and it jolted me out of that dream world I had been living in” (56). Like Bud Freeman, Wilber took pride in the

“physical well-being” that came as a result of his arduous training (56). Yet also like Freeman, Wilber was in most respects an outsider, both by temperament and political inclination; he describes himself as “politically conscious at the time and very left-wing in my thinking” (57).²³³ As Wilber readily admits, his affiliation with the left caused him “some difficulties”:

It was the McCarthy period, and all recruits were required by the army authorities to sign a document called the Attorney-General’s List, certifying that they weren’t members of any of the organizations on the list, all of which had been labeled subversive. I refused to sign, with the result that I was investigated by the CIA. (57)²³⁴

Wilber’s “family and friends” faced extensive questioning from authorities regarding his involvement in left politics, but Wilber, unlike so many others, never faced the full brunt of McCarthyism. “They found nothing to incriminate me,” he notes, “but it was still police-state stuff—not what you’d expect in America” (57).²³⁵ Much to Wilber’s relief, he was accepted into the Band School at Fort Dix, where he “was assigned permanently to

²³³ During the 1948 US presidential campaign, Wilber had “campaigning for Henry Wallace,” the Progressive Party candidate. “My involvement included giving a lecture on jazz with my band at Wellesley College under the auspices of the American Labor Party. I was probably the only soldier at Fort Dix with a subscription to *The Compass*, a left-wing newspaper” (57).

²³⁴ Perhaps Wilber means the FBI, which handles domestic surveillance, rather than the CIA.

²³⁵ Wilber’s apparent surprise about the “police-state” methods of McCarthyism suggests that his left-wing involvement at that time was perhaps more an expression of youthful exuberance than a long-term ideological commitment. See, for example, his account of his participation in a State Department sponsored tour to Russia in 1975, in which he reflects a more conservative view of mainstream American values (122–25).

the school as an instructor,” and thus avoided combat duty in Korea or reassignment with other musicians “as stretcher or ammo bearers” (57). Wilber’s experiences at the Band School, and later in the First Army Band on Governors Island, gave him important opportunities to develop as a musician: “I was gaining experience playing a lot of different kinds of music, which stood me in good stead in years to come” (57). Wilber also benefited from his army stint in another way, as well. When he was discharged in 1954, he attended the Manhattan School of Music “under the GI Bill of Rights” (59).

v. Artie Shaw’s Navy “Rangers”

Bandleader Artie Shaw and trumpeter Max Kaminsky served together in the South Pacific during World War Two as members of Navy Band 501, commonly known as Shaw’s Navy Rangers. Kaminsky’s account of this experience in his autobiography is extensive, while Shaw’s is relatively uninformative and must be supplemented by other accounts. In *The Trouble with Cinderella*, in fact, Shaw makes little mention of politics or world events. Although he received his draft notice only weeks after Pearl Harbor and served in the US Navy from April 1942 through February 1944—including a lengthy tour of the South Pacific as one of the war’s most prominent bandleaders—his account of his Navy experience is sparse and vague. Yet in an early passage mainly concerned with his struggle with “the Cinderella Myth,” Shaw makes clear the significance of his military service for him, writing that “right smack in the middle of the second act of this little drama I was starring in, there came along another little drama called World War II, in which I also played a part. Hardly a starring one, of course, but it was a much more

difficult part and gave me a much better sense of proportion regarding the role I had been playing” (14). In fact, in the paragraph that follows, Shaw suggests that he began psychoanalysis as a direct consequence of his war experience:

Coming back to the United States after some fourteen months in the South Pacific as an enlisted man in the U.S. Navy and receiving my medical discharge, I finally met up with a very famous man. Namely Dr. Freud—and although I didn’t actually meet up with him personally I was fortunate enough to get into the hands of a doctor who understood the value of Freud’s basic principles. (14)

Yet Shaw does not refer to the war again until almost the end of his autobiography, when he states that he broke up his band and “enlisted in the Navy” immediately following Pearl Harbor, and, after being “given three months” to deal with his business affairs, he “reported for duty at a mine-sweeper base on Staten Island, N.Y.” (372). A short while later, Shaw adds, he was “transferred to Newport, R.I.,” where he spent the following months as Chief Petty Officer Shaw; at some point in this same period (Shaw does not specify when) he went to Washington to meet with James Forrestal, Undersecretary of the Navy, who redirected him “to the Bureau of Personnel at 90 Church Street, New York City,” where Shaw was assigned the task of putting together a service band to tour “battle areas all over the Pacific. This was the first such group ever sanctioned by the U.S. Navy—and no one had any idea as to how the thing would work out, least of all myself” (372).

But Shaw gives only the barest outline of “how the thing [did] work out”; his report of his tenure in the Navy reads like a travel itinerary, as he lists the band’s route from “the Naval Base at Treasure Island in San Francisco” to Pearl Harbor, where they arrived on Christmas Day, 1942, and spent several months before embarking on their tour of the South Pacific (372–73). The band toured the New Hebrides, the Solomons, and Guadalcanal before returning to their base at Noumea, New Caledonia; later they “were sent down to New Zealand for a month or so, and finally to Australia. “At that point,” Shaw explains, “the whole outfit was beginning to show signs of wear and tear. We stayed on in Australia, however, and traveled up and down the entire continent for some months more before the whole band, including myself, began to come apart at the seams” (373). Although the Navy described these symptoms as “combat fatigue, or operational fatigue,” Shaw insists that “[t]he men in my outfit had a far more descriptive phrase for this state—‘I’m beat, man’” (373). Unable to carry on, the band was sent back to the United States, where Shaw spent several months recovering in a naval hospital in California (373). About his condition at this juncture, Shaw writes that “I was pretty much washed up” and experiencing “a state of dysfunction. As I would put it, I was nowhere” (374).

Although Shaw leaves no doubt that the Pacific tour exacted a considerable physical and mental toll on him and his musicians, his war account is frustratingly short on specifics, leaving many questions unanswered. For instance, how did he manage to leave the naval base at Newport to meet with the high-ranking Forrestal? As someone whose sense of non-belonging serves as a central motif of his autobiography, how did he

feel about serving in the military? How did he react to the response his big band—Shaw’s Navy Band 501, or the Rangers—received from the thousands of military personnel they entertained in the US and then on their lengthy tour through the Pacific? And what role did his Jewish identity play in his participation in a war to defeat Hitler?

Indeed, Shaw himself answers some of these questions—not in *Cinderella*, but in accounts of his military service he gave to journalists and to his various biographers, both shortly after his return to the United States and also in the decades following the publication of his autobiography. In these accounts images of patriotism abound, in descriptions of Shaw as an American eager and willing to serve his country, and of the power of his music to assuage thousands of homesick soldiers longing for the familiar sights and sounds of home. At times, however, his cynical appraisal of upper-level military personnel—the “brass” as he refers to them—as well as descriptions of the significant mental illness that beset him and other musicians challenge these simpler images of patriotism and invite a more ambivalent portrait of Shaw as musician and soldier.²³⁶

In a 1985 interview on National Public Radio’s *Fresh Air*, Shaw told host Terry Gross that he was performing with his big band in Providence, R.I., when he heard on the

²³⁶ Shaw biographer Vladimir Simosko constructs a sympathetic and moving portrait of Shaw’s service in the US Navy with extensive reference to contemporary articles on Shaw and his band in *Metronome* and *Down Beat*, to a 1962 feature *New Yorker* article, and from his own correspondence with Shaw over many years. In Simosko’s view, Shaw’s tour in the Pacific with his band was “probably the most important tour Shaw or any of his bands ever did, considering the work they were doing” (99). Yet Shaw biographer Tom Nolan offers a somewhat more critical assessment, noting Shaw’s attempts to shape the nature of his service by using his influence as a leading entertainer and his friendship with high-ranking military personnel (170–82).

stagehands' radio . . . a hysterical announcer talking about the Japs having bombed Pearl Harbor. . . . Just before I went back onstage, I got a note from the manager—please announce that all military personnel are to report to their bases immediately. . . . I went out on stage and did that. And about three quarters of the house got empty. I hadn't realized . . . World War II was out there, but it seemed somehow distant. (Gross 1985)²³⁷

Here Shaw portrays the bombing of Pearl Harbor as a transformational event for him, forcing to the surface submerged feelings of duty and patriotism. Although he came out after hearing the news of the bombing to announce the band's next tune, he recognized his own words as “so irrelevant to this conflagration that World War II represented to me, that I thought, ‘I can't do this.’” As the band began to play, Shaw recalls that he turned to his lead saxophone player and told him to “pass the word, two weeks notice.” In a response that Shaw describes as “a total impulse,” he broke up his big band and “three weeks later, I was down on Church Street, enlisting in the Navy” (Gross 1985). Shaw elaborates on the nature of his patriotism, telling Gross,

I just felt that there was no place for me as a civilian. This was *the* big experience of my life, [and I] had to be part of it. I didn't at that time know that much about why Hitler was there, but I knew he had something to do

²³⁷ Shaw's account here supports the view offered by his biographer, Tom Nolan, who suggests that prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 Shaw's “engagement with world affairs” had been minimal: he, along with Benny Goodman, had made “appearances on behalf of Russian War Relief,” and, in cooperation with the “government appeal for citizens to conserve wool,” he had ordered his band's winter suits “single-breasted and without vests” (Nolan 170).

with it, and I figured no matter how he got there we had to stop him, or the world would come to an end, as we knew it. (Gross 1985)²³⁸

Clearly Shaw's description of his response to the war here is more detailed but no less crafted than was his earlier account in *Cinderella*. In this version of events Shaw does not mention that he received his draft notice within weeks of Pearl Harbor but instead stresses the voluntary and seemingly selfless nature of his enlistment, in which he was transformed in a short period from a star bandleader on tour to "apprentice-seaman, as low as you could get" (Gross 1985).²³⁹

Yet Shaw biographer Tom Nolan emphasizes the bandleader's extensive efforts to shape the nature and extent of his military service, as he immediately "began exploring alternative-service possibilities" (171). In Los Angeles (where Shaw was living in the first months of 1942), Shaw contrived a plan for his military service, "with the help of the William Morris Agency (which had ties to the USO)," whereby "he would travel to Army camps and organize servicemen's bands, rehearsing each orchestra for two weeks and supplying it with free arrangements" (174). Shaw went so far as to announce his plans to *Down Beat*, insisting that "[t]his isn't a fancy-pants job I've got." The problem, as *Down Beat* reported, was that "Shaw had cleared his proposed USO camp job with everybody

²³⁸ A 1962 article in *The New Yorker* also emphasizes the strong patriotic impulse that pulled at Shaw as he undertook his military service; just before the band broke up, the author explains, Shaw "made one of the few sentimental speeches of his life. From the stage, he said goodbye to the band and to the audience, and spoke feelingly about the war" (qtd. in Simosko 98).

²³⁹ Tom Nolan explains that although Shaw—as "sole provider for his mother"—had originally been classified as 3-A, in January 1942 he received his new 1-A classification along with his draft notice (171).

but his draft board. . . . They got very huffy about the whole thing” (qtd. in Nolan 174). It is hardly surprising that Shaw—one of swing music’s most acclaimed bandleaders—would have made every attempt to limit his military involvement to a role as musician, rather than to serve as a regular enlisted man. Nonetheless, his attempt to set the conditions of his service, without appropriate consultation of draft personnel, conveys a sense of entitlement and privilege that is in marked contrast to the image Shaw presents in his various accounts.

As an apprentice-seaman, Shaw told Gross, he was quickly relieved of his misconception that he would be given a job appropriate to his abilities—“I didn’t realize that the military service doesn’t operate *rationally*”; instead, he found himself swabbing the decks, “building shelves. . . . Six or eight weeks of mine-sweeper duty, off Staten Island, this that and the other” (qtd. in Nolan, 174–75, emphasis in original). Eventually he received a promotion “to chief petty officer, sent to the Newport naval base” and put in charge of the band, most of whom were hardly able to play their instruments (175). The situation left Shaw demoralized, and he began to suffer from severe migraines. As he later claimed, “I had a breakdown; they put me in the hospital” (175). According to Nolan, within days Shaw had “bribed someone to look the other way while he went AWOL to Washington,” where he managed to make his way into the office of the Undersecretary of the Navy, James Forrestal (175).²⁴⁰ Shaw explains that Forrestal put him in touch with

²⁴⁰ In his interview with Terry Gross, Shaw explains that “I knew Forrestal, who was then Undersecretary. When I joined up, I had seen him, and he said, ‘If you get in trouble, come see me’” (Gross 1985). According to Nolan, Shaw and Forrestal had likely met at New York’s famed Stork Club (175).

Admiral Bledsoe, “the head of enlisted men. . . . And he gave me carte blanche to get a band together. . . and I enlisted a bunch of guys who were 1-A and got the best band that ever was” (Gross, 1985).

Shaw’s apparent reluctance to say too much about his war experience in his autobiography is perhaps both understandable and puzzling. His concern in *Cinderella* with rendering an impressionistic account of the war on his mental state—“I’m beat, man”; “I was pretty much washed up”; I was nowhere”— is in fact consistent with the narrative strategy of his autobiography as a whole (373–74): for all its long and rambling musings about the price of fame and fortune, its author’s literary aspirations and explorations of psychoanalysis, his tortured response to anti-Semitism and his disgust with the music business—*Cinderella* is strikingly uninformative regarding many aspects of Shaw’s life and career.

According to Nolan, however, Shaw had been anticipating a call to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) for several years prior to his appearance before the committee in May 1953—that is, precisely in the period in which he was working on his autobiography. If that were true, then, it is curious that he did not attempt the kind of patriotic self-representation in *Cinderella* that is apparent in these other interviews, and to an even greater degree in his testimony before HUAC, that will be explored later in this chapter (Nolan 275). On the other hand, for similar reasons it is easy to imagine why Shaw did not reveal the fact that he went AWOL.

The point here, however, is not to speculate on Shaw’s decisions regarding the information he offered or withheld in his autobiography, but rather to examine his

response to his identity as an American citizen in a time of national crisis. Another valuable source for closing some of the gaps left by Shaw in *Cinderella*, beyond the comments provided by Shaw himself in the interviews referred to above, comes from trumpeter Max Kaminsky, who describes his own experience in the Second World War in his autobiography, *My Life in Jazz*. Kaminsky—who served as a member of Shaw’s Rangers—offers a detailed exploration of the particular difficulties that he and the other musicians encountered in their dual role as musicians and as soldiers, as both outsiders and insiders, with attendant feelings of patriotism and non-belonging evoked by their ambiguous status. Moreover, his description of the physical and emotional distress that they experienced as they drew closer to the front lines in the Pacific theater provides valuable insight into the “combat fatigue” and post-traumatic stress that afflicted many of the musicians—including Kaminsky and Shaw—as a consequence of their military service.

Kaminsky’s account begins with a wisecrack. He was already a member of Artie Shaw’s big band when Shaw announced that he was breaking up the band and enlisting; upon hearing the news, Kaminsky writes that he turned to drummer Dave Tough and remarked, “The minute we get a chance to make a little money they have to go and have a war” (Kaminsky 127). But Shaw did not forget Kaminsky’s value to his band as a top-notch trumpeter; when he formed his Navy band the following summer, he offered a position to Kaminsky, who by then had also received his draft notice: “I was nearly thirty-four,” Kaminsky reasoned, “and I preferred doing something I knew to going into the Army and never having a chance to play any more” (131). Within weeks he received a

letter from the Navy Department confirming his “assignment to the Artie Shaw Navy band as musician first class” (131). His medical examination, however, revealed an ulcer and hernia; in addition, at five feet tall he failed to meet the height requirement for the military. Yet even though the medical officer and head doctor gave him every opportunity to bow out of serving, Kaminsky donned his patriotic coat, insisting that “I don’t see why I can’t blow as well in the Navy with those handicaps as I have for years as a civilian” (132).

A short while later Kaminsky received a “letter from the Navy Department instructing me to report immediately,” and putting aside his wounded feelings, he “decided to give them one more chance at me” (132). Kaminsky’s portrait of himself as the comically naïve jazz musician thrust into the rigid military routine continues; anxious at the prospect of being late for his gig, he “waylaid a lieutenant and explained that I had to go to work that night” and was caught short by the lieutenant’s hard, no-nonsense response: “Buddy, . . . you’re not going anyplace tonight. You’re in the Navy now” (132–33):

Even these simple, explicit words didn’t sink into my one-track musician’s mind. The world might be blowing up but all I knew was that I was supposed to be doing some blowing that night myself. When six o’clock came and I found myself holding a tin plate and standing in line for chow, I still couldn’t believe I might not make my job. I had no idea yet that this was the start of a long career of standing in line. . . (133)

That Kaminsky experienced his status as an enlisted musician as liminal is not surprising; like other musicians who were recruited for military bands, he found himself thrust into duty without receiving even basic training. “I was the only one out of the two thousand men there,” Kaminsky writes, “who had no boot training, no uniform, and no equipment” (134). Indeed, as he is put to work “cleaning the latrines,” he seems to be working especially hard to summon a reluctant patriotism: “I was finally able to convince myself that I was George Washington,” he writes, “and what with Hitler and the Japs and all that crap going on, this was something I should do for my country” (134).

And yet the contrast between his lifestyle as a working musician and the regimented routine of the military continually chafes at that patriotism and reinforces his position outside mainstream America. He recalls that he would “rise at 5:30 A.M., my normal bedtime, and march out on the pier to play [patriotic songs] while the poor gobs went through their exercises and marched around in the chilly October air” (135). In Kaminsky’s description, the musicians seem both privileged and incompetent in the role thrust upon them; Dave Tough, the great drummer who was also part of Shaw’s band, was not strong enough “to carry a drum or even the big cymbals, so they gave him a peck horn” that he was barely able to play. Shaw’s Rangers, according to Kaminsky, for all their skill and experience, “were a horrible excuse for a military band” (135).

But the musicians’ shortcomings as a military band pale beside the genuine physical and psychological hardships they endured in their various postings. Over the several months they were stationed at Pearl Harbor, Kaminsky writes that they experienced “daily rainstorms,” barracks “in the middle of a mosquito-infested swamp,”

and chronic coughs caused by inhaling “a fine coral powder which covered everything with dust” (137).²⁴¹ Following their assignment at Pearl Harbor, they headed to the South Pacific on board the battleship *North Carolina*, where they were “assigned to damage control, which meant that when we were under fire we were stationed in the damage-control room to lock all equipment, shut off the fans, and seal off each compartment in case of a hit” (140). Although this was considered a fairly light assignment, Kaminsky was unnerved by the sound of the cannons firing from “the gun storeroom” directly “[o]ff the control room. . . . The first time I heard them shoot those sixteen-inch gun salvos,” he recalls, “the shock was so appalling that I sprawled on my face. I didn’t think I could ever live through it again. But I did” (140). Shortly after the musicians reached Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, he came down with dengue fever and was delirious for several days (142).

In spite of these hardships, Kaminsky conveys the gratification that he and the other musicians experienced at the power of their music to lift the spirits of the enlisted men. “When we had played for the troops in Honolulu, he recalls, “we were always warmly received, but the men in the South Pacific theatre were so starved for bands from home that they went wild at the mere sight of us” (142–43). He describes a particularly memorable concert by Shaw’s band aboard the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* soon after their arrival in New Caledonia:

²⁴¹ Kaminsky writes that he depended on “terpin hydrate codeine” to control his cough and also to “calm my nerves. If it weren’t for terpin hydrate codeine, I don’t know how I’d have got through the war” (137).

As I sat there looking out at these thousands and thousands of sailors and feeling the waves of homesickness flow out of them at the sound of the familiar songs, I began to fill up so much that when I stood up to take my solo on the “St. Louis Blues,” I blew like a madman. ... [W]hen I picked up my plunger and started to growl, those three thousand men went stark, raving crazy. Even the fellows in the band were shaken. (143)

Thereafter, Kaminsky adds, he would attempt “to break it up for the men everywhere we went and try to play the way I knew they felt inside” (143–44). He realized that at times his trumpet “would get to them when nothing else worked,” as, for example, “at a base hospital” when at the sound of his playing “those broken men came to life again and banged their crutches and beat the arms of their wheel chairs, or just yelled and shouted themselves hoarse if they were too smashed up or too weak to applaud” (144).²⁴² In his 1962 interview with *The New Yorker*, Shaw also describes his emotional response to the reception the Rangers received from the Navy enlisted men: “Sometimes those forlorn, homesick birds would throw their hats in the air and cheer for five minutes. It made a lump come into my throat, I can tell you” (qtd. in Nolan 179).

But while Kaminsky insists that “eventually even the top brass were becoming aware of the morale value of jazz,” Artie Shaw, in his *New Yorker* interview, criticized some of them for their derisive attitude toward him and his band (Kaminsky 157;

²⁴² As Simosko notes, “In some of the wards the musicians were so moved by the condition of the soldiers that they could hardly play” (100).

Simosko 100).²⁴³ At Espiritu Santo, Shaw claimed that he received orders to play for Navy morale, yet the officials neglected to arrange for quarters for him and his men. “I was the lowest of the low,” he told *The New Yorker*. “The brass considered our mission silly, and I heard a lot of ‘You’re not in Hollywood now’” (qtd. in Simosko 100). Shaw’s response, the article claimed, was to become “a champion scrounger, finding bunks, bedclothing and food for his men, and doggedly playing concerts whether anybody asked for them or not” (qtd. in Simosko 100). At times, Shaw would later claim, the resentment of certain Navy officials compromised the safety of the musicians.²⁴⁴

As the musicians were sent closer to the front lines, they began to experience symptoms of battle fatigue.²⁴⁵ “We always seemed to be in foxholes,” Kaminsky recalls about the band’s experience at Guadalcanal, adding that frequent bombardments restricted their performances to the daytime. “But when the sirens blew to alert us for Condition Red—the warning that enemy planes were approaching—the jungle would

²⁴³ Later in *My Life in Jazz*, however, Kaminsky refers to the “resentment against the band on the part of the other Navy men,” so that “our lot was not an easy one whenever we were quartered with them” (151); he attributes the bad feelings to the “ambiguous” status of musicians, who “were in the Navy as regular sailors, and not in Special Services, but we hadn’t even gone through boot training” (151). See also David Stowe’s account of the resentment of “the rank and file” toward musicians in the military (Stowe 149–50).

²⁴⁴ “There was one son-of-a-bitch out there who almost got us all killed,” Shaw told biographer Vladimir Simosko. “We were all set to hitch a ride on a transport plane when this officious bastard ran out and ordered us off, saying we had to travel like other Naval personnel, and made us take a ship. It not only threw us off schedule, it was particularly dangerous just then. Everyone knew a Japanese sub was waiting out there. Sure enough the next ship in our little convoy got torpedoed and sank right there” (100).

²⁴⁵ As Vladimir Simosko explains, “fighting was still taking place” when Shaw’s band landed at Guadalcanal in July 1943. “There were bombing attacks on the base every night. According to *Metronome*, the band experienced a total of seventeen bombing attacks” (101).

become suddenly still, and not even a leaf seemed to stir in the hushed silence until you began to hear the hum of the planes and the scream of bombs and then the nightmare began again” (145). For Kaminsky, the “nightmare” of the bombings was replayed in the nightmares that “would wake [him] up screaming night after night,” and which continued for many months after his discharge (Kaminsky 151–52, 155). Shaw describes the hearing loss he suffered on Guadalcanal when “bombs landed close by the foxhole I was in, one on each side, bracketing it. We were deafened, and my hearing never came back in my left ear. It had been in bad shape since an ear infection 10 years earlier, but after that, nothing” (Simosko 102).

The 1962 *New Yorker* feature on Artie Shaw attributes the band’s deteriorating physical and mental condition in part to the “the makeshift quarters, the inadequate food, and the constant shifting around” (qtd. in Simosko 101). The description of Shaw’s breakdown on Guadalcanal is especially vivid:

One night, Shaw was taking a walk along a jungle road when he suddenly went blank. An officer came along in a jeep and said, “Where you bound, Chief?”

“I don’t know,” said Shaw.

“Get in,” said the officer quietly, recognizing the symptoms. Shaw burst into tears, but climbed into the jeep and allowed himself to be driven to the hospital.

“I’d probably have been all right if the fellow hadn’t been so damned kind,” he says. (qtd. in Simosko 101)

Although he is briefly hospitalized, Shaw dramatizes his own heroism, describing how he rose from his sickbed on the goading of his psychiatrist to play “before twenty thousand men, who practically went berserk with pleasure” (qtd. in Nolan 180–81).

Clearly their tour of duty in the South Pacific had a significant effect on both Shaw and Kaminsky, both physically and emotionally. Yet as the above accounts demonstrate, their patriotic impulses sustained them; through these impulses both men became linked to American democratic ideals of inclusion and fairness, Shaw especially to “a version of American exceptionalism” that David Stowe has outlined as central to the ideology of swing.²⁴⁶ In its article on the Rangers’ tour of Australia in August 1943, for instance, *Down Beat* reported that Shaw “rightly takes his wartime role very seriously, and will play only for servicemen, although he goodnaturedly arranges for the entree of local members of the musicians’ union if possible. It is believed that he will not broadcast here because of this attitude” (qtd. in Simosko 102).

Yet this same exceptionalist ideology may also encourage a reflexive xenophobia, or at the least an attitude of unquestioned American superiority—an attitude apparent in Kaminsky’s description of his encounter with “a party of natives” whom he came across one day in the South Pacific while scouring a beach “for the shells and cat’s eyes all the servicemen used to collect to send home” (147). Kaminsky briefly considers fleeing, but when he realizes that the natives had seen him, he approaches them “as calmly as I could”

²⁴⁶ “If swing melded only imperfectly with Marxist politics,” Stowe argues, “it came to stand as the epitome of a broader, ambiguously left-leaning ideology of the 1930s—a version of American exceptionalism, which equated democracy with the United States and posited an ‘American way of life’ as the medium in which political ideal and nation were blended (73).

(147). His describes them as exotic, fearsome, and animalistic, with their “wild, frizzy hairdo,” their “nostrils, lips and ears ... pierced with slivers of white bone,” and their profusion of spears that made them look, in Kaminsky’s view, “like a bunch of porcupines” (147).

But quickly his fear turns to compassion for their “bedraggled and filthy” appearance and diseased condition, for “most of them were suffering from elephantiasis, dragging themselves along on their swollen, trunklike legs” (147). When they reach him, Kaminsky makes the quintessential gesture of battlefield goodwill, as he “stepped forward with a big, compassionate American smile to offer them cigarettes and coins. That broke the ice, and in a few minutes we were all puffing up a storm” (147–48). Then Kaminsky decides to pull out all the stops, showing them his ID card to verify his American identity. Interpreting their “wide grins” as evidence of their “amiability,” he “pointed out to the bay where several destroyers and a battleship were riding at anchor, and explained to them that these all belonged to the U.S.A.—‘Friends’ I repeated over and over” (148). Although he knows that they could not understand him, he nonetheless “had the impression they thought *I* owned all those ships” (148). Kaminsky attempts to “clear up the confusion” by breaking into a song-and-dance routine, which “really broke them up. They laughed and jabbered at each other, nodding at me and then at each other. I figured they thought I was some kind of harmless nut” (148). As the natives continue on their way, “still nodding and grinning their black-toothed [‘betel-nut-stained’] grins,” Kaminsky approaches a boy to enquire about the group’s identity: “He pointed after them,

nodding solemnly,” Kaminsky writes, “and then drew his little brown hand slowly across his throat—the native sign for headhunters” (148).

Notably absent from Kaminsky’s story here is any awareness of his own self as “other”: in his encounter with the headhunters on Espiritu Santo, Kaminsky—the Jewish American jazz musician whose struggle to position himself in relation to mainstream American life dominates his autobiography—becomes as American as apple pie, or at least as an eccentric, screwball version of apple pie.

Following Shaw’s breakdown at Guadalcanal, the Rangers “were pulled away from the front and sent back down the chain of islands they had visited before” (Nolan 181); tours of New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, and Australia followed, after which “the whole band was sent back to the States for medical inspection, rest, and rehabilitation” (181–82). According to Nolan, Shaw lost twenty pounds during his time overseas; he arrived back in San Francisco on November 11, 1943, “morose, withdrawn, depressed” and was sent “for psychiatric observation” (183). As Simosko adds, “Several members of the band were sick enough to require hospitalization, including Shaw”; although the “official diagnosis” was “combat fatigue,” *The New Yorker* article suggested that “the malaise that had stricken him on Guadalcanal was by no means cured. His migraine headaches recurred, he felt deeply depressed, and he drifted into a near-psychotic stupor” (qtd. in Simosko 103).

In *My Life in Jazz*, Kaminsky writes that “the doctors reported that Dave [Tough] and I were in very bad shape and they recommended immediate discharge for us as well

as for a couple of other guys in the band” (152). Whereas Shaw makes only vague references in *Cinderella* to his mental condition following his Navy experience, Kaminsky is much more direct, describing his loss of “desire to work or to see anybody or even to touch the trumpet,” as well as his continuing nightmares and bouts of malaria (155). Yet he also details his gradual recovery from post-traumatic stress, attributing it in large part to his return to music (156–57). Shaw’s recovery, by contrast, seems much less certain.²⁴⁷

vi. Honour and Dishonour: Post-War Images of Max Kaminsky and Artie Shaw

In the late 1950s, Max Kaminsky toured the Far East as a participant in the US State Department’s Cold War strategy to showcase jazz as representative of American ideals of democracy and interracialism.²⁴⁸ By contrast, Artie Shaw would see his heroic wartime persona vanish in the glaring spotlights of HUAC, before which he was forced to testify regarding his alleged ties to Communist and Popular Front organizations and causes. Briefly, then, it is worth considering how the paths of these two jazz musicians—paths that were closely intertwined during the Second World War—diverged so dramatically in the years following, and what that might suggest about fundamental differences in their political and cultural perspectives.

²⁴⁷ According to Simosko, after discharge Shaw began “intensive psychoanalysis for his depression and immobility,” remaining in analysis “for a year and a half,” although “within a few months he was able to start functioning again and began to make plans for another band” (103).

²⁴⁸ For an excellent account of the US State Department sponsored jazz tours, see Penny M. Von Eschen’s *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (2004).

From September 1958 through January 1959, Kaminsky toured the Far East under the sponsorship of the US State Department as a member of Jack Teagarden's Sextet. Just as he seemed to don the role of patriotic American soldier in his encounter with the natives on Espiritu Santo, on the State Department jazz tour we see him moving away from his persona as scuffling jazz artist in the US to that of a representative of mainstream American values in foreign places. With no apparent reservation, for example, he refers to the "pep talk and briefings" that the State Department gave the musicians in advance of their departure, outlining "what was expected of us as 'ambassadors' of our country" (Kaminsky 214).²⁴⁹ And as the musicians tour through Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, Kaminsky confesses that "[i]t's hard for the American mind to get used to the great extremes of wealth and poverty existing throughout the East" (220).

Significantly, Kaminsky's display of American chauvinism—this so-called "American mind"—seems directly connected to his discomfort with foreign political systems—namely communism—as well as to foreign social and cultural customs—how and what people eat, and the various forms of Eastern music he hears on the tour. Over dinner at the house of John Wiggins—"the head U.S.I.S. man in Madras"—Kaminsky listens sympathetically as Wiggins expresses his concern about Communism in India while arguing for the role of jazz "in helping save the country from the Reds"; although

²⁴⁹ By contrast, Von Eschen observes that Dizzy Gillespie, whose band toured the Middle East under US State Department auspices in 1956, "managed to avoid his official State Department briefing, noting that 'I've got three hundred years of briefing. I know what they've done to us and I'm not going to make any excuses'" (qtd. in Von Eschen 34).

flattered by Wiggins' elevation of jazz, Kaminsky is not swayed from his belief "that this poverty-ridden country is still so ignorant and primitive in so many ways that it will be hard to steer it from the Reds" (224).²⁵⁰

Then Kaminsky's ruminations take a remarkable turn, as he suggests that just as Western political and musical systems are linked by an inherent sense of "order," so too are the political and musical systems of the East linked by a corresponding lack of order:

In short, harmony involves order, the orderly building of a piece of music according to the composition, progression, and modulation of the chords, and they have no feeling for harmony in Eastern music. We heard Asian musicians playing their butts off, . . . but these guys were swinging without a harmonic system. In the West we built a whole musical civilization on the basis of the harmonic system—and a political one on the same principles of order, structure and compromise. It was the harmony between the white and black man that made jazz. So Wiggins has a tough job, trying to get the Asians on a more harmonious kick. (225)

²⁵⁰ Kaminsky describes his reaction to the absence of cutlery, for example, when he was served a meal in Ahmedabad, at "the home of a vastly rich Hindu family" with whom the musicians were staying. "There were no forks or spoons and we just sat there in stricken silence while our hosts plunged their fingers into the concoction and scooped it into their mouths. They finally explained to us that their religion taught that God had given them their fingers to eat with. There was nothing to do but plunge in, too, and do the best we could. It was funny to consider that no doubt each was secretly thinking how barbaric the other was" (222).

For all that Kaminsky seems capable of recognizing African American music and culture as a source of wonder and enrichment, he displays a limited ability to extend that wonder to other cultural groups or musical forms.²⁵¹

Kaminsky displays a limited imagination in other ways, as well. In Japan for the final stop of their tour, the musicians “were taken to see the memorial tablet where the bomb hit Hiroshima” (233). Just over a decade earlier, it is worth recalling, Kaminsky had returned home from his Navy service traumatized from the nightly shelling, the firing of the cannons, and the sights and sounds of the dead and wounded. Yet when “one of the Japanese officials” referred to “how terrible [Hiroshima] was,” Kaminsky recalls that he “got sore and snapped, ‘Next time don’t mess around.’ There was a moment of coolness,” he adds, “before the bland smiles took over again” (233). Kaminsky’s attempt to counter the “bland smiles” of the Japanese with a stance of American moral superiority passes without further comment, and seemingly without further reflection.

With his return to New York following the tour, Kaminsky found himself trying to reconcile the contrast between his celebrity status overseas and his struggle to make a living playing jazz in the United States. “It’s hard enough on the emotional level, being in one week and out the other,” he writes, in his most direct reference to his positioning as both insider and outsider that the above analysis has tried to illuminate:

²⁵¹ Kaminsky’s limited vision of cultural exchange may be glimpsed in his suggestion that “a bop-type band would be a great hit in the Far East, especially since the modern jazz is getting closer to Asiatic melodic with its shifts in pitch and pantonality. If we can bend in their direction with bop, maybe they can bend in ours, too” (225).

One month you're a representative of your government in a foreign country; you're cheered by thousands and thousands of people; you play in palaces and embassies—and then you're back in your hotel room, opening a can of hash for supper, waiting for the damned telephone to ring, and trying not to look at the pile of bills that covers the bureau. (235)

Less than a decade after Artie Shaw had returned home from his tour of duty in the South Pacific to warm tributes in the press for his “contribution to the war effort,” he found himself forced to defend his patriotism at a hearing in New York, on May 4, 1953, before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) (Simosko 99).²⁵² Shaw was ensconced on his farm in New York State and writing his autobiography in the years before he was summoned to appear before HUAC, apparently anticipating, as stated earlier, that he might be called to testify, and yet he reveals nothing about this in *Cinderella*.

He does, however, refer to it in his 1979 Introduction to a reprinted edition of *Cinderella*, in which he gives an account of the specific personal circumstances and wider social and political context against which his autobiography, first published in 1952, took shape. Shaw wrote *Cinderella* between 1950 and 1952, during one of his many hiatuses

²⁵² In January 1944, *Metronome* named Shaw the 1943 “Musician of the Year” in recognition of his military service, while *Down Beat* highlighted his Navy experience in its article, the “Amazing Saga of Shaw Band” (Simosko 99). In its December 1, 1943 article, “Navy Band 501 Creates Furore in South Pacific,” *Down Beat* opined that “to such Australians as are lucky enough to hear it, the Shaw band is an unforgettable experience and lesson. . . . Its effect on the morale of troops wherever it goes is of inestimable military value” (qtd. in Simosko 102).

from the music business, while he was living on Picardy Farm—“a nice peaceful little haven”—in Pine Plains, N.Y.; yet despite his intention to continue his life there as a writer, events quickly overtook him, chief among them, in his words, “the McCarthy plague and its disastrous effects on my life” (viii). As a result, he was forced to sell his farm, and after testifying before HUAC he left the United States, spending several years in exile in Spain (viii–ix).²⁵³

In his depiction of these events, Shaw reveals his contempt and cynicism for the United States and its social and political policies at the height of the Cold War and beyond. He describes Joe McCarthy as “good old Joe, the sterling Super-American, the man who knew exactly what *Un*-American meant because he knew exactly what American meant and was by God going to see to it that America remained American” (vi). Then he reveals his own involvement with McCarthyism, namely as “an invited guest of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The whole shot,” and the dire ramifications of that experience, as he “watched the grey pall fall over my entire life as a direct result of having been branded ‘a controversial figure’—meaning, in simpler and more direct terms, an untouchable” (vii).

Although Shaw expresses his relief at having survived the witch hunt “with a few tattered vestiges of sanity,” he notes that many were “done in by the deadly virus of

²⁵³ Shaw also describes his considerable literary ambitions and gives an account of his success, due to his own celebrity as a bandleader, in gaining entrance to the most established American literary circles of his day; among his acquaintances he cites Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Steinbeck, and his “real friendship” with Sinclair Lewis, who gave him invaluable “advice” regarding the writing process, advice that enabled Shaw to overcome his writers’ block and write his autobiography (xv).

hatred and intolerance and suspicion and finally downright stupidity that hung over the U.S. of A. like a vast poisonous cloud” (vii). And in a tone dripping with sarcasm, Shaw offers his late 1970s, post-Vietnam-era perspective on McCarthy as the bastion of democracy “holding back a vast tidal wave of subversion. . . . (And now that we’ve achieved our stunning victories in south-east Asia, any fool can plainly see how truly worthwhile all *that* was)” (vi, emphasis in original).

Shaw’s description of his experience with McCarthyism, like much of his autobiography itself, seems more concerned with impressions than with substance, yet the impressions themselves are worth noting. In particular, the cynical and defiant Shaw that appears here, as critics have noted, stands in sharp contrast to the patriotic and contrite figure that stood before HUAC in 1953, and thus provides another reminder of the autobiographer’s role in crafting different versions of a life.²⁵⁴ Once again, as for so much about Shaw’s life and career, the reader is forced to look beyond his autobiography for a more complete understanding of this experience—in this case to the transcription of Shaw’s testimony before HUAC itself, to evidence that critics have gathered of Shaw’s support for Popular Front organizations in the late 1940s, and to accounts Shaw provided in later interviews.²⁵⁵ The objective here is not to argue that Shaw was either

²⁵⁴ Shaw biographer John White suggests that Shaw, in his “Introduction to the second edition of *The Trouble With Cinderella* . . . is less than candid (or accurate) about either his involvement with or the consequences of his appearance before HUAC,” adding that “Shaw’s appearance and testimony before HUAC was not his finest hour” (151–52).

²⁵⁵ The outline below draws on direct quotes from Shaw’s testimony and summaries of the hearing as a whole as supplied by his various biographers and critics. The transcription of Shaw’s testimony was published in *Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, First Session*

accommodating or defiant or walking a fine line between the two in his testimony (as we will see, critics and Shaw himself have made these various arguments), but rather to sketch the circumstances of Shaw's life in the period following his navy service in an attempt to assess his ties to, or distance from, mainstream America.

As Lewis Erenberg points out, in his testimony before HUAC Shaw directly linked his own war experience to his support for "leftist causes" in the period following his return home; in particular, he cited his contempt for "domestic reactionaries and black marketers and set out to fight for the Fair Employment Practices Commission and other leftist causes as part of his conception of American war ideals" (Erenberg 243).²⁵⁶ During the hearing, the committee brought up specific charges against Shaw based upon "the sworn statement of Leo Townsend, a screenwriter and admitted one-time Communist," who claimed to have seen Shaw at "five or six Communist Party branch meetings . . . and four or five Marxist classes"; Townsend had also admitted, however, that Hy Kraft—another Communist friend of Shaw—had been opposed to recruiting him, "on the ground that Shaw would be a bad Communist" (Nolan 276). In response to the last charge, Shaw replied, "I'm afraid he had me right there. . . . I didn't know that Mr. Kraft was a

(Washington, D.C.: GPO) (Simosko 127). Shaw's testimony "was televised live in New York and filmed for movie-theater newsreels" (Nolan 275).

²⁵⁶ According to Tom Nolan, allegations about Shaw's involvement with the left first surfaced in 1948 when Kathleen Winsor, with whom he was then embroiled in bitter divorce proceedings, announced to the press that Shaw was a member of the Communist Party and had tried to coerce her to join the party (232–34). The following year, when Shaw signed a petition "in support of a Soviet-endorsed Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace" taking place at New York's Waldorf-Astoria, there was immediate fallout, with the press calling him "the Communist-loving clarinetist" (243).

Communist, I can tell you that now. . . . To the best of my knowledge I have never been a member of the Communist Party” (276).

Shaw clarified his response, Nolan explains, by stating that in 1946 “he was ‘absolutely misled’ and ‘hoodwinked’ into attending some questionable gatherings” (276); he also admitted that he had been “‘quite active’ in [Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions] (HICCASP) and a member of its executive council, and he told of witnessing Communist Party meetings as a bystander” (276). Although in his testimony Shaw did not directly reveal the names of people he saw at these meetings, he acknowledged that “they are names I am sure you know” (276).²⁵⁷ Later in his testimony Shaw admitted that he had signed “political petitions and event endorsements . . . in the later 1940s,” but insisted that “the use of my name on a lot of these things should . . . not have been granted,” although “the intent on my part when I granted them was not to do anything disloyal. I have never in my life done anything disloyal to this country” (277).

When Shaw was asked if he realized that he was “thoroughly duped by the Communist group,” he responded, “In this Communist thing, . . . I certainly was. . . . Yes sir. . . . I was a fool; I should not have signed” (Nolan 277). On the verge of tears, Shaw professed his deep and abiding loyalty to America:

²⁵⁷ In his interview with Shaw, Tom Nolan asked him if he had been asked “to name names” during his private meeting with the committee during a recess in the hearing. Shaw replied that he had been given particular names, some of whom he admitted to know, others he denied knowing (276–77). He insisted, however, that he only named figures whose political affiliations were already well known, such as Dalton Trumbo, and therefore did not give the committee “much corroboration or any new leads” (277).

I would just like to say one thing. This is no prepared statement or anything. It may sound garbled, but I have, I think, personally, a very large stake in this country, and I want to do everything I can, as I always have, to defend American institutions and American folkways. This country has been very kind to me. I started out as a minority member of a poor family, and I have come a long way for a guy like me; and I have found on the roads I am met with a lot of love and a lot of affection, and when I was serving in the service that same thing happened. . . . I never had any intention of doing anything detrimental or disloyal to the interests of this country. (qtd. in Nolan 277–78)²⁵⁸

As the hearing ended, Shaw reached across the table to shake hands with the committee chairman, Harold H. Velde, “a former FBI agent” and current “Republican congressman who had campaigned on the slogan ‘Get the Reds out of Washington and Washington out of the Red’” (White 148). The photograph that captured this moment was printed in *Time* magazine—“to some,” according to Nolan, “a portrait of cooperation and reconciliation; to others, a snapshot of collaboration and capitulation” (Nolan 278).²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ According to Vladimir Simosko, Shaw was clearly sensitive about the image of him, widely portrayed in the press, of breaking down and crying during the hearing; later he would insist that his eyes were tearing as a result of “the bright Kleig lights focused on him” an explanation which some critics dispute (Simosko 127). See, for example, White, 150.

²⁵⁹ While two of Shaw’s biographers, Tom Nolan and John White, view Shaw’s testimony as self-serving and capitulatory, biographer Vladimir Simosko and Lewis Erenberg offer a decidedly more sympathetic portrait of Shaw’s testimony and his connection to the Popular Front. See Nolan 275–78; White 148–52; Erenberg 243, 245; Simosko 127.

John White's succinct statement—that “[m]usically, temperamentally, and politically, Shaw did not ‘belong’ in the increasingly conformist America of the early 1950s”—identifies part of Shaw's dilemma at the time of his appearance before HUAC (White 148). Yet if Shaw were simply content in his non-conformity, then why did he go to such lengths to prove his patriotism during his HUAC testimony? Beyond the obvious implications for his life and career that blacklisting would have had, Shaw was deeply torn—as he reveals so clearly in *Cinderella*—between cynicism and nonconformity on the one hand, and a desperate need for success and recognition within mainstream America, on the other. By contrast, Max Kaminsky seemed to have worked through his ambivalence regarding his life as a jazz musician and his desire for mainstream respectability; in the end, he emerges as an untroubled jazz statesman, eager to represent his country on foreign tours.

This brief survey of the responses of white jazz autobiographers to military service, limited and incomplete as it is, provides a new perspective from which to consider the relationship between jazz and mainstream American values amidst the upheaval of World War Two and the Cold War that followed. It shows, first and foremost, that there was no homogenous or predictable response from the white jazz autobiographers who were drafted or who voluntarily enlisted in the US military during the 1940s and 1950s. For Bud Freeman and Bob Wilber, military service was an opportunity to show their physical fitness and masculinity, even as they were critical of some of the behaviour and values of the military establishment and of mainstream American society. While Eddie Condon and Woody Herman suggest that their 4-F status

gave them extra incentive to prove their patriotism through their music, Charlie Barnet seems chiefly motivated by his desire to let the good times role, war or no war. If Artie Shaw and Max Kaminsky illustrate that notions of patriotism and duty could exist alongside feelings of alienation and contempt, Chet Baker and Art Pepper reveal a sense of despair and pointlessness in their military service that reflects in many respects the tragic arch of their lives as a whole.

David Stowe begins his social history of the swing era by invoking Ralph Ellison's reference to "American culture as 'jazz-shaped,'" or, in Stowe's concise paraphrase, "African-Americans have provided the essence of the nation's cultural style" (1). If African American culture is now widely accepted to have shaped and fundamentally altered mainstream (white) American culture, this was certainly not the prevailing belief in the early decades of the 20th century, during which the jazz autobiographers in this study were coming into adulthood and into their chosen professions as jazz musicians. As we have seen in earlier chapters, their accounts of immersion within black music and culture placed them outside many of the mainstream values of their time. Yet as this chapter has tried to illustrate, their varying and unpredictable responses to serving in the US military suggest that their self-representations as white jazz musicians immersed in black culture were sometimes, but certainly not always, reflective of their wider ideological or political stances.

Conclusion

These fifteen autobiographies by white jazz musicians, considered together, provide a new direction for understanding race as a defining feature of 20th-century US society. Previous studies that have referred to these texts have tended to consider them within the context of a particular historical moment, such as the Swing Era, or a particular jazz style, such as 1920s Chicago style or bebop. This study has argued that recurring attitudes about race emerge within them that cut across stylistic and historical difference. These attitudes offer important evidence that over the first six decades of the 20th century white musicians from a wide range of musical, social, and economic backgrounds looked to black music and culture as the model on which to form their identities as jazz musicians.

In many respects, the trope of outside and inside carries powerful, multivalent meanings within these texts. White jazz autobiographers describe their status as outsiders in respect to African American music and culture; as professional jazz musicians, some of them also inhabited an outsider position in respect to the values of mainstream American society. Furthermore, as published authors who—with few exceptions—lacked literary training or credentials, they were also outsiders to the literary world on which they made claims. The effort of white jazz musicians to become insiders, or conversely to justify their outsider status, assumes great significance within their narratives.

From their position as outsiders, white jazz autobiographers searched for authentication within a musical form commonly understood to be African American in origin. As we have seen, they quickly learned that in order to authenticate themselves as jazz musicians they had to excel as students of black music and culture. The process of immersion that was an essential part of their learning to play jazz led to intense experiences of interracial interaction, experiences which revealed both the potential of music to move people beyond basic prejudices and suspicions as well as the limitations of what was possible within a society in which racism continued to flourish, both by law and by custom.

Within these accounts emerge deeply moving descriptions of white youngsters learning to play under the guidance of a black mentor, sitting in at interracial jam sessions, or returning night after night to clubs in black neighborhoods to listen to their favorite bands. These descriptions illustrate the most hopeful and positive aspects of these interracial experiences, but other aspects are less positive. Several of the autobiographers, as we have seen, reflect primitivist or essentializing attitudes in their descriptions of black music and culture.

In more general terms, it is notable but perhaps not surprising that discussions of race in these texts rarely move beyond its specific impact on these musicians' lives and careers. The accounts of military service that we examined in Chapter 4 offer a particularly vivid illustration of this point. As white soldiers serving in the segregated US military, these white autobiographers played in white bands and lived and traveled in

strictly segregated units.²⁶⁰ Yet it is notable that their accounts of their military experiences rarely refer to the fact of segregation, or to the campaign of Double V that became a rallying point for African Americans in that period. Instead, their accounts are intensely personal—the autobiographers are absorbed with their own responses to serving, or with their recollections of pride and achievement, or pain and suffering.

In other chapters, we find many examples of how particular musicians succeeded or were hindered in their efforts to play or record in interracial groups, or to participate in sessions in black neighborhoods or clubs. Rarely, though, is there an attempt at a more reflective analysis of race in the United States—Shaw’s account is more concerned with anti-Semitism than with anti-black racism—nor do the autobiographers seem eager to acknowledge the benefits that their whiteness conferred upon them in respect to career opportunities and economic security.²⁶¹

Historians William Kenney and Burton Peretti provide a way to consider interracialism in early jazz with their suggestion that the young men who gathered in Chicago in the late 1920s were initially attracted to jazz for reasons other than an overriding interest in African American music and culture. As Kenney points out, “few of the white Chicago jazzmen had heard black music before turning to jazz in the first place” (116). For many of these youngsters, the “lure” of jazz was part of a more general attraction to the excitement of urban life and a form of rebellion from middle-class

²⁶⁰ For a brief summary of the specific details of segregation in the various branches of the US military at the beginning of World War Two, see DeVeaux 245.

²⁶¹ According to William Kenney, cornetist “[Wild Bill] Davison and [Bud] Freeman were among the few white Chicagoans to address directly the power advantage most white musicians enjoyed over black musicians under racial segregation” (109).

respectability and mainstream values (Peretti 86; Kenney 116). For others, a career in popular dance bands or jazz bands offered an opportunity to rise out of the impoverished conditions of their youth.

Yet once these musicians were exposed to black music, they quickly came to understand its particular significance for their own lives and potential careers in jazz. They discovered, more specifically, that there was something authentic—or “real,” to borrow Kenney’s term—in the music of the black bands that was missing in the music of the white dance bands (Kenney 88). I have argued that this search for authenticity through immersion in “real” black music may be seen to varying degrees in all of the accounts examined in this study, not only in those of the Chicago musicians, and that this search pushes beyond generational and stylistic differences. It was in search of the “real” music that Wingy Manone went over the levee in turn-of-the-century New Orleans; that same search provided the driving force behind the pilgrimage to Chicago’s South Side by Goodman, Hodes, Kaminsky, Condon, and Mezzrow, among others. In a later generation, it was this search for musical authenticity that sent Art Pepper and Chet Baker to Los Angeles’ Central Avenue, where they learned swing and later bebop by playing alongside the leading African American practitioners of these styles, and that sent John LaPorta and Don Asher to interracial jam sessions in Philadelphia and Boston.

Put another way, these white musicians were *forced* to negotiate the tricky terrain of interracialism—and their own personal relationships to black music and culture—as an essential part of their learning to play jazz in the first place, and later of their construction of their identity as professional musicians. Or in Peretti’s succinct and moving summary:

“Jazz was a biracial music, but the society that fostered it was violently opposed to biraciality. . . . Jazz musicians did not seek the assignment of hurdling the barriers of race, but they nevertheless were compelled to face them and to confound them on many occasions” (177). From this perspective, white jazz musicians found their way into interracial musical and cultural experiences, and they quickly came to recognize the benefits that these experiences could provide for them. This observation is not intended as simply a harsh judgment on their motives and intentions, but rather as a way to open the door to a better understanding of the attitudes toward race that emerge from these autobiographies.

Another avenue through which to consider the racial attitudes of these autobiographers is to contrast them with their depictions of women, in which misogynistic attitudes prevail. The contrast between their efforts to address racial inequity (albeit with limited success) and their seeming acceptance of the misogyny that prevailed within jazz culture is striking; it seems likely that at work here were societal pressures that encouraged at least a degree of reflection about race while at the same time leaving gender inequity relatively unchallenged. To be sure, the hyper-masculinity of the jazz world has been a key feature of mainstream jazz historiography; in that respect there is little surprise that many of the men autobiographers who are the focus of this study often reflect a similar perspective. When women do appear in these texts, they appear primarily in the roles that have been typically assigned them in the mainstream narratives: they are girl singers in the big bands, wives or sisters or mothers, mistresses or girlfriends or one-night pick-ups, or sometimes they are adoring fans. For our purposes, however, it is

noteworthy that misogynistic rants and crude objectification of women appear side by side with emotional pleas for racial tolerance, or descriptions of happy interracial sessions. In some of these texts, it would appear that all human beings are equal, as long as they are men.

This attitude is on display in Wingy Manone's *Trumpet on the Wing*, which ends with Manone reasserting his reverence for the black cultural and musical traditions of New Orleans.²⁶² Yet only a few pages earlier he had railed against musicians' wives, who, according to him, "hold 'em back and ruin their success" by preventing them from going on the road where "musicians must keep going on to make a bigger success" (209). From Manone's perspective, women aggressively pursue men musicians because they are irresistibly attracted to their instruments (!), but once they succeed in capturing their men in marriage, they thereafter conspire to keep them from reaching their potential. And if that weren't bad enough, these same women "break their hearts by leavin' 'em" (209).²⁶³

Eddie Condon recalls that during his summer experience at Lake Delavan resort in Wisconsin, he and his buddies "drove to town every day in the Wills St. Clair and checked our trap line for new girls" (116). Later he remembers an experience he had on a

²⁶² As Manone writes in his stirring finale, "I ain't never been sorry that I went up over the levee and listened to the only kind of music that's really solid, and caught it. And kept on playin' it all my life" (239).

²⁶³ Manone suggests that a musician without his instrument does not attract the attention of women. "But the minute he picks up a horn and starts playin'," Manone insists, "he fascinates 'em. The gals go for him, then. The gals all get plenty anxious to marry him, 'cause he is a success, and a great player. . . . Musicians' wives ought to think what they're gettin' into, before they get into it. If they don't want to tag along with the guys, they ought not to bother 'em" (209).

trip to Trinidad, when he and a friend were “pursued” by a prostitute as they “walked down the street.” According to Condon, his friend remarked, “Lack of self-control In a higher animal it would be unforgivable. In a woman it is understandable” (234). Clearly Condon—who as we noted earlier prides himself on his linguistic cleverness and salty wit—is much taken with the humour of these passages.²⁶⁴

In *Those Swinging Years*, bandleader Charlie Barnet’s repeated proclamations of his own racial tolerance stand in sharp contrast to his crude objectification of women and his blatant homophobia. Both of these emerge in the following passage, in which he notes that a “girl singer” he had just hired for his band was

a wild-looking gal, but she couldn’t sing very well. I soon found that someone else had eyes for her. This was encroaching on my territory, although I always had a strict rule for myself: no hanky-panky with the girl singer if she can really sing. I used to maintain that there were four sexes—male, female, homosexual, and girl singers. More trouble in bands has been caused by girl singers than by any other factor. (70)

²⁶⁴ Condon also recalls his response to pianist Joe Sullivan, when Sullivan asked him, “‘Eddie, do you think the public will ever make an honest woman out of jazz?’ I was feeling bitter,” Condon replied, “my rent was due. ‘There is no such thing as an honest woman,’ I said. ‘There are just women who get higher prices than other women. Jazz is in the lower brackets’” (229). Notably, Condon devotes a chapter to explaining his role in organizing a tribute to pianist Fats Waller at Carnegie Hall in 1942, followed by another at Town Hall in which white and black musicians performed together. In these passages, he takes pains to emphasize the significance of these events in racial terms; he includes quotes from both John Hammond and musicologist John M. Halpern in which these critics offer blunt critiques of racism in America while illustrating jazz’s role in promoting integration by focusing on ability over racial or religious differences (280–83).

Texan reeds player Drew Page describes women as vultures who pursue men in order to lure them into sex or marriage, or both. He expresses gratitude toward a young prostitute with whom he had a brief relationship for “arousing my curiosity about women’s motives toward men”; he credits her with teaching him “to recognize the whorish, vulturous tendencies in certain types of women—from the married ones, willing to pay for the sex they want with gifts, to the single ones seeking security in the form of money” (26–27). According to Page, these lessons concerning the basic immorality of women kept him “out of a lot of trouble over the years,” for on those occasions when he became entangled “with opportunistic women, I did it with my eyes open” (27). In *The Trouble With Cinderella*, Artie Shaw notes his considerable surprise when, as a young man, he discovered that “a fellow could actually go to bed with a ‘nice’ girl and still continue to like her” (185).²⁶⁵ In *Straight Life*, Art Pepper describes in graphic detail his violent sexual impulses.²⁶⁶

By no means am I suggesting that the attitudes reflected in the examples cited above are shared by all of the autobiographers under discussion in this study; several of them, in fact, offer nuanced and sensitive accounts of their personal relationships with

²⁶⁵ Toward the end of *Cinderella*, Shaw—who would eventually marry and divorce eight times—devotes a chapter to the topic of marriage. Although he admits that he “made an unholy botch of every last one of them,” he maintains that he “had a good bit of help in making these various unholy botches” (361). Several of his ex-wives accused him of emotional abuse.

²⁶⁶ As Gary Giddins explains in his introduction to *Straight Life*, Pepper claimed that heroin “provided the only relief from sexual obsessions that had turned him into an obsessive masturbator, a rapist, a voyeur. In *Straight Life*,” Giddins adds, “[Pepper] recounts sexual exploits with the relish of a pornographer” (vi).

women, both personal and professional.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, even among the autobiographers quoted in the above passages, it is not unusual to find alongside these misogynistic outbursts portraits of affection and devotion toward the particular woman who has brought stability into their lives and nudged them into blissful domesticity.²⁶⁸

Nonetheless, it is rare to find accounts in which women (other than Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday) are depicted as serious musicians worthy of the respect of men musicians,²⁶⁹ or in which women are collaborators or friends.

In some respects, the absence or invisibility of women in these texts is as significant as are particular examples of misogyny, for it allows many of these autobiographers to avoid serious discussion of their interpersonal relationships with women inside and outside of the jazz world.²⁷⁰ By contrast, these same musicians are

²⁶⁷ See, for example, Asher, Kaminsky, Wilber.

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Condon and Barnett.

²⁶⁹ Bud Freeman offers such a description, recalling with respect and admiration a woman trumpeter he and some of the other young white Chicagoans used to go see at a speakeasy in Chicago called the Bookstore; notably, his admiration also extends to her physical attributes: “There was a black band that played there, led by a woman trumpet player named Dolly Hutchinson. She was very much influenced by the wonderful beat of church singing and also by Louis, I think. We loved her. She was young—probably under twenty—and tall, very slender, with a very lovely loose walk, no affectation and no showmanship—which was probably her showmanship. She was very sweet. I haven’t the faintest idea what became of her” (15). Eddie Condon speaks highly of his own sisters’ ragtime ability; he also credits the bandleader’s wife for teaching him about “chords and modulations” when he played with Peavey’s Jazz Bandits in 1922 (Condon with Sugrue 71).

²⁷⁰ John LaPorta, for example, illustrates the simple fact that for most jazz and studio musicians of his generation, one’s career was spent almost entirely in the company of other men; among the hundreds of personal names in the index to his autobiography, only a few women are included. Yet LaPorta’s few references to women are notably respectful, including one in which he praises the singer Mary Ann McCall, recalling about a recording session in which she participated, “It was the only time in my

unable to avoid at least some discussion of the impact of race on their lives and careers as white jazz musicians. Significantly, it is this focus on race and interracialism, rather than on aspects of gender construction or relationships between men and women in the jazz world, that is central to the work of the cultural historians and ethnomusicologists whose texts have provided critical context for the themes explored in this study. Although David Stowe and Lewis Erenberg have brief accounts of all-women big bands in their respective histories of the Swing Era, it was only with Sherrie Tucker's groundbreaking *Swing Shift* that an important alternate history of the Swing Era was uncovered.

It is worth noting that Tucker and other contemporary jazz scholars have tended to focus on the role of mainstream jazz historiography—including popular jazz histories, college textbooks, and biographies of great musicians—in creating and perpetuating the erasure of women in jazz, as well as in encouraging a particular “masculinist focus” (20).²⁷¹ Yet within these white jazz autobiographies we have discovered the same impulse toward erasure, or at least the tendency to restrict women to the domestic or sexual realm, while making them mainly invisible as instrumentalists or bandleaders. Both Stowe and Erenberg acknowledge the considerable hostility toward women musicians within swing culture. As Stowe observes, debates within swing culture regarding “the musical capability of women demonstrate that gender relations in jazz were affected even more by

experience that a group of musicians spontaneously applauded anyone in a recording studio” (53).

²⁷¹ In her introduction to *Swing Shift*, Tucker contends that “[t]he continued erasure of women from dominant jazz discourse, *despite* a dignified body of published knowledge on women in jazz, points to an ideological morass impervious to pleas for the dignity and heroism of the women who played jazz and swing in the 1940s” (21, emphasis in original).

the dominant culture than were race relations” (168–69). Similarly, Erenberg points to the strength of the “male swing fraternity” that “revealed the limits of its concept of democracy” (Erenberg 199). These specific comments about “swing culture” do excellent work to reinforce my point regarding contrasting constructions of race and gender in white jazz autobiographies that span a wide range of 20th jazz history.

Without minimizing the significance of these musicians’ interracial encounters, then, the above discussion points to factors within the larger American society that permitted a kind and degree of interracial exchange that, for example, did not extend to exchanges between men and women in jazz. In other words, the immersion in black music and culture described by these autobiographers, and their later professional and social interactions with black musicians, was guided primarily by an interest in the music rather than by a conscious desire or plan to break down racial barriers or to challenge mainstream values. The resulting social gains, as well as the tensions and points of division examined throughout this study, were a by-product of musicians coming together to participate in jam sessions or studio recordings, or sitting down as student and teacher.

This conclusion, in fact, is supported by many of the autobiographers themselves, to whom I give the last word in a study that has been primarily guided by their words. “A lot of people credit me with helping to break down the color barrier in our business,” Charlie Barnet comments about his interest in hiring African American musicians in a period in which the jazz world was still highly segregated. “It is true that I did hire a lot of black musicians in my bands over the years, but it was not done with any thought of being a crusader. I simply hired what I thought were the best men available at the time, and I

never experienced any serious trouble about having a mixed band. It never occurred to me that I might be doing something revolutionary or that some folks might have been upset by what I was doing” (Barnet with Dance 182). A similar striving for musical excellence through absorption of a black music sensibility leads John LaPorta to reject “the Dixieland idiom played by the White musicians” and to seek out black jam sessions where “[t]hey accepted me and the ideas I played without question. . . . Listening to great Black Jazz musicians was how I learned to play in the idiom, so it was easy to understand why I felt at home playing in Black jam sessions” (19). And in a related vein, Benny Goodman observes that in the end “nobody cares much what colors or races are represented just so long as we play good music. That’s the way it should be, and I certainly hope that the time will come when any band can play anyplace, as long as it delivers what the public comes to hear—music” (231).

As we have seen, their immersion experiences in African American music and culture led many of these autobiographers to speak from an insider’s perspective. It is this insider’s perspective that comes through in Wingy Manone’s fascinating recollection of seeing Louis Armstrong’s short film, “Shine,” in a Chicago movie theater. Manone begins the story by explaining a New Orleans tradition about which he clearly assumes his readers would be unfamiliar: “Down in New Orleans,” Manone writes, “whenever a cat buys himself a new garb, he goes down on the main drag so everybody will see it. He doesn’t say nothin’, but struts up and down with his thumb hooked under the lapel of his coat, so everybody will catch on that he has a fine new suit” (127).

In the movie, Armstrong, who was outfitted in “a tiger skin, and wearing a hat with horns on it,” began to sing the feature song, “and when he got to the part about being ‘all dressed up in the latest style,’ he stuck his thumb under the lapel of that tiger skin and started to strut” (127). Manone, who got the cultural reference immediately, “laughed so much” that he was kicked out of the theater. The other members of the audience also began to laugh, but as Manone points out, “they didn’t dig” (127). Later “the manager of the theater came across the street” and asked Manone to explain the reason for his laughter. “I tried to explain it to him, but it was one of those private jokes that you have to be hip to, to dig” (127).

It is possible to interpret Manone’s anecdote as a comment about culture—the culture of New Orleans as he experienced it, that is—as much as it is a comment about race. Yet in white jazz autobiography, sometimes culture and race seem to merge—as do white and black—leaving only jazz.

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