

Lester Young and the Birth of Cool

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American studies scholar Joel Dinerstein designed and teaches a course at the University of Texas at Austin on the history of being cool in America. In this essay from The Cool Mask (forthcoming) he shows how the African American concept of cool synthesizes African and Anglo-European ideas, describing African American cool as both an expressive style and a kind of public composure. For African Americans, cool resolves the conflict between competing needs to mask and to express the self, a paradox exacerbated by historical exigencies of life in the United States. For Dinerstein, the jazz musician Lester Young modeled a strategy of self-presentation that became the dominant emotional style of African American jazz musicians and several generations of African American men.

Miles Davis's 1957 collection *The Birth of the Cool* tends to serve as a lightning rod for discussions of "cool" in jazz and African American culture.¹ A spate of jazz recordings, however, testify to the importance of being "cool"—of maintaining emotional self-control—during World War II as a strategy for dealing with dashed hopes of social equality. The messages of Erskine Hawkins's hit, "Keep Cool, Fool" (1941) and Count Basie's "Stay Cool" (1946) and the cerebral quality of Charlie Parker's "Cool Blues" (1946) testify to a new valuation of public composure and disparagement of the outward emotional display long associated with stereotypes of blacks, from Uncle Tom to the happy-go-lucky "southern ducky." Contemporary American usage of the word "cool" has its roots in the jazz culture of the early 1940s, and the legendary tenor saxophonist Lester Young probably used it first to refer to a state of mind.² When Young said, "I'm cool" or "that's cool," he meant "I'm calm," "I'm OK with that," or just "I'm keeping it together in here." The jazz musician and scholar Ben Sidran rightly noted that this cool ethic reflected "actionality turned inward" and was "effected at substantial cost and suffering."³

According to Gunther Schuller, Lester Young was "*the* most influential artist after [Louis] Armstrong and before Charlie Parker," the creator of the "cool"

saxophone style and the father of the “cool school” of jazz with which Miles Davis later became associated. Yet he is little known outside the jazz world because his groundbreaking 1930s recordings were made with the Count Basie Orchestra and Billie Holiday. Young was the “genius soloist” on the classic 1930s Basie band recordings and the saxophone complement (the second voice, really) to Billie Holiday’s best vocal performances.⁴ Young was Holiday’s favorite musician, and they bestowed the nicknames on each other that stuck for life: she dubbed him “Pres” because he was “the president of all saxophone players,” and Young dubbed her “Lady Day.”

Young burst into recorded jazz history in 1936 with a revolutionary, vibrato-less tenor sound: fast, floating, airy, clean, light. It was so completely opposed to the then-dominant model of tenor playing, Coleman Hawkins’s rhapsodic, powerful, “macho” tone, that it confused most black jazz musicians.⁵ Young’s combination of lightning speed, blues feeling, rhythmic balance, precise articulation, and inexhaustible melodic ideas made him, in retrospect, something like the Michael Jordan of jazz. Dizzy Gillespie called it a “cool, flowing style” to emphasize Young’s long, fluid phrases, strategic use of silence and space, and rhythmic mastery. Young’s sound and style represented a musical synthesis of early jazz history: from his childhood on the New Orleans streets and adolescence on the black vaudeville circuit to his responsiveness to white Chicagoan influences such as Jimmy Dorsey and Bix Beiderbecke; from his mastery of the blues and his classical virtuosity to his involvement in “the big music workshop” of early 1930s Kansas City.⁶ Young influenced hundreds of white and black musicians between 1937 and 1944. After suffering traumatic experiences at a southern army base in World War II, however, he withdrew into a quiet, gin-soaked nonconformity.

Between 1945 and his death in 1959, Young’s strategies of self-insulation were as influential on younger jazz musicians as his music.⁷ Young’s renowned use of hip slang influenced jazz culture, black cultural pride, white Beat Generation writers, and (through them) the counterculture of the 1960s. His prodigious consumption of marijuana and alcohol, his humor, his trademark porkpie hat, and his silent, expressive sadness generated so much jazz lore that he remains a model of the hip jazz musician of the period (for example, as the character Dale Turner in the movie *Round Midnight* [1986] and Edgar Poole in John Clellon Holmes’s novel, *The Horn* [1958]). He made more than \$50,000 a year during this period yet self-consciously drank himself to death in a small room in the Alvin Hotel on Fifty-second Street, neither proud nor ashamed of either his substance abuse or his sadness.⁸ Between his continued dedication to expressing his inner pain artistically, and the blank facial expression he wore to

resist the white “gaze,” Young embodied two aspects of cool that seem contradictory: expressiveness in music and emotional self-control.

There were four core African American cool concepts alive at the birth of cool, all of which still influence contemporary ideas of cool. Cool the first: to control your emotions and wear a mask in the face of hostile, provocative outside forces. Cool the second: to maintain a relaxed attitude in performance of any kind. Cool the third: to develop a unique, individual style (or sound) that communicates something of your inner spirit. Cool the fourth: to be emotionally expressive within an artistic frame of restraint (as in jazz or basketball). (Cool is also the word used to express aesthetic approval of such a performance [“cool!”].) Cool can be seen as an ideal state of balance, a calm but engaged state of mind between the emotional poles of “hot” (excited, aggressive, intense, hostile) and “cold” (unfeeling, efficient, mechanistic)—in other words, a “relaxed intensity.”

Nelson George reflects that for young urban black men in the mid-1940s, “cool came to define a certain sartorial elegance, smooth charm, and self-possession that . . . suggested a dude that controlled not only himself but his environment.” Lester Young was a musical genius with a legendary sense of humor who influenced hundreds of musicians during the most dynamic years of the black migration, a time when American race relations were undergoing a radical shift. Young’s whole life was self-consciously dedicated to being original—in his music, in his mannerisms, in his style of detachment—as if being original was the vital force of human life itself. He was often described as “‘cool’—calm, imperturbable, unhurried, and balanced in his playing and personal demeanor.”⁹ Although Young died nearly forty years ago, longtime rhythm and blues bandleader Johnny Otis claimed in 1993 that he “is the one figure who stands above the entire field of music as the guiding spirit of African American artistry.”¹⁰ In this essay I will explore the West African, Anglo-American, African American, and popular culture roots of cool, and show how Young’s synthesis of these materials gave birth to cool.

From Blackface Minstrels to Jazz Artists

Even among jazz musicians, Lester Young was thought of as a visitor from another planet. A shy, reserved, and gentle man, he was a fierce musical competitor but one who otherwise recoiled from interpersonal conflict. When insulted, he pulled out a small whisk broom and brushed off his shoulder; when a bigot appeared on the scene, he said softly, “I feel a draft”; he rang a

little bell when a fellow musician made a mistake on the bandstand. As Young's Basie bandmate, the guitarist Freddie Green, reflected: "Most of the things he came up with were . . . things you'd never heard before. . . . He was a very original man."¹¹ His trademarks were a slow, relaxed step no one could hurry and the flat, black porkpie hat he had custom-made from a Victorian women's magazine. He seems to be one major source for the essential jazz idea that it is more important to "tell a story" in a solo than to be virtuosic; his sage advice was, "Ya gotta be original, man."

After 1940, Young spoke a nearly impenetrable hip slang, which more than one fellow musician claimed it took him several months to understand.¹² To express desire for something, he said "big eyes for that" (or "no eyes" if he disapproved), an expression still used among jazz musicians; he called policemen "Bing and Bob," an old girlfriend "a wayback," and white jazz musicians "gray boys"; he addressed fellow musicians as "Lady" plus their last name (Lady Basie, Lady Tate, Lady Day) and stuck many of them with permanent nicknames.¹³ His vocal inflections were so expressive that a New York clergyman called it "his personal poetry," noting that "[n]o one . . . but Prez could say [the word] 'mother-fucker' like music, bending the tones until it was a blues."¹⁴ He was that rare jazz musician whose use of hip slang "correspond[ed] with the popular magazine and radio concept of a jazz musician's jargon . . . 'dig,' 'cool' and 'hip' are key words with him."¹⁵ When jazz scholar and producer Ross Russell called Lester Young "the greatest bohemian and hipster in the jazz community," he meant Young was an anti-authoritarian, peace-loving, jive-talking nonconformist long before those qualities were acceptable in the average American man (black *or* white).¹⁶

Two strains of the African American historical experience converged in the 1930s that helped create the conditions for the emergence of cool: first, a new impatience among blacks with the historical need to mask their feelings in front of whites; second, the fight for recognition of individual self-expression. As blacks moved north and west and became part of the national social fabric, a new sense of possibility arose along with economic success and this freedom of movement. The two most important cultural forms of what Cornel West calls "New World African modernity" were "a dynamic language and mobile music"; big-band swing and "hipster jive" became the portable expressions of American society's "perennial outsiders."¹⁷ Black jazz musicians helped stimulate cultural pride and became national culture heroes. In validating black vernacular culture, they helped "nurture the undercurrent of protest in the black community between the 1930s and 1970s."¹⁸ But until the early 1930s, these changes were bubbling beneath the surface only.

Ironically, the confluence of black masked behavior and African American

artistic expression first took place when blacks replaced whites as entertainers in the business of blackface minstrelsy in the 1870s. African Americans created a professional class of singers, dancers, musicians, and comedians “under the cork,” minstrelsy being one of the only paths to success open to them in the late nineteenth century. Blues composer and businessman W. C. Handy claimed “the minstrel show was one of the greatest outlets for talented musicians and artists.”¹⁹ Minstrel performers forever shaped American popular comedy through character sketches, slapstick comedy, rhythmic dance (cakewalk, tap, flash), and syncopated music.²⁰ Kansas City bandleader and arranger Jesse Stone grew up in his family’s minstrel band, and he perceived a musical continuity between rhythm and blues and “the flavor of things I had heard when I was a kid.”²¹ But there was a serious social cost: white Americans believed African Americans were actually like the stereotype black characters portrayed on the idyllic southern plantation of the minstrel show: the smiling “Sambo,” the slow-witted, shuffling southern ducky (Jim Crow), the northern urban dandy (Zip Coon), the black buck, Uncle Tom, Mammy, old Uncle and old Auntie.²² These were, in Kenneth Burke’s words, the “frames of acceptance” within which whites saw blacks. The social contradictions created by this overlap of performative skill, rhythmic genius, and smiling pretense still confound race relations. Minstrelsy’s most enduring legacy may have been “the grinning black mask . . . embedded in American consciousness,” but the power of African American cultural expression was such that a great black-faced performer inspired perhaps the earliest definition of black cool by a white observer, poet and physician William Carlos Williams.²³

In an essay entitled “Advent of the Slaves” (1925), Williams perceived a certain “quality” among his working-class African American neighbors in Paterson, New Jersey: “There is a solidity, a racial irreducible minimum, which gives them *poise in a world where they have no authority*.”²⁴ It’s hard to imagine a better first definition of cool. This poise was manifested locally in the homespun existential philosophy of the poet’s neighbors, and publicly in the comedian Bert Williams’s performance of his signature song “Nobody.” Bert Williams was the most famous African American entertainer of the century’s first two decades, and the first to draw large white audiences. As half of the famous vaudeville duo Williams and Walker, he helped tone down the wilder minstrel-derived antics into a “cooler [style that] more realistically mirrored actual black behavior.”²⁵ “Nobody” was an ode sung by a downtrodden man in tattered clothes who claimed “nobody did nothin’ for him,” and Bert Williams made of it a meditation on the basic rights of food, shelter, companionship, and love, managing to “express the existential desire to be treated as a person.” The song was a huge hit. William Carlos Williams expressed wonder at Bert

Williams's ability to bring dignity to "saying *nothing*, dancing *nothing* . . . [to] 'NOBODY,'" and then in the way he amplified his message in dance: "waggin', wavin', weavin', shakin' . . . bein' nothin'—with gravity, with tenderness." The poet saw beneath the mask to the "affirmation" of human existence at the heart of all African American rituals of music and dance, the goal of imparting a sense of "somebodiness."²⁶

Ralph Ellison maintained that early blackface minstrelsy was a popular masking ritual that allowed for a "play upon possibility"; it allowed white men to act silly and irrational, and to express joy through movement, without sacrificing their public face and role responsibilities.²⁷ Underneath the burnt cork, in an escape from the work ethic, Christian ideals of saintly behavior, and Republican virtue, white minstrels displayed a more tolerant humanness for their working-class and immigrant audiences. Minstrelsy provided therapeutic relief from a society whose then-heroic model required a combination of rational thinking, virtuous public behavior, and repressed emotion—what Ronald Takaki has termed an emotional "iron cage."²⁸ Although the content of the shows often depicted African Americans as happy-go-lucky slaves, fit only for the hard work and dependence of plantation life, clearly whites who put on blackface were bestowing a twisted compliment on the African American cultural elements they mocked in the sense that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Eric Lott calls this conflicted admiration of African American music, dance, humor, and movement "love and theft." Ellison stated simply that "in . . . America humanity masked its face with blackness."²⁹

Why is this phenomenon related to cool? First, because the demise of minstrelsy and the beginnings of jazz overlap in the first three decades of the century; second, because white audiences brought old minstrel-derived "frames of acceptance" to their experience of the new urban music and its musicians.³⁰ Louis Armstrong did not have to "black up," yet he wore the smiling mask of the happy-go-lucky darky on stage throughout his life. His mainstream success was probably dependent upon allowing whites to hold on to their ideas of white supremacy while enjoying his music as purely entertainment. As Gerald Early puts it: "Did the whites love Armstrong for his undeniably powerful musicality or because he was a one-man revival of minstrelsy without blackface? . . . Could his genius be contained only by having it entrapped in a halo of intolerable nostalgia, of degrading sentiment about darkies on the southern campground?"³¹

Jazz musicians helped destroy these plantation-derived images, but it was a slow process because the business of American popular entertainment had for so long been *southern* business.³² The very names of 1920s jazz bands and venues tell the story of southern stereotypes come north: every city had a

Cotton Club or a Plantation Club, a Kentucky Club or a Club Alabam; bands drew specifically on mythic southern images (McKinney's Cotton Pickers, the Dixie Syncopators, the Chocolate Dandies). Plantation themes also served as the content for much of the world-famous entertainment at Harlem's Cotton Club. "The whole set was like a sleepy-time down South during slavery," band-leader Cab Calloway later reflected, "[and] the idea was to make whites who came feel like they were being catered to and entertained by black slaves."³³ The bands of Duke Ellington and Calloway set national standards of jazz *and* jive, of new African American economic success within plantation-derived frames of acceptance. Most Americans believed in the African American "types" co-invented by northern minstrels and southern slaveowners to emphasize black inferiority, and perpetuated both by pseudo-scientific theories of racial hierarchy and Hollywood images.³⁴

Hiding one's feelings under the grinning black mask was a survival skill of great importance to all black males up through World War II; a black man could get lynched for pretending to be on equal terms with a white man under almost any circumstances. Drummer Panama Francis remembered a man who used to come see his band every week in his Florida hometown and every week put a hole in his bass drum. The man always gave him five dollars to fix it, but the drummer hated the ritual humiliation. "I used to get so mad, but I had to smile because back in those days, you had better smile, so I smiled; but I didn't like it too well."³⁵ At the time, black sociologist Charles S. Johnson called emotional masking "accommodation" to white expectations; in the vernacular it was known as "Tomming."³⁶

Even the most successful African American bandleaders needed to create a "readable" public front. Cab Calloway played the joyful, out-of-control, energetic wild man: "I was . . . energy personified."³⁷ Duke Ellington played the debonair, gentlemanly dandy on stage; in a *Downbeat* profile extolling his genius, the editor astutely noted that "he will not even talk to a white woman without his manager . . . know[ing] too well the inflammatory moods of a dominant race."³⁸ Jimmie Lunceford's crack band of former college students flipped their instruments in the air and tap-danced in sections as part of their act.³⁹ The classically trained bandleader George Morrison still played the old "darker lament" of "Shine" for white audiences when he sensed any hostility—an act he deemed "black diplomacy."⁴⁰ These bandleaders all took pride in what was then called "showmanship"—and they had fun on stage—but these nonmusical gestures enabled white audiences to deemphasize the skill and intelligence of jazz as art. Swing bandleaders were "heads of a business organization and public figures concerned with the artistic, emotional, and symbolic function[s] of a band and its music." These men were grossing as much as

\$10,000 a week in the 1930s, yet had to appeal to white expectations, had to provide the old symbolic associations.⁴¹

“Tomming” was the racial order of the era. African American bandleaders who totally eschewed showmanship for musical artistry in the early 1940s—for example, Teddy Wilson and Benny Carter—never “hit” with the public. They did not provide the wild energy and therapeutic escape from guilt and the work ethic that white audiences looked for in black entertainers. “Benny’s band never caught on too well,” according to saxophonist Howard Johnson. “At that time they wanted black musicians to ‘get hot,’ and nearly all bands had gimmicks of one kind or another. They were entertainers more than musicians, and we were not entertainers.” Teddy Wilson’s bassist Al Hall claimed, “Everybody kept saying we sounded too white.” George Simon, the white editor of the jazz magazine *Metronome* noted, “‘Polite’ black bands were hard to sell in those days.”⁴² Certainly many successful white bandleaders had an identifiable gimmick or theme song, but audiences did not demand that they ingratiate themselves as inferiors.

Lester Leaps In

It was left to a swing band’s star soloist—a performer who did not have to engage with the audience—to start a quiet, nonviolent revolt against Tomming. Lester Young was born and raised in Mississippi and New Orleans at a time when to speak out against racial injustice would have meant economic death, at the very least. Between the ages of ten and nineteen, he was a key member of his father’s family band, the Billy Young Band, a staple attraction on the black vaudeville circuit (the Theater Owners Booking Association, or TOBA) in the 1920s. Young was proud to have grown up in “travelin’ carnivals [and] minstrel shows,” but he hated the South and spoke with pride about avoiding it as an adult: “Only time I went through the South was with Basie.”⁴³ Young made his only public statement about racism at the age of fifty, two months before his death—in France, significantly—and focused on the mask as the symbol of black male limitation. “They want everybody who is a Negro to be a Uncle Tom or Uncle Remus or Uncle Sam, and I can’t make it.”⁴⁴ Young here clearly identified the frames (or masks) of acceptance by which he was most often seen: as the smiling, servile southern servant who always agreed with white men (Uncle Tom); as the desexualized old man who distributed folk wisdom (Uncle Remus); as the regular-guy soldier who disowned his cultural heritage (Uncle Sam).

Willis Young, Lester’s father, was a school principal and trumpeter. He

formed a carnival band and left the New Orleans area in the violent summer of 1919, when race riots broke out all over the country and lynchings increased for the first time in several years. The senior Young believed the music business held the greatest opportunities for blacks at the time; Lee Young (Lester's brother) remembers his father saying, "My son will never be a porter; my daughter will never be a maid. You're going to learn to play music."⁴⁵ The Billy Young Family Band toured throughout the Midwest, South and Southwest, playing carnivals, state fairs, minstrel shows, and theaters. The band was popular enough—and good enough—to have carried three future jazz giants for short periods: Ben Webster, Cootie Williams, and John Lewis, all of whom attested to Billy Young's ability as a musician and teacher.

With his father as the front man during his formative years, Lester focused on music and became the band's musical star. His siblings and cousins smiled, danced, and did acrobatic flips while playing, but Young grew to hate the "Uncle Tomming that went on," and his idea of jiving was just to play the saxophone upside down. Young was a disciplined musical apprentice; he ran scales, practiced six to seven hours a day along with the records of classical saxophone virtuoso Rudy Wiedoft, and synthesized Louis Armstrong's powerful expressiveness with the cleaner white jazz styles of Bix Beiderbecke, Jimmy Dorsey, and his "idol," Frankie Trumbauer. The senior Young knew Lester was gifted musically and sometimes rode him pretty hard—for example, when he forced him to learn to read music. When his father beat him, Lester ran away for short periods—he never could endure emotional discord—but he always returned, and did not express any resentment toward his father in later life.⁴⁶

A telling example of generational change among African American men is that Lester Young's declaration of independence from his father dovetailed with his rejection of southern "accommodation." In January 1928, the family band got ready for a series of Texas dates and Lester refused to go: "I told him [his father] how it would be down there, and that we could have some fine jobs back through Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa, but he didn't have eyes for that."⁴⁷ He said later, "I was just ready to be grown is all." Young stayed behind with two other bandmates in Salina, Kansas, and joined up with the local territory band, Art Bronson's Bostonians, for a year. He barnstormed for the next four years, first touring with New Orleans legend King Oliver for a season, then settling in Minneapolis where the grapevine spread his reputation. In 1930, bassist and bandleader Walter Page offered him a spot in the legendary Oklahoma City Blue Devils, a territory band whose nucleus later formed the foundation of Count Basie's band in Kansas City in 1935.⁴⁸ Young freelanced with the Blue Devils, the Bostonians, and several Kansas City bands before joining Basie in 1934. Young was well known enough among black musicians by 1934

that when he temporarily replaced Coleman Hawkins in the Fletcher Henderson band, two leading black newspapers referred to him as “one of the most celebrated tenor sax players in the music world.”⁴⁹

Young’s refusal to “accommodate” to whites was representative of a new breed of jazz musicians, just as his cool style and nonchalant demeanor were responses to the “hot” jazz of the 1920s. Until bebop, jazz was widely known as “hot music,” a reference to the music’s faster, syncopated rhythms, its improvisation, and its ability to stir up emotional and physical response. During the “Jazz Age” of the 1920s, the featured soloist was in fact called the “hot man.” There weren’t yet many musicians who could improvise well, and the hot man’s drive and originality propelled the jazz band to moments of peak excitement and emotional release. Clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow claimed musicians first introduced the word “swing” because the “unhip public” had taken over the word “hot” and would stand by the bandstand and yell at musicians, “Come on man, get hot! Get hot!”⁵⁰ Young would help change the idea of the hot man to the cool man.

During the swing era, the structure of Tomming began to shift. Increasing visibility of African American cultural heroes (Joe Louis, Jessie Owens, Ethel Waters), the success of big-band swing music, the relative freedom of northern and western cities, the new economic and political power blacks felt after leaving the South—all contributed to what I call the “swing hopes” that social equality was around the corner. Historian Lewis Erenberg calls big-band swing “the music of the black migration,” and claims the musicians were walking advertisements for urban (and urbane) northern promise.⁵¹ Cab Calloway’s bassist, Milt Hinton, said the bandleader often reminded them that their job was to “uplift” people in the South and “elevate the black customer.”⁵² Musicians validated African American vernacular culture by displaying its attitudes, heroes, dances, phrases, foods, and sounds in song: Ellington’s “Harlem Air Shaft,” Calloway’s “Pickin’ Cabbage” and “Chili Con Conga,” Basie’s “Stompin’ at the Savoy,” Lunceford’s “What’s Your Story, Morning Glory?” Looking back from the 1970s, both Cab Calloway and Earl Hines referred to their big bands as the first “Freedom Riders” who went behind enemy lines to help change racist assumptions and inscribe a new set of urban, sophisticated images on African Americans.⁵³

The most colorful memoir of the social and cultural leadership of big-band swing musicians is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; nearly a quarter of the book revolves around Malcolm X’s transformation from rural hick to hip city slicker between 1937 and 1943. The arenas of change were the great ballrooms where jazz heroes and dynamic dancers, speaking hip slang and sporting flamboyant clothes and hairstyles, took that nightly ride to a less limited future on

the brash, loud, chugging, confident, big-band night train. Ralph Ellison reflected back on the sound and sight of Ellington's band in 1930s Oklahoma: "Where in the white community . . . could there have been found . . . examples such as these? Who were so worldly, who so elegant, who so mockingly creative? Who so skilled at their given trade and who treated the social limitations placed in their paths with greater disdain?" Black jazz musicians were the epitome of 1930s urban sophistication.⁵⁴

Lester Young's contribution to these swing hopes was to help develop new self-presentation strategies for the individual musician—without drawing on the minstrel legacy of "the darky entertainer" or fading into the collective sheen and sound of the big bands. At the time, most big band musicians wore tuxedos or uniforms on stage, and exercised their sartorial tastes offstage; Young wanted to stand out onstage. His first stylistic trademark was his completely original way of holding a saxophone, up and out to the side at a 45-degree angle.⁵⁵ At the start of a solo, he looked about to "paddle a canoe"; once he really got going, it became "almost horizontal."⁵⁶ He held it high in the air and blew musical worlds into the sky: fast, rhythmic flights of musical consciousness. It drove audiences wild.

Ralph Ellison caught the saxophonist's dramatic synthesis of sight and sound in 1929 when Lester Young was an unknown twenty-year-old kid in the great territory band, the Blue Devils:

[an] intense young musician . . . who, with his heavy white sweater, blue stocking cap and up-and-out-thrust silver saxophone left absolutely no reed player and few young players of any instrument unstirred by the wild, excitingly original flights of his imagination. . . . Lester Young . . . with his battered horn upset the entire Negro section of town . . . [We tried] to absorb and transform the Youngian style.⁵⁷

At twenty, Young stood out with a stocking cap and sweater, perhaps adapted from the popular collegiate look of the 1920s. (All dance bands played colleges regularly.) Fourteen years later, Young was a world-famous hipster, and a white soldier experienced some of the same "upset" seeing him perform with the Al Sears band at a USO show at a Texas air force base: "Lester was working with a fine group of Negro musicians . . . [but] when he stepped out in front with his pork-pie hat and dark glasses (no USO monkey suit for him), he blew the crackers, the hayseeds, and even we studiously casual easterners right out of our seat."⁵⁸

Young made the saxophone into a new weapon, an instrument of speed and flight; standing still, he sounded like he was taking off. Americans were obsessed with aviation in the 1930s: Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlan-

tic right before the decade started and Superman first appeared in the skies over Metropolis toward the end. Young belongs in their company: he flew across the middle ground, a man riding atop a big-band train. One jazz scholar has suggested that the jazzman's horn had an iconic sexual value as a phallic symbol at a time when any assertion of African American male sexuality was a matter of life or death. Perhaps holding up your "horn"—also known as an "ax"—mediated a joyful celebration of individual black male creative energy: physical, sensual, sexual, intellectual.⁵⁹ That Young brought the horn down in front of him during the mid-1940s underscores the sexual symbolism. The Beat novelist Jack Kerouac, ever on the lookout for models of masculinity, judged Young's mood over time from how he held the saxophone, from his glory days "holding his horn high," to "when he let his horn half fall down," through the time "when all our horns came down."⁶⁰

Young's soaring saxophone style was "cool" because he generated excitement without getting excited; he stayed cool. He dazzled listeners' minds with rhythmic surprise and melodic ideas, not technique or flash. As his Basie bandmate Harry Edison described his solos: "He didn't put a whole lot of notes in a solo. He put the right note in the right place at the right time. . . . His timing was perfect."⁶¹ The cool message came through Young's rhythmic control—surefooted solos in which he cut lightly across the shouting brass and crisp rhythms, maintaining his own personal beat even while being shouted at by three trombones and a drummer. The cool message came through Young's fast, smooth, floating tone, a rebellion against the heavy, powerful style of the tenor's primogenitor, Coleman Hawkins.⁶² Young's friend and Basie alto saxophonist Earle Warren wondered even in 1980, "A thing I've never been able to figure out . . . is why so many black players followed Lester *and* so many white ones did." Young had synthesized what were then seen as black strengths (speed, rhythmic depth, emotional feeling) with the strengths of white musicians (purity of tone, precise attack, "clean" phrasing).⁶³

Young's second contribution to individual self-expression on the bandstand was the strategic use of sunglasses. Young was the first jazz musician to wear sunglasses on stage (indoors and outdoors).⁶⁴ Long before Charlie Parker and Miles Davis became famous for turning their backs on the audience, Young recognized the use of shades as a mask to deflect the gaze of others without causing conflict, and to create an air of mystery. In July 1938, he wore something resembling wraparound plastic shades on the stage of the Swing Jamboree at Randall's Island in New York City, a concert featuring twenty-six bands that drew 25,000 young people.⁶⁵ He looked calm and aloof amid a noisy, joyous, outdoor throng; the Basie band seemed excited but Young was detached and dispassionate. Sunglasses became a key element of the stylistic

rebellion of black jazz musicians in the postwar era, perhaps the primary symbol of the cool mask.

Third, Young introduced the idea of “relaxation” into jazz soloing and combined a revolutionary use of silence, space, and accent into the structure of a solo (his cool, flowing style).⁶⁶ For example, on Count Basie’s “Doggin’ Around” (1939), Young starts his solo by holding one note for the whole bar, slides into a long, fluid line for six bars, then lays out for four beats.⁶⁷ Count Basie’s rhythm section was a key element in Young’s ability to soar. Universally considered “the greatest percussion combination in the history of jazz,” the depth of its groove freed the soloists from having to accentuate the beat. The big band was often a fast, loud, chugging, shouting machine, but Basie’s band created an easy, relaxed swing beat—call it a *cool groove*—that revolutionized big-band swing.⁶⁸ Young sometimes soared over the rhythm, but more often set up exciting cross-rhythms and musical tension with his phrasing; according to Wilfrid Mellers, Basie’s band brought creative conflict into swing music.⁶⁹ Drummer Jo Jones insisted that just keeping the reins on the band took all his energy: “I didn’t need to worry about [competing with drummers] Gene Krupa or Buddy Rich, I was catching hell sitting up there, trying to play in Basie’s band.”⁷⁰ The implicit challenge of playing in Basie’s band was to maintain one’s individuality in the face of a powerful collective rhythmic drive. Here then is the first contribution of big-band swing to African American cool: a cultural form that publicly displayed the fight for individual self-expression within a larger unit.⁷¹

Young spent his happiest and most productive years (1934–1940) with the Basie band, first in Kansas City and later in New York. Before living in Kansas City, Young did not curse or drink or smoke pot or speak that “funny language.”⁷² He seemed an inwardly focused dreamer, a musical artist for whom “the grinning black mask” had no meaning. Kansas City, however, was the Las Vegas of the Midwest in the early 1930s, a wide-open town where the clubs never closed and Prohibition was not recognized as law. Mayor Tom Pendergast’s corrupt political machine was run in service to the big farmers, cattle ranchers, and oilmen of the region. “If you want to see some sin, forget about Paris and go to Kansas City,” an Omaha journalist wrote at the time.⁷³ It was a lively city with steady work, a strong African American community, and so much music cooking in the street that “people walked in time” said Jo Jones, . . . “in swing-time.” The Basie band worked seven nights a week, from 9 P.M. to 5 A.M., and Young loved every minute of it: “I’d sit up all night and wait to go to work.”⁷⁴ Then he would make the round of local jam sessions, and jam until noon or one o’clock. Impresario John Hammond wrote of Young in 1936: “He is the kind of guy who just likes to make music, with the result that he is always

to be found jamming in some unlikely joint.” Legendary trumpeter Roy Eldridge reflected that Young “was *always* a cat who loved to play.”⁷⁵

Kansas City jam sessions resonated with both western frontier aesthetics and African American humor. Musicians in what were known as “the territory bands” thought of their artistry “in terms of self-reliant individualism . . . [in terms of] performances associated with violent contests and gunfights.”⁷⁶ Trumpeter Buck Clayton remembers his experience when he first came from California to join the Basie band in Kansas City, and word got out that he would be at the Sunset Club that night:

[A]fter a few minutes about two more trumpet players came in and started jamming . . . I figured we’d all have a ball. Then about half an hour later in came about three more trumpet players. . . . Then, as the evening went on, more and more trumpet players came into blow. To me, it seemed as if they were coming from all directions.⁷⁷

When the tenor saxophone’s reigning king, Coleman Hawkins, came through with the Fletcher Henderson band in 1934, he got “hung up” at the Cherry Blossom all night, battling the tenor saxophonists Ben Webster, Lester Young, and Herschel Evans—all mostly unknown at the time—in perhaps the most famous jam session in jazz history. At four in the morning, Ben Webster begged the pianist Mary Lou Williams to get out of bed: “Get up, pussycat, we’re jammin’ and all the pianists are tired out now. Hawkins has got his shirt off and is still blowing.”⁷⁸ Following that session, Hawkins ruined his car’s engine making the Henderson band’s next gig in St. Louis.

Lee Young, Lester’s brother and a fine jazz drummer himself, saw this gunslinging attitude as the motivation for Lester’s jam-session prowling: “Anyone who picked up a saxophone, you know, Lester wanted some of it . . . he really wanted to see who was the better man. It would be just like a prize fighter or a wrestler.” Young was a jam-session legend, renowned for his competitive zeal and his fertile imagination. Billie Holiday bragged that Young could blow fifteen choruses in a row, “each one prettier than the last.” “It took him several choruses to get started,” commented the less partisan Kansas City jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams, “then, brother, what a horn.”⁷⁹ Perhaps Young spent so much time in jam sessions because it was the only public forum in American life where black and white adult men exchanged ideas in a relaxed atmosphere.⁸⁰ At jam sessions, African American men could display excellence unmasked—in their own faces—and receive respect from peers (both black and white) in a relaxed-but-competitive African American ritual. The Count Basie Orchestra brought this kind of gunslinging attitude to New York City when John Hammond brought them east in 1936.⁸¹

From the moment the band came to New York until Young was drafted into the army in 1944, he enjoyed the universal admiration of jazz musicians. Although he was erratically employed after quitting the band in 1940, he was a brand-name player. Record reviewers referred to other saxophonists as “Lester Youngish”; arch-rival Coleman Hawkins named him number one among tenor saxophonists for originality and flow of musical ideas; Benny Goodman had Young sit in with his band for a recording session, insulting his regular tenor player.⁸² Up-and-coming tenors like Dexter Gordon and the young John Coltrane favored Young’s sound over that of Hawkins.⁸³ Trumpeter Joe Newman saw Young at Alabama State College and was awed by his “flamboyant style . . . I mean it was smooth, it was easy, and it flowed so freely that it excited me.”⁸⁴

In 1943, Young starred in the best jazz film of the period, *Jammin’ the Blues*. *Life* magazine photographer Gjon Mili directed the Academy Award–nominated ten-minute short, and made jazz icons of Young’s porkpie hat, his floating, expressive tone, his relaxed, aloof manner, and his blank, pained facial expression.⁸⁵ When Harlem jam-session enthusiast Jack Kerouac wrote that Lester Young had “put it all together for his generation just as Armstrong had for his,” he meant Young had combined a new sound and self-presentation style to produce one of the nation’s greatest artistic voices of the World War II era.

White (Anglo) Cool and Black (West African) Cool

In Anglo-American culture, the adjective “cool” reflects the ability to repress one’s emotions to think more clearly and to effect a more “objective” intellectual analysis. The archetypal cool characters of American popular culture—the private detective of film noir (Bogart), the western gunslinger (John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, the Lone Ranger), the existential motorcycle wanderer—are untamable, self-sufficient male loners who create and live by private codes of ethics; they exist as “free radicals” on the fringes of society and cultivate a calm impudence regarding social norms. In the vernacular they were called “cool characters”—nonconformist, unpredictable, mysterious, adept at violence. There is an unbroken line from the Enlightenment philosophical ideal of living in “the middle state” between heaven and earth to the classic composure of the English gentleman and the stereotypical British reserve of fictional models such as Sherlock Holmes and James Bond.⁸⁶ Anglo-American cool characters are existential loners valued for the ability to repress emotion and resist temptation (women, money) in exchange for an unimpeachable reputation for straight talk and the self-satisfaction of seeking the “Truth.”

Among many West African peoples—especially the Yoruba, whose cultural

legacy is strongest in the Americas—"coolness" has associations with smoothness, balance, silence, and order.⁸⁷ Robert Farris Thompson first noticed the importance of "cool" across the African diaspora—in West Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. Thompson found thirty-five West African languages with conceptions of what Yorubans call "mystic coolness" (or *itutu*), a philosophical concept with associations such as "discretion, healing, rebirth, newness, purity." There are many similarities between West African cool and Anglo-American cool: emotional control, the calm face, a demeanor "composed, collected, unruffled, nonchalant, imperturbable, detached" (especially in time of stress). There is, however, no West African equivalent of the European idea of "icy determination" or "cold efficiency." In addition, the West African "mask of coolness" is admired in the midst of pleasure as well as stress, and has the connotation of healing. In West Africa, a cool action can "cool the heart," or "make a country safe." Coolness is also associated with silence: to "cool one's mouth" (keep a "cool tongue") is to keep strategically silent (i.e., "cool it"). A common meaning of cool is to "restore order."⁸⁸

In public rituals of music and dance, coolness is a *force* of community—of maintaining the social order. A cool West African performer stimulates the participation of others and thus *generates* community. For example, a master drummer directs the generation of continuous, building rhythms to create a solid foundation for the contributions of dancers; he shows coolness by contrasting the propulsive rhythms he creates with steady, calm execution in motion. A dancer might do the reverse, and use accelerated steps to work against slow, steady drumming. Both provide a model of coping with dynamic forces with grace, expressiveness, and composure.⁸⁹ As a West African, then, to be cool is to participate actively in an event while maintaining a detached attitude. The symbol of one's coolness is the relaxed, smiling face.

American anthropologist John Miller Chernoff apprenticed for years with a West African master drummer named Ibrahim Abdulai, a Dagomba man who described cool as a kind of spiritual calm displayed in performance: "[The word] 'baalim' is not 'cool' in the way that water or the weather is cool, but rather it means 'slow' or 'gentle.' . . . The one who has learned well, he plays with understanding, and *he has added his sense* and cooled his heart" (emphasis added). The pun of sense/cents is useful. To add "your two cents" is an American capitalist metaphor of participation and it means to give your opinion. In Dagomba musical ritual, you add musical "sense" to the rhythmic discussion. Ibrahim declared that only the old men play coolly; they understand the essence of being "generous" with their rhythms, whereas the young men are too busy "taking big steps and shaking their bodies when they dance"—in other words, *hot-dogging*. He contrasted the diffusion of sound to coarse, thudding,

heavy “beating,” and pointed out that when a drummer is uncool, he is relieved from his job: “Sometimes when we are playing hard and then come to make everything cool, and the one who knows only force is beating, we just hold his hand and collect his stick so that he won’t play again.”⁹⁰

Coolness is thus an aesthetic attitude of *participation* effected through an individual’s ability to contribute his or her own rhythms to a larger communal event. At a West African musical event, everyone is expected to lend energy—and their individual styles—to the larger “beat.” West African cool is less about striving for the middle state than about partaking of both extremes—the “sweet” and the “pain”—in public ritual without losing control. Cool balances the duality of hot and cold, of propulsive rhythms and smooth execution, of call and response. Just as colors opposite each other on the color wheel (say, blue and orange) bring out the most intense dynamics in each other, to “cool one’s head” is first to heat it up—as when eating hot, spicy foods in the summer—so as to detoxify the built-up stress. Coolness concerns balancing opposites, *with* style and *without* being average or conformist.

For a West African dancer, the analogy to cool, gentle drumming is the ability to maintain “facial serenity.” A dancer often keeps time to three or more rhythms, using different parts of the body to dialogue with different rhythms. When a dancer smiles through this hard work, she celebrates the rhythms and her own vitality by implying that these graceful motions, this dialogue with the drums, is effortless, easy, no sweat, a piece of cake. The “mask of coolness” shows serenity of mind *and* mastery of the body: the cool performer thus shares with the community the joy of one’s body, the pleasure one gets in contributing beauty and grace to an event, the skill in producing a distinctive rhythm that links up with other rhythms.⁹¹ The objective is to display a relaxed sense of control, to turn difficult physical acts into smooth, fluid, easy motion. This idea of “relaxation” does not exist in the Anglo-American “cool” model.

The salient difference between West African and Anglo-American ideas of cool rests in the relationship of individual action to the community. Anglo-American cool figures “save” the community from external threats (criminals, governmental corruption, social stratification) but do not participate in the community; West African-derived cool performers generate community by drawing the crowd into the performance and challenging others to equal their performance. The goal of a drummer’s or dancer’s maintenance of rhythms is to add depth and texture to the event—an event maintained collectively through the “beat.” The display of physical mastery—of being “cool in motion”—calls forth competitors to share the honor and glory of recognized excellence.

Perhaps American jam sessions were the kind of public ritual in which West African coolness was admired and called forth. No one was paid to play and yet

everyone was expected to contribute, often until they wore themselves out. In other words, this *African American* musical event provided an opportunity to express “excellence” of personal character in relation to other participants. As Kansas City pianist Mary Lou Williams explained about jam sessions, “My whole thing is to needle the man [musician] to play their best for anybody who is soloing because if he plays a good solo then I have inspiration to play.”⁹² This kind of competition was as common among African American dancers as among musicians.

The legacy of West African coolness to African American cool centers on the transition from community ritual performance to American popular entertainment, and it reflects three non-European strategies. First, playing “hot” or “cool” is a West African idea, as Thompson notes. “It is cool to sweeten hurt with song and motion; it is hot to concentrate on the pain.” Second, in the dialogue between the drummers and dancers, the boundary between performer and audience dissolves. Third, “relaxed, effortless grace” in a musical or dance performance is a valued achievement.

Jazz musicians seemingly had no direct access to the hot and cool modes of West African performance beyond an untraceable continuity in Mississippi Delta and New Orleans culture; for example, there is no indication that Lester Young thought of his style as cool playing in an African mode. Yet this quality still exists today within traditional jazz values. In the recent book *What Jazz Is*, a young jazz musician emphasizes the importance of striving for “relaxed intensity,” explaining that when he would coast, his teacher would drive him harder, yet when he became too “hot,” he was told he was “too intense.”⁹³

The contrast between propulsive rhythms and gentle execution is the essence of Lester Young’s cool musical revolution in the big-band era. Pianist Oscar Peterson claimed Young could “cool” any song and any rhythm section. “Lester . . . had this remarkable ability to transmit beauty from within himself to the rhythm section . . . [He would] play some lines that were so relaxed that, even at a swift tempo, the rhythm section would relax.” Two cardinal qualities of all African music are “propulsive rhythms” and the “clash of rhythms.”⁹⁴ Unlike swing tempo, which was called the “push-beat,” or playing “on top of the beat” (one dancer called it the “kicking-your-ass” beat), the Basie band played slightly behind the beat.⁹⁵ Young was the best solo exemplar of this style. Using long, flowing phrases punctuated by held notes and short honks, Young took his relaxed time during his solos as if to wait and see where the band was headed, setting off the collective rhythmic drive by coming up behind its power. Many scholars have pointed out that his solos set up cross-rhythms within the call-and-response of the big band sections. But while adding his

“sense” to the big-band message, Young always kept in mind a Romantic-derived artistic concept of self-expression: “musicians wishing to say something really vital must learn to express their feelings with a minimum of outside influence.”⁹⁶ Jazz composer Johnny Carisi described how a typical Young solo provoked participation from other musicians: “Just when you think he had done it [was finished], he would, like, back off a little bit, he would goof and then descend on you again, only more so than before, [and] get everybody crazy, man.”⁹⁷

At jam sessions Young may have acted as a western gunslinger, but as a swing band musician, he saw his role as something akin to a West African master drummer.⁹⁸ Young claimed he “missed the dancers” of the swing era, and specifically the dialogue of dancers and musicians. “I wish jazz were played more often for dancing,” he reflected in 1956. “I have a lot of fun playing for dances because I like to dance, too. The rhythm of the dancers comes back to you when you’re playing. When you’re playing for dancing, it all adds up to playing the right tempo. After three or four tempos, you find the tempo they like. What they like changes from dance date to dance date.”⁹⁹ Young and the band found their musical cues by judging the “tempo” of each evening and each audience. At a time when many musicians and critics were trying to make jazz into a concert form, and saw dancing as *the* main symbol of commercialism, Young was proud of his function—his “job”—to increase the level of participation of the dancers.

Young is, of course, not the only carrier of West African cool aesthetics into American popular culture between the wars. For example, there was an enormous reciprocal development between jazz and African American vernacular dance. As early as 1925, “jazz drummers were getting ideas from tap dancers,” and many swing-era drummers *were* originally tap dancers.¹⁰⁰ In the 1920s, jazz musicians and chorus-line dancers in floor shows caught one another’s rhythms, leading to a more sophisticated and elastic groove. The lindy hoppers at the Savoy Ballroom would stand in front of the band and beat out the rhythm they wanted the band to play, an action common in West Africa (and in rural black America) and uncommon elsewhere in American society.¹⁰¹ Most pre-bebop jazz musicians were good dancers and proud of it. As the pianist and composer James P. Johnson reflected, “All of us used to be proud of our dancing—Louis Armstrong, for instance, was considered the finest dancer among the musicians. It made for attitude and stance when you walked into a place and it made you strong with the gals.”¹⁰²

Another factor in the dissemination of West African cool aesthetics in American society during the swing era was the emergence of the modern trap-

set drummer. Drummer-leaders such as Gene Krupa, Chick Webb, Jo Jones, and Buddy Rich came to have responsibilities more akin to the master drummers of West Africa than to the classical percussionist. In the 1920s, the drummer was thought of as a “time-keeper,” not even a musician; in classical music, only the conductor controls the performance.¹⁰³ In a big band, jazz musicians needed a more solid rhythmic foundation—a clearer set of cues—both to ground the more complex sound and to support their solos. In a sense, the role of the dancers in a West African ritual had been replaced by the interaction between the rhythm section and the melody instruments. As the pioneering black folklorist Willis Lawrence James wrote in 1945, “The rhythmic feeling of the players, which would otherwise find expression in the dance, is expressed through the instruments.”¹⁰⁴

As the classical composer Igor Stravinsky observed about jazz, “the percussion and bass . . . function as a central-heating system. They must keep the temperature ‘cool,’ [or] not cool.”¹⁰⁵ Since the drummer commands the most potentially dynamic sonic forces, it becomes his job to manage the band’s dynamics. Duke Ellington’s drummer, Sonny Greer, explained how this worked in a live performance: “A guy, naturally, playing a solo, he gets over-energetic and he has a tendency to turn loose. You’ve got to hold it. Right away he wants to take it up to the sky. But no, we have to hold him down.”¹⁰⁶ Legendary drummer Chick Webb called swing tempo “the push beat,” because he “pushed” each individual soloist according to his needs: held him down or kicked him into gear. Count Basie said plainly: “The drummer is the boss of the band, not the bandleader. If the drummer’s not right, nothing’s happening.”¹⁰⁷

Jazz drumming has roots in military drumming, brass bands, minstrel bands, circus bands, and the pit-drumming for silent movies. But the role of the jazz drummer came of age in the swing era and the primary influences on the music were “African percussive techniques.”¹⁰⁸ Significantly, the now-standard trap set emerged between the world wars: the bass-drum pedal, the hi-hat, and brushes were invented; Chinese cymbals and the African-derived tom-toms were added. The modern drummer arrived at the head of a drum battery that combined the functions of four African drummers into one percussion point man.¹⁰⁹

That the term “cool” arose in this period seems like either a remarkable historical accident, a semantic mystery, or an indication that African-American oral tradition carries more Africanisms than has been suspected. Yet as important as was Young’s adaptation of West African cool into African American sound and style, his adaptation of the Anglo-American pose of repressing emotion was an even more important symbol of the post-war cool of African American males.

The Cool Remove from Cold War America

Being cool (that is, toward white people) reflected the disappointment of African Americans in the progress toward social equality during World War II. Cool was “an attitude that really existed,” according to Amiri Baraka, who defines it this way: “To be cool was . . . to be calm, even unimpressed, by what horror the world might daily propose . . . [such as] the deadingly predictable mind of white America.”¹¹⁰ In the early 1940s, examples abounded. Labor leader A. Philip Randolph had to threaten a march on Washington before President Franklin Roosevelt would open up federal defense jobs to African Americans by executive order in 1941. Race riots broke out in several major cities in the summer of 1943 as whites rejected the presence of African Americans in their neighborhoods and in the workplace. The internment of Japanese Americans was a scary, foreboding precedent of racial judgment and disfranchisement. Harlem’s famous Savoy Ballroom—a national symbol of social equality—was temporarily padlocked for the summer of 1943 on the patently false charge that black hostesses were selling sex to white servicemen. Black soldiers endured virulent racism from their own (white American) officers, served in separate units and were generally assigned as mess attendants.¹¹¹

African Americans recognized the irony of fighting in Jim Crow regiments against an enemy, Nazi Germany, that believed in white supremacy when they faced their own version of race war at home. As a young black college graduate put it in a 1943 Chester Himes novel, “As long as the Army is Jim Crowed, a Negro who fights in it is fighting against himself.”¹¹² The editors of the influential black weekly, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, called for a two-front patriotism known as the “Double-V campaign”: victory against fascism abroad and racism at home.¹¹³ It was necessary to hide one’s feelings behind “a bullet-proof vest known as cool,” Ralph Ellison reflected, which was less a matter of Hemingway’s heroic “grace under pressure . . . than of good common sense.”¹¹⁴

Lester Young suffered in a personal microcosm of America’s domestic race war. Drafted in September of 1944 by an undercover agent who followed the Basie band in a zoot suit, he was denied a musical assignment at a base band by a middle-class African American bandleader who thought he lacked proper musical education.¹¹⁵ His inability to submit to discipline drew the attention and hostility of his commanding officer, who soon found marijuana and barbiturates in his trunk. Young was court-martialed in a Kafkaesque trial in which he calmly admitted his long-term drug use and proudly claimed he had never harmed a man; he was sentenced to nearly a year in solitary at Fort Gordon, Georgia, where he was often beaten. He occasionally got a break from the solitude because the members of the all-white big band at that base wanted

Young to practice with them. Every day, a white trumpeter would pick him up from the African American side of the camp, and both had to play-act their southern caste-roles. The trumpeter would say, "Come on, nigger," and Young would answer "Yessir, boss." Young rarely discussed his army experience. He wrote one song to commemorate it ("D.B. Blues" or "Detention Barracks Blues") and in a 1948 interview said simply: "[It was a] nightmare, man, one mad nightmare. They sent me down South, Georgia. That was enough to make me blow my top. It was a drag."¹¹⁶

When Young returned to playing in 1945, many writers and musicians commented on his blank face, his weary stride, and the lack of joy in his playing. Young "numbed his feelings . . . with much alcohol and some marijuana and hid behind a disguise—his long . . . face, expressionless as a mummy's—that he seldom removed even among the few people he trusted."¹¹⁷ Many writers and musicians of the time pinpointed the musical end of Young's legendary career as his induction into the army, and discussed his post-war life as a version of the tragic artist myth.¹¹⁸ This myth of Young's dissipation has been overstated, as many recordings of 1946–47 show, but he was a less consistent player after the war, and his playing often lacked the old *joie de vivre*.¹¹⁹

Still, young jazz musicians—both black and white—consistently called Young "a beautiful man," and commented on his good humor, his gentle humanness, his "balanced mind."¹²⁰ Young's silence helped him keep his sanity; more than a few young musicians declared him to be the sanest, most human man in their experience. Many white writers observed that Young avoided the company of whites, and wondered aloud why he didn't play the way he used to.¹²¹ Young always told them, in effect, "that was then, this is now"; it was not his job to be who he was in 1939, but rather to ask, "what are you going to play today?" Though Young treated white jazz musicians warmly, he did keep most other whites at arm's length and at a masked remove. By keeping a blank face and rejecting a "get-along" attitude, Young refused to play up to white expectations in public encounters. Young's solitary resistance reflected a larger movement among African American writers and musicians to reject the old racial order of accommodation and Tomming.

Between 1938 and 1952, four major African American male writers and musicians used their art to rebel against accommodation by symbolically executing the figure of Uncle Tom. In Richard Wright's first collection of short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), every male protagonist (literally, every son of Uncle Tom) either shoots a white man or refuses the orders of a white man. In 1941, Duke Ellington and a team of Hollywood writers put together a theatrical revue called "Jump for Joy," whose objective was to "take Uncle Tom out

of the theatre [and] eliminate the stereotyped image that had been exploited by Hollywood and Broadway.”¹²² In Chester Himes’s 1943 story, “Heaven Has Changed,” a soldier fighting overseas in World War II dreams he is back in a southern cotton field, where he stumbles upon a funeral procession of old sharecroppers who tell him simply, “Ol’ Uncle Tom is dead.” And the first spoken lines in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) comprise a deathbed confession by the protagonist’s grandfather, who explains that Tomming was actually a sophisticated form of rebellion. “Our [African American] life is a war,” he exclaims, and implores his grandson to keep up the grinning and shuffling: “overcome ’em with yeses, undermine ’em with grins, agree ’em to death and destruction, let ’em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.” Ellison later wrote that this scene was “a rejection of a *current code* . . . a denial become metaphysical.”¹²³

The nameless, faceless central character of *Invisible Man* symbolizes the larger black migration of the time—the South come north—and Ellison evoked the tense temporary balance between swing hopes of equality and the survival skill needed to act inferior before whites. Invisible Man comes up north with the hope that social equality is within reach, and finally rejects all the limited, preconceived conceptions of African American possibility. He finds that all black men in the novel wear masks in front of whites with authority; Invisible Man watches with disgust as even the president of his black college “compose[s] his face into a bland mask” before meeting with the school’s white trustee.

Like Lester Young, Invisible Man was the symbol of a generation that refused to live by accommodation. Yet the novel ends with him living underground; without the old plantation stereotypes, there is no new “face” for him to wear.¹²⁴ Invisible Man has but one clue as to the new “mask” of self-preservation: before he goes underground, he observes a new quiet style among young black men on the street—the serious, introspective silent mask Young helped provide.

It was as though I’d never seen their like before: Walking slowly, their shoulders swaying, their legs swinging from their hips in trousers that ballooned upward from cuffs fitting snug about their ankles; their coats long and hip-tight. . . . These fellows whose bodies seemed—what had one of my teachers said to me?—‘You’re like one of these African sculptures’. . .

They seemed to move like dancers in some kind of funeral ceremony, swaying, going forward, *their black faces secret* . . . the heavy heel-plated shoes making a rhythmical tapping as they moved . . . they were men outside of historical time. . . . *Men of transition whose faces were immobile.*¹²⁵

They were new to Harlem, these cool boys in their zoot suits, long coats, quiet, blank faces, rhythmic strides, “speak[ing] a jived-up transitional language full of country glamour.” Nelson George believes this new style was a direct consequence of the black migration as “many Southern boys now wise to the concrete jungle started to move with a fluid, no-sweat attitude everybody called ‘cool’ . . . [C]ool was clearly an African-urban thing.”¹²⁶ The new response to the white gaze of superiority was to drop the grinning black mask—the symbol that everything was all right—and cool the face. In a novel based on the rejection of masks, the cool mask provides the only new strategy of self-preservation.

Just as black male writers killed off Uncle Tom, bebop musicians such as trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie targeted Louis Armstrong’s “plantation image” for execution. Gillespie honored Armstrong’s trumpet playing but never his stage persona: “Handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism, I never hesitated to say I didn’t like it.” Gillespie, who admitted the need for a new public style, affected a pose of nonchalance. His hip, ironic style became the prototype of beatnik chic: beret, black-rimmed glasses, goatee, hip slang.¹²⁷ Both Miles Davis and Charlie Parker became legends for literally turning their backs on audiences,¹²⁸ and other bebop musicians kept a cool silence on stage as befits classical musicians (artists) while playing the “willfully harsh, anti-assimilationist sound of be-bop.”¹²⁹ By refusing the role of “entertainer,” bebop musicians displayed a *cool remove* from mainstream American assumptions, rebelling simultaneously against both masked modes of behavior and the society’s disrespect of jazz. According to Orrin Keepnews, a white jazz producer of the time, the bebop rebellion was “brought to the surface by the ferment of the war years . . . [and] reflected a protest against the position of the Negro [and] against the position of the Negro entertainer.”¹³⁰

Lester Young was an elder statesman at the famous jam sessions at Minton’s and Monroe’s Uptown House where bebop was created, and was a familiar musical presence to all the bebop pioneers (Gillespie, Parker, Kenny Clarke, Thelonious Monk). In his 1979 autobiography, when Dizzy Gillespie calls the roll of musicians he has outlived and wants to pay tribute to, the only pre-bebop (and non-bebop) musician he names is Lester Young.¹³¹

Lester Young was the musical and stylistic bridge between Louis Armstrong’s sambo act and Charlie Parker’s audience-defying artistry. Parker’s musical mentor was alto saxophonist Buster Smith, but he grew up watching and worshiping Young from the wings of the Reno Club in Kansas City, and often said he “attended Lester Young University.” Parker took Young’s first records with him on a six-month gig in the Ozark Mountains, and memorized each solo note for note. Young once told him the challenge of music was to use your

whole body to create a personal sound, “to shape the air.”¹³² “I was crazy about Lester,” Parker once claimed. “He played so clean and beautiful. But . . . our ideas ran on differently.”¹³³ A 1943 photograph of Earl Hines’s big band provides iconographic evidence of Parker’s adaptation of Young’s nonconformist stage stance: he sits at the end of the front row, sunglasses on, legs splayed, seemingly detached, as if leaning away from the saxophone section.¹³⁴ It is Parker—more than any other bebop musician—who used Young’s hip slang to avoid conversation with those fans and writers who idolized him, turning core hipster terms like “cool,” “heavy,” “dig,” “solid,” and “crazy” into one-word ideograms.¹³⁵ Amiri Baraka celebrated Young’s language play in “Pres Spoke in a Language”:

in the teeming whole of us he lived
tooting on his sideways horn
translating frankie trumbauer into
Bird’s feathers
Tranes sinewy tracks
the slickster walking through the crowd
surviving on a terrifying wit
its the jungle the jungle the jungle
we living in¹³⁶

Bebop musicians were largely responsible for disseminating the word and concept of “cool,” but they came to it through Lester Young.

Young’s most influential heir was Miles Davis. “Man, playing with Prez was something,” Davis wrote in his autobiography. “I learned a lot from the way he played the saxophone . . . [and] I tried to transpose some of his saxophone licks over to my trumpet.” Davis was influenced by Young’s “real, fast, hip, slick, Oklahoma style” and his combination of rhythmic flexibility with a “cool sonority.” Davis liked the way Young “flood[ed] the tone,” and the way he approached each and every note, rather than running up and down scales. Pianist Sadik Hakim, who often toured with Young in the mid-1940s, said that Davis always came to see the band when it came through his hometown of St. Louis. “He’d sit in and he really dug Prez at the time and . . . much of his style, if you listen to him closely, was from Prez. He took many of the things Prez did and transferred them to his style, which we know as the cool style.”¹³⁷ Davis’s first session as leader of the Charlie Parker Quintet in May 1947 rebelled against bebop’s virtuosity, and was instead smooth, fluid, relaxed, and laid-back. As one biographer noted, “the liquid spirit of Lester Young hangs over the music.”¹³⁸

Davis’s self-presentation featured a fierce reserve that said, “You don’t wanna know—or ask.” His music, like Young’s, was accessible and admired by white

fans, musicians, and writers; yet Davis symbolized the cool, aloof, sometimes hostile African American jazz musician of the 1950s. He turned his back on audiences, and often walked off stage to smoke a cigarette while the band continued. Davis's well-dressed stage presence, his disregard for both artistic and social convention, his mix of personal mystery and artistic mastery, his tough, don't-fuck-with-me stance kept white jazz fans at a safe distance and suggested a churning inner complexity. Nightclub owner Max Gordon once asked why Davis didn't announce his songs or talk with the audience: "I'm a musician, I ain't no comedian," Miles answered. "The white man always wants you to smile, always wants the black man to bow. I don't smile and I don't bow. OK? I'm here to play music. I'm a musician." Lester Young's strategic withdrawal set the stage for musicians like Miles Davis and Charles Mingus to give voice to their anger; although a few perceptive writers saw the hurt underneath the swagger, clearly Uncle Toms were no longer welcome on the jazz scene.¹³⁹

At its most functional, "to keep your cool" has always meant not to "blow your top," phrases that suggest the potential for violence. For Young to have spoken out about racism as directly as Miles Davis (who grew up the son of a middle-class dentist in St. Louis) would have been suicide in the deep south of the nineteen-teens. Jazz has in fact always been chock-full of language that sublimated violence into musical combat: the horn was an "ax" (long before guitars were); musicians "cut" and "carved" each other at "cutting contests" and "carving sessions"; white people were called "ofays" (pig latin for "foe"). As Duke Ellington once noted, "[m]usic has always had to say what we couldn't otherwise say." Young instead poured his complex ideas into long, flowing, well-structured solos, "loose in space, transform[ing] his life every night into what it ought to be." He imagined a better world and put it in his sound, a dreamy romanticism with enough rhythmic power and blues feeling to generate a "special intensity . . . with cool understatement."¹⁴⁰

Like many jazz musicians, Young believed his "sound," not the notes or songs he played, told the world who he was. Your "sound" *was* you, it was your literal voice—and the maintenance of that sound was effected at considerable artistic and emotional effort. Young had something of an identity crisis when many musicians adapted his melodic ideas and cool, fragile tone (including the entire "four brothers" saxophone section of the Woody Herman band in the late 1940s). He often wondered aloud, "What am I to play? Should I copy them?" Tenor saxophonist Stan Getz—then one of the best and most successful jazz musicians in the country—often came up to Young's hotel room and asked him how he created certain sounds on his old records. Young enjoyed the attention but was saddened by it. "The trouble with most musicians today is that they are copycats," he said in 1948.¹⁴¹

The “love and theft” of Young’s sound was one factor in his physical deterioration through alcoholism; others included a perceived lack of recognition and simply the nomadic musician’s life. Young drank up to two quarts of gin a day on and off from the late 1940s until his death in 1959, and often forgot to eat. He was seen by white writers as “slow and unsteady of movement, detached from reality [and] sealed off in a private world,” and framed as a victim of a racist society. Although he married a second time in 1946 and enjoyed short periods of domestic stability in the early 1950s with his wife Mary, he was not a successful (or attentive) family man. After long stretches on the road, Young stayed in small hotels in midtown Manhattan, where he was often found by friends looking out the window, listening to his favorite “pretty music”: Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, Jo Stafford. Former jazz critic and producer Nat Hentoff reflected that he had “never seen anyone who was more alone wherever he was.”¹⁴²

But the younger musicians (black and white) who played with Young in the 1950s saw a different “Pres,” one they revered as a mentor, a poet, a spiritual figure, and something of a philosopher, especially on the fate and destiny of African-Americans. “The . . . principles he taught me are: the philosophy of the spirituals, the musician as a philosopher and a scientist, that we [African-Americans] have made a major contribution to this country and [that] we are Americans,” drummer Willie Jones typically reported of Young; “Prez opened my eyes.” Such statements suggest the effort (and success) with which Young insulated himself from white people after his army experience. Ex-Basie band drummer Jo Jones declared in 1973 that for all his contacts with black civil rights and political leaders, “there has never been nobody from Marcus Garvey up, that ever loved the black man like Lester Young, nobody!”¹⁴³

As jazz musician and scholar Ben Sidran wrote in 1969, cool was “actionality turned inward”; Young wasn’t simply the bruised romantic victim of a racist society but had a rich underground life in which he fought battles by other means. As Young said in his last interview before his death: “[I]t’s the same way all over, you dig? It’s fight for your life, that’s all. Until death do we part.” Cool is, in one sense, composed violence.¹⁴⁴

If Lester Young was not the actual model for the ending of *Invisible Man*, he was certainly a real-life counterpart of Ellison’s character. Young was an original kind of American rebel who, despite his gentleness, remained a walking indictment of the society that denied the recognition of his accomplishments. A famous 1947 study of American hostility toward jazz concluded that the reaction to a new cultural form depends upon the “prestige of the donors,” and that anti-jazz sentiments were based on the low status of African Americans. “The jazz musician is an ‘invisible man,’” the sociologist Charles Nanry wrote,

“contributing mightily to American cultural life yet usually rewarded with facelessness and anonymity.”¹⁴⁵ The jazz world alone recognized Young’s accomplishments, and a year before his death, he moved into the Alvin Hotel on Fifty-second Street, “to look down on Broadway and look at Birdland [the jazz club],” according to drummer Willie Jones. Sick with alcoholism and malnutrition, Young was assisted in the move by Miles Davis, Max Roach, Sonny Rollins, and Jo Jones. A major musical innovator of the cultural form by which Americans signified “freedom” during World War II, the slow-walking, pot-smoking, monkishly dressed, gentle alcoholic Lester Young wore a silent face and asked for no attention. He simply played his sadness every night, just as Billie Holiday sang in her cracked voice until the very end, and who knows, but at the lower frequencies, he spoke for the dashed swing hopes of social equality?

The Legacy of Black Cool

William Irwin Thompson, an important American historian and philosopher, points to jazz as the catalyst for a major African American cultural shift in the 1940s: “Jazz was . . . essentially the expression of the underdog going through a *cultural transformation* in which the ‘hot’ agricultural slave became the ‘cool’ urban artist.”¹⁴⁶ In the post-war period, the musical mode of cool came to mean “relaxed, cerebral, sophisticated”—that is, emotional power and intensity restrained in favor of musical complexity. Young created this musical approach, and brought a lyrical, bluesily romantic, introspective approach to jazz that Miles Davis and Charlie Parker adapted and took in different directions.¹⁴⁷ The word and concept of cool disseminated into American society quickly: it was regularly mocked in the media in the late 1940s; by the early 1950s, “playing it cool” was a common “hip phrase” and a staple of sociological literature; in 1957, the song “Cool” was one of the showpieces of the movie and play *West Side Story*.

The “cool mask” was a blank facial wall, suggesting resistance to mainstream social norms and an inner complexity few Americans ever suspected of their black “entertainers.” Cool can be seen as a three-front cultural civil war against mainstream society (both white and black): (1) a person wore a cool “front” (or mask) as invisible armor to hold off the prejudice, irrationality, and hostility of the society—“you didn’t leave home without it,” as one writer recently reflected;¹⁴⁸ (2) “cool” stands as an umbrella term for a set of non-European aesthetic values that provided a base for the display of artistic excellence, ultimately traceable to West African sociocultural functions of music

and dance; (3) cool heralded the necessary creation of a personal sound and style in a society that rarely saw African Americans as individuals.

The philosophical objective of African American cool was—is—to combine expressive style with public composure. Jazz cool reflected a medium between West African cool and Anglo-American cool: the intelligent expression of one's human experience in the world at a given moment. Listening to the beautifully sad ballads of Lester Young's last years, one hears a record of his daily experience and the emotional costs of his attempt to share them. Albert Murray compared Young's later sound to the "somewhat painful but nonetheless charismatic parade-ground strut of the campaign-weary soldier who had been there one more time and made it back in spite of hell and high water." The cornetist and composer Thad Jones, who roomed with Young on a 1957 tour, said, "You could feel the pain in the man, I could, but he was still one of the most humorous. . . . In the midst of all of the pain of it, he was able to laugh at it." Johnny Otis likewise heard both sadness and affirmation, "a melancholy power and a lament . . . but [also] a joyous celebration of life, the human spirit, and sexuality."¹⁴⁹

Duke Ellington called jazz "freedom of expression music," and its universal symbol is probably a black man playing a tenor saxophone.¹⁵⁰ One jazz scholar terms this image "the first truly nonmechanical metaphor for the twentieth century."¹⁵¹ It is certainly one of the first global icons of what Kenneth Burke once termed "man-as-communicant": a human being communicating his or her emotional experience *in the moment* without losing control.¹⁵² It is an image that owes as much to Lester Young's life and art as to anyone.

I am suggesting that "cool"—or the birth of cool, anyway—was a synthesis of West African aesthetic attitudes and Anglo-American ideas of self-mastery, braided and historically embedded in the African American struggle for social equality in the United States. In valuing musical communication over technical skill, Lester Young expressed his "somebodiness" without blowing his public cool. In the process Young helped dignify a stance and a pose—a cooled face—that his jazz heirs have used to signify spiritual self-mastery and to resist American self-congratulation. The cool mask was a public face that displaced the smiling accommodation of Tomming, and displayed instead "*poise in a world where one had no authority.*"

NOTES

1. Richard Williams, "The Conception of the Cool," in *The Miles Davis Companion*, ed. Gary Carner (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 93–97; Bill Kirchner, "Miles Davis and the Birth of the Cool: A Question of Influence," in *A Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Kirchner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 38–46.

2. For two claims that Young coined the contemporary American usage of the word “cool,” see Joachim Berendt, *The New Jazz Book* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1975), 79, and Leonard Feather, “Pres Digs Every Kind of Music,” in *A Lester Young Reader*, ed. Lewis Porter (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 149. For a short Anglo-American etymology of “cool,” see J. E. Lighter, “Way Past Cool,” *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1994, 148.

3. Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (New York: Da Capo, 1980 [1969]), 112.

4. Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 547; Sidran, *Black Talk*, 93.

5. Young was hounded from Fletcher Henderson’s band by fellow musicians in 1934 for having too “thin” a tone. The first time Count Basie heard Young, he thought his tone the “weirdest” he had ever heard, and “wasn’t even sure he liked it.” Bassist Walter Page heard the speed first: “Who’s that fast saxophone?” he asked. Cited in Nathan Pearson, *Goin’ to Kansas City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 200–204.

6. African Americans often honor an important artistic synthesis with the term “cool.” See Donnell Alexander, “Are Black People Cooler Than White People?” *Might*, July–August 1997, 44–53. A short discussion of the Kansas City “workshop” can be found in Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 149–78.

7. The varied contemporary meanings of cool can all be found within jazz culture of the late 1940s. See Robert S. Gold, *Jazz Lexicon* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 65–68.

8. Young stated openly at an army court-martial hearing that these substances were necessary for a musician to cope with life on the road. Quoted in Frank Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life: The Story of Lester Young* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 123–24.

9. Nelson George, *Elevating the Game* (New York: Fireside, 1992), 62; Douglas Henry Daniels, “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat: Lester Young As a Spiritual Figure,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* (1988): 172.

10. Johnny Otis, *Upside Your Head: Rhythm and Blues from Central Avenue* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 78.

11. Quoted in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 84. Another typical reflection comes from Texas blues pianist Sammy Price. “I don’t ever remember having met a person that was as unique. He was just a cute man . . . sweet, high, nice, polite, kind, but mean as hell [when he wanted to be].” Dan Morganstern interview with Sammy Price, Jazz Oral History Project (New Brunswick, N.J.: Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, 1980): 57–58 (hereafter, “IJS” will be used to refer to interviews in this collection).

12. Sadik Hakim, “Reflections of an Era: My Experiences with Bird and Prez,” unpublished pamphlet, vertical file, IJS, n.d.

13. Douglas Henry Daniels, “Lester Young: Master of Jive,” *American Music* 3 (fall 1985), 313–27; Whitney Balliett, *American Musicians: Fifty-six Portraits in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 234–40; Berendt, *New Jazz Book*, 76–83.

14. Cited in Lewis Porter, *Lester Young* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 2.

15. Leonard Feather in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 142.

16. Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (New York: Da Capo, 1997 [1971]), 159.

17. Cornel West, *Keeping Faith* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xii–xiv.

18. John Blassingame and Mary Frances Berry, *Long Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 368. The best analysis of the influence of swing-era musicians on 1930s

African American culture is Ben Sidran's chapter entitled "The Evolution of the Black Underground, 1930–1947," 78–115; see also Lewis Erenberg, "News from the Great Wide World: Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Black Popular Music, 1927–1943," *Prospects* 18 (1993): 483–506, and Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 1–6.

19. W. C. Handy, *Father of the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1969 [1941]), 62, 30–54.

20. Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 80–133; Thomas L. Riis, *Just before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York between 1890–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 4–7; W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

21. Chris Goddard interview with Jesse Stone, New York, 1981, IJS: II:131.

22. Robert Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 75–79; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23, 222.

23. Toll, *Blackening Up*, 274.

24. William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions, 1956 [1925]), 209 (emphasis added).

25. Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 160.

26. Williams, *American Grain*, 208–11; Eric Ledell Smith, *Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black Comedian* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1992), 81–82, 228; Ann Charters, *Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 102, 107. On affirmation, see Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 21–42, and Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1972 [1964]), 189; on "somebodiness," see James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1972), 16.

27. Ralph Ellison, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 163–68, and *Shadow and Act*, 45–59.

28. Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1–12. The construction of whiteness as an American ethnic identity led to the projection onto blacks of those traits that fell outside the ideal of Republican virtue (e.g., passion, childish joy, emotional expression, immediate gratification). One source of the nation's complex relationship to black skin and black masks is the Revolutionary period, when proud Englishmen traded in their European identities for as-yet-unknown American ones. "Far from English civilization, they had to remind themselves constantly what it meant to be civilized—Christian, rational, sexually controlled, and white." See also David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991), 3–15; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 328–37.

29. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 23–29; Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 44; see also Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 7, 139–40.

30. Kenneth Burke's term "frames of acceptance" is useful since it privileges the visual mode (how blacks were seen) over the rhetorical (how blacks were discussed). Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes towards History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961 [1937]), 20–22.

31. Gerald Early, *Tuxedo Junction* (New York: Ecco, 1989), 279.

32. Bebop musicians completed the job that swing-era musicians had started. See Eric Lott, "Double-V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," in *Jazz among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 243–55.

33. Quoted in Tom Scanlan, *The Joy of Jazz: The Swing Era 1935–1947* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996), 68; see also James Haskins, *The Cotton Club* (New York: Hippo-

- crene Publishers, 1977) and Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76.
34. Early movies fastened on such stereotypes as “[the tom], the coon, the tragic mulatto, the mammy, and the brutal black buck. . . . to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority.” Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 3–4.
35. Milt Hinton interview with Panama Francis, New York, 1980, IJS: IV: 7–9.
36. Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), 244; see also Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be or Not . . . to Bop* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 295–97.
37. Cab Calloway and Bryant Rollins, *Of Minnie the Moocher & Me* (New York: Crowell, 1976), 184.
38. Carl Cons, “A Black Genius in a White Man’s World,” *Downbeat*, July 1936, 6.
39. Jacqui Malone, *Steppin’ on the Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 108.
40. Otis, *Upside Your Head*, 77. A long interview with George Morrison appears in Gunther Schuller’s *Early Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 359–72.
41. Morroe Berger, Edward Berger, and James Patrick, *Benny Carter: A Life in American Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press and the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, 1982), 238.
42. Quotes from George T. Simon, *The Big Bands* (New York: Schirmer, 1981), 115–16, 483–84; Berger, Berger, and Patrick, *Benny Carter*, 105–106.
43. See Young’s statements about his early life in Allan Morrison, “You Got to Be Original,” and Pat Harris, “Pres Talks about Himself,” both in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 132, 138. At the age of 14, Young was called upon to smuggle a gun to a band member who was being chased by a lynch mob; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 9. See also John McDonough, liner notes, *The Giants of Jazz: Lester Young* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Records, 1980). This three-record boxed set includes a pamphlet featuring McDonough’s well-researched oral history of Young’s life.
44. Francois Postif, “Interview with Lester Young,” in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 181.
45. Lee Young quoted in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 12; McDonough, *Giants of Jazz*, 7–8. Many African American swing bandleaders were middle-class college graduates who found conventional career paths closed to them. Hsio Wen Shih, “The Spread of Jazz and the Big Bands,” in Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy, *Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1959), 177–79.
46. Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 8–9 and 18–20.
47. Pat Harris, “Pres Talks about Himself,” 138.
48. Luc Delannoy, *Pres: The Story of Lester Young* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 25–37; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 27–40; Porter, *Lester Young*, 6–9; Russell, *Jazz Style*, 151–52.
49. Both the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News* reported Young’s new assignment in their April 14, 1934 issues. Citations reprinted in Walker C. Allen, *Hendersonia* (Highland Park, N.J., 1973), 294–95.
50. Mezz Mezzrow with Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (New York: Citadel Press, 1990 [1946]), 140–42; Berger, Berger, and Patrick, *Benny Carter*, 105–106.
51. Erenberg, “News from the Great Wide World,” 483–503.
52. Interview with the author, August 19, 1997, Jamaica, New York.

53. Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Da Capo, 1977), 81; David W. Stowe uses the term “soldiers of music” in *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1994), 10–13.
54. Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove, 1966), 35–136; Ellison, *Going to the Territory*, 220; Douglas Henry Daniels, “Schooling Malcolm: Malcom Little and Black Culture during the Golden Age of Jazz,” *Steppingstones* (winter 1983): 45–60.
55. Russell, *Jazz Style*, 152–53; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 33.
56. Balliett, *American Musicians*, 234–35.
57. Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 236–37.
58. Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 109.
59. Krin Gabbard, “Signifyin(g) the Phallus: Mo’ Better Blues and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet,” in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 104–30.
60. Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Cody* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 391–96. Kerouac’s hero-worship of Lester Young is analyzed in W. T. Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 166–67, 177–78.
61. Quoted in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 115.
62. For the best short discussion of Young’s musical style and achievement, see Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 547–62; for a longer technical analysis of Young’s solos, see Porter, *Lester Young*, 38–98, and the essays in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 197–305.
63. Earle Warren quoted in McDonough, *Giants of Jazz*, 13; see also the discussion of Young’s synthesis in Bennie Green, *The Reluctant Art* (New York: Da Capo, 1962), 91–118.
64. Photos dating back to 1937 show Young wearing sunglasses on stage, predating all other jazz musicians. See Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 119, and Delannoy, *Pres*, 105–106.
65. Paramount News, “Jitterbugs Jive at Swingeroo,” newsreel, 1938, Ernie Smith Collection 491.230, Smithsonian Institution Archives Center, Washington, D.C. See also “All Day Swing Carnival Draws 25,000,” *Metronome*, July 1938, 9.
66. “Lester . . . augured the slow changeover from hot jazz to cool jazz.” Leonard Feather in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 144–45.
67. This analysis is drawn from Martin Williams in the liner notes of *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* (Smithsonian/Columbia Special Products P6 118910973); see also Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 43–44, and bassist Gene Ramey’s comment in Delannoy, *Pres*, 45.
68. Schuller, *Swing Era*, 222–62; Simon, *Big Bands*, 79–87.
69. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1964]), 312–14.
70. Quoted in Stanley Dance, *The World of Count Basie* (New York: Da Capo, 1980), 53–54.
71. The pianist Dave Brubeck thought this relationship of individual to community crucial to jazz, “a fusion of African group consciousness with the Renaissance concept of individualism.” Dave Brubeck, “Jazz Perspective” in *Reading Jazz*, ed. David Meltzer (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993), 206.
72. Eddie Barefield, quoted in McDonough, *Giants of Jazz*, 13.
73. Cited in Frank Driggs, *Black Beauty, White Heat* (New York: Da Capo, 1982), 148; on social aspects of Kansas City, see Russell, *Jazz Style*, 3–24.

74. Young quoted in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 138–39.

75. John Hammond, “Kansas City a Hotbed for Fine Swing Musicians,” *Downbeat*, September 1936, 1, 9. Roy Eldridge quoted in liner notes, *The Kansas City Six with Lester Young: A Complete Session*, Commodore XFL 15352 (1961 [1944]). For testimonies of Young’s improvisatory prowess in jam sessions, see Count Basie with Albert Murray, *Good Morning Blues* (New York: Random House, 1985), 147–48, and Delannoy, *Pres*, 44–47. For the importance of the jam session in Kansas City, see Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 208–11.

76. David W. Stowe, “Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region during the Swing Era,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 23(1) (February 1992): 53–74. During the 1920s and 1930s, the territory bands provided the most dynamic new musical elements of big-band swing: a more freewheeling sense of improvisation, a focus on “head” arrangements, and a blues-based hard-swinging drive. For a more thorough account of territory bands, see Thomas J. Hennessey, *From Jazz to Swing: African-American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890–1935* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 103–21; Schuller, *Swing Era*, 770–805; Murray, *Stomping*, 166–70.

77. Buck Clayton, *Buck Clayton’s Jazz World* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 89–90; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 45–48.

78. This famous jam session is described by various sources in Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro, *Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya* (New York: Da Capo, 1955), 291–93, and in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 45–48. In a 1939 jam session, Hawkins battled Young in New York. Hawkins felt so sure of victory he walked off the bandstand; Young refused to concede and “walked out right behind him and was playing his horn right behind Hawk as Hawk was going to his car in the street.” Bill Kirchner interview with Cozy Cole, April 1980, IJS: 22–24.

79. Lee Young with Patricia Willard, “The Young Family Band,” in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 20; Billie Holiday with William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 56–57; Mary Lou Williams quoted in Hentoff and Shapiro, *Talkin’*, 309; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 75.

80. The few white musicians and fans who attended Kansas City jam sessions spoke of the communal spirit at the clubs, and an easy acceptance of their presence. See, for example, Milt Hinton interview with Cliff Leeman, n.d., IJS: 30–42.

81. A bartender at Monroe’s Uptown House in Harlem remembered, “Lester Young and Ben Webster use to tie up in battle like dogs in the road. They’d fight on those saxophones until they were tired out, then they’d put in long-distance calls to their mothers . . . and tell them about it.” Quoted in Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 210. Kerouac quoted in Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*, 166–67.

82. Gordon Wright, “DISCussions,” *Metronome*, March 1940, 46. Wright notes Young twice in the same review. Of a Ziggy Elman recording, he writes, “[I] wish that Jerry Jerome would be his natural self instead of trying to imitate Lester Young”; of a Harlan Leonard record, “the Lester Youngish tenor and rhythm section aren’t too exciting.” In a 1941 magazine survey, Hawkins rated Young fourth best of all saxophonists; cited in John Chilton, *The Song of the Hawk: The Life and Recordings of Coleman Hawkins* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 191. For Goodman anecdote, see James Lincoln Collier, *Benny Goodman and the Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 203, 223.

83. See Dexter Gordon’s comments in Russell, *Jazz Style*, 154. Gordon based his stellar performance as Dale Turner in *’Round Midnight* on his memories of Young’s last years.

84. Quoted in Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 39.
85. For a discussion of the film's reception and its revolutionary presentation of African American musicians on film, see Arthur Knight, "The Sight of Jazz," in Gabbard, *Representing Jazz*, 11–53, and Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 113–15.
86. A short discussion of "the middle state" can be found in David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), xiii–xiv. As early as 1764, Immanuel Kant described the English as "cool," "steady," "reasonable," and "indifferent" in his essay "On National Characteristics." Duke Ellington praised Londoners as "the most civilized [people] in the world," lauding English tolerance for human imperfection, emphasis on self-discipline, and their remarkable "sense of *balance*." Considering how important "balance" was to Ellington—"my aim in life is to obtain *balance*," he wrote—this observation constitutes a significant compliment. Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 139–40, 379.
87. Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts* 7 (1) (Fall 1973): 40–43, 64–67, 89. For analysis of the Yoruba legacy on the Americas, see Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 1–97; Andrew Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora," *Diaspora* 1 (3) (1991): 235–60.
88. This discussion of West African cool relies on the following sources: Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance," *African Forum* 2(2) (Fall 1966): 85–102 (reprinted in this volume); R. F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 9–16; R. F. Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 1–44; John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 30–115; John Collins, *West African Pop Roots* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 1–15. The Collins book contains a useful discussion on how Africans view "hot and cool rhythms."
89. Cultural values are affirmed, shared, and transmitted in African musical functions. John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).
90. Chernoff, *African Rhythm*, 105–11; see also Ayo Bankole, Judith Bush, and Sadek H. Samaan, "The Yoruba Master Drummer," *African Arts* 8(2) (Winter 1975): 48–56, 77–78. Master drummers are the conductors of African tribal music: they control the texture of the musical event through the beat, making sure it is deep and steady, but always changing.
91. In West African societies, "couples" do not dance; a dancer needs her whole body to communicate with other dancers and musicians.
92. John S. Wilson interview with Mary Lou Williams, New York, June 1973, IJS: 119.
93. Johnny King, *What Jazz Is* (New York: Walker & Co., 1997), 24–26.
94. Oscar Peterson quoted in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 162. See A. M. Jones, *Studies in African Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1–55; John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 1–16.
95. Burt Korall, *Drummin' Men* (New York: Schirmer, 1990), 29; see also Norma Miller with Evette Jensen, *Swingin' at the Savoy: The Memoir of a Jazz Dancer* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 69.
96. Young quoted in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 132; Green, *Reluctant Art*, 99–108.
97. Johnny Carisi quoted in Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 39–40.
98. Douglas Henry Daniels has explored Young's humor, musical approach, philosophy, and spirituality from the vantage point of someone raised in a West-African derived oral tradition. See Daniels, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," 161–77.

99. Quoted in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 161–62. The idea of finding out what an audience wants—and then giving it to them—I find only in African American musicians.
100. Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (New York: Da Capo, 1994 [1968]), 140. Tap-dancing drummers included Jo Jones, Buddy Rich, Cozy Cole, and Louis Bellson. See interview with Cozy Cole, *IJS*: II:27.
101. Malone, *Steppin'*, 91–110. In the Broadway show *Runnin' Wild* (1923), the chorus boys danced the Charleston to only hand-clapping and foot-stamping, “the way it had been danced for many years in the South.” Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 134; see also Norma Miller, *Swingin'*, 102.
102. Tom Davin, “Conversation with James P. Johnson,” in *Jazz Panorama*, ed. Martin T. Williams (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1962), 56–57.
103. Korall, *Drummin' Men*, 50–51; Mezzrow, *Really the Blues*, 142–47. Mezz Mezzrow explained clearly how white Chicagoan drummers—Gene Krupa, Davey Tough, Ben Pollack—learned from black drummers that keeping a steady beat involved more than just playing straight time, but was instead “a sequence of different sounds accented at the right intervals.”
104. Willis Lawrence James, *Stars in de Elements: A Study of Negro Folk Music* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995 [1945]), 456.
105. Stravinsky quoted in Meltzer, *Reading Jazz*, 252.
106. Stanley Crouch interview with William “Sonny” Greer, New York 1977, *IJS*: IV: 15–6.
107. Korall, *Drummin' Men*, 29–30; Basie quoted in Stanley Dance, *The World of Count Basie* (New York: Da Capo, 1980), 14.
108. Theodore Dennis Brown, “A History and Analysis of Jazz Drumming to 1942,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976: 1–42 (on African influences), 102–33 (on the trap set), 424–48 (on Chick Webb).
109. Cosmo Anthony Barbaro, “A Comparative Study of West African Drum Ensemble and the African-American Drum Set,” Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1993: 62. By discussing the emergence of a master drummer in a culture that had none, the existence of a body of joyfully assertive and rhythmically sophisticated dancers, and the difference between English and West African cool aesthetics, I hope to open up a larger discussion of the importance of African aesthetics in both black and American culture.
110. Amiri Baraka (as LeRoi Jones), *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow, 1963), 111–12; Ellison, *Going to the Territory*, 166–67.
111. Manning Marable, *Black American Politics: From the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson* (London: Verso, 1985), 74–87; Charles S. Johnson, *To Stem This Tide* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1943), 109; Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War* (Syracuse University Press, 1996); Russell Gold, “Guilty of Syncopation, Joy, and Animation: The Closing of Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom,” *Studies in Dance History* 5(1) (Spring 1994): 50–64.
112. Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1986 [1943]), 121.
113. For the relationship between jazz musicians and the Double-V campaign, see Lott, “Double-V,” 245–50.
114. Ellison, *Going to the Territory*, 166–67. “Coolness kept our values warm, and racial hostility stoked our fires of inspiration,” 167.
115. Young’s army experience is discussed in detail in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 117–30, Delannoy, *Pres*, 134–48, and McDonough, *Giants of Jazz*, 25–27.

116. Quoted in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 135.
117. See McDonough, *Giants of Jazz*, 5; Bill Coss, "Lester Young," in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 154.
118. The Basie trumpeter Harry Edison said, "The army just took all his spirit"; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 129. Young's close friend Gene Ramey believed he lost some of his technical skill from the beatings he received; see Ramey interview, IJS, V:37–41. In the late 1940s, European writers expressed disbelief that this was the legendary Lester Young; see Delannoy, *Pres*, 140–55, and Ross Russell, *Bird Lives* (London: Quartet, 1972), 327.
119. See Lewis Porter, liner notes, *Sarah Vaughan/Lester Young: One Night Stand*, Blue Note CD, 1997 [1947]; see also Porter, *Lester Young*, 102–103.
120. See Daniels, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"; Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 174–77 and 181–84; Bobby Scott, "The House in the Heart," in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 99–118.
121. Porter, *Lester Young*, 27.
122. Ellington referred to it as a "social significance show," and originally the show was to open with Uncle Tom on his death bed. Ellington, *Music*, 175.
123. Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 56 (emphasis added); Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (London: Pluto, 1986 [1945]); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1980 [1952]).
124. See Joel Dinerstein, "The Cool Mask: The Evolution of an African-American Male Survival Strategy, 1934–1945," M.A. thesis, University of Texas, May 1995.
125. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 439–44 (emphasis added). Invisible Man spots the cool boys at a pivotal moment regarding his faith in racial progress, having just witnessed the arrest and subsequent murder of his friend, Tod Clifton. Clifton had turned and punched a policeman for shoving him, an act designated by Invisible Man as "plung[ing] outside of history." The policeman shoots Clifton dead for stepping out of the racial order.
126. George, *Elevating the Game*, 62.
127. Gillespie, *To Be or Not*, 295–96. Struggling for the right to self-definition and freedom from both white assumptions and outmoded southern self-defense strategies, bebop musicians rebelled against show business traditions and the clichés of swing. Neil Leonard, *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16–18; Berger, Berger, and Patrick, *Benny Carter*, 18.
128. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 112–13; Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 226–27.
129. Amiri Baraka, cited in Lott, "Double-V," 248.
130. Orrin Keepnews, *The View from Within* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 39.
131. Gillespie, *To Be or Not*, 116–17, 185, 241, 502. Young was briefly the tenor saxophonist in Gillespie's first bebop band (October–December 1943), but his father's death compelled him to travel to California. He was replaced by Don Byas. Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 110, 112. See also Dempsey Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Jazz* (Chicago: Urban Research Institute, 1983), 341.
132. Al Young, "We Jazz June/We Die Soon: Jazz Film Thoughts," in *On Music*, eds. Daniel Halpern and Jeanne Wilmot Carter (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco, 1994), 123; Russell, *Bird Lives*, 68, 89–95.
133. Parker quoted in Hentoff and Shapiro, *Talkin'*, 355; Schuller, *Swing Era*, 794–96.
134. Photo in Russell, *Kansas City Style*, 198–99.
135. Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 221–32; Sidran, *Black Talk*, 110–12.

136. Amiri Baraka, *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amira Baraka/LeRoi Jones, 1961–1995* (New York: Marsilio, 1995), 171–72.
137. Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 44–45, 99; Hakim quoted in Jack Chambers, *Milestones I: The Music and Times of Miles Davis to 1960* (University of Toronto Press, 1983), 16; see also Andre Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 116–36, especially his definition of the “cool sonority” in jazz.
138. Ian Carr, *Miles Davis: A Critical Biography* (London: Quartet, 1982), 26.
139. Max Gordon, “Miles—A Portrait,” in Garner, *Miles Davis Companion*, 93–97; see also Chris Albertson, “The Unmasking of Miles Davis,” in *Miles Davis Reader*, 190–97.
140. Evan Hunter, “Streets of Gold” (excerpt) in Meltzer, *Reading Jazz*, 196–97; Russell, *Bird Lives*, 43; Nat Hentoff, *Boston Boy* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 125–26; Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 89.
141. Tate-Young conversation related in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 210. Bassist Gene Ramey, a longtime close friend of Young, remembers Getz and other white musicians “would come around to his room every night” at the Alvin Hotel, to “sit around and listen to his old records and have him explain to them [how he created certain sounds].” Young would often beg Ramey not to leave: “‘Stay here,’ Ramey recalls Young saying, ‘maybe we can get these guys to leave.’” See Stanley Dance interview with Gene Ramey, *IJS*, V:37–41. For an excellent discussion of how Young’s ideas were diffused into jazz in the 1950s, see Green, *Reluctant Art*, 113–18; see also Donald L. Maggin, *Stan Getz: A Life in Jazz* (New York: William Morrow, 1996), 38–43.
142. Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 137–39, 201–212; Hentoff, 126.
143. Daniels, “Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat”; Willie Jones quoted in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight*, 212; Milt Hilton interview with Jo Jones, January 1973, *IJS*, 92.
144. Postif, “Interview with Lester Young,” in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 181; Sidran, *Black Talk*, 111.
145. Morroe Berger, “Jazz: Resistance to the Diffusion of a Culture Pattern,” in *American Music*, ed. Charles Nanry (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1972), 11–43; Nanry’s “invisible man” connection comes from his introduction, 6.
146. William Irwin Thompson, *The American Replacement of Nature* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 51 (emphasis added).
147. Schuller, *Swing Era*, 547.
148. Thad Mumford, “Where Is the Class of ’96,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1996, sec. 5, 25.
149. Murray, *Stomping*, 162–63; Thad Jones quoted in Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 125; Otis, *Upside Your Head*, 78.
150. Ellington, *Music*, 421.
151. John Szwed, “Foreword,” in Clyde E. B. Bernhardt, *I Remember: Eighty Years of Black Entertainment, Big Bands, and the Blues* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), ix.
152. Burke, *Attitudes*, 262.