rebirth with the consumer electronics revolution (radio) and black culture (jazz), he put explicit alliances—indeed, the principle of alliance—at the heart of the aesthetic he delivered. Like the deliberately speeding culture which it helped inaugurate and for which it can stand, “Howl” filled any purported fifties hole in history.

Charlie Parker, the great saxophone player and bop jazz improviser, died laughing on 12 March 1955. Ill, propped on pillows in the suite of Barone Pannonica de Koenigswarter at the Hotel Stanhope in New York City, laughing at a vaudeville juggling act on the Dorsey Brothers’ TV show, Parker choked, then succumbed to a seizure. Although he was only thirty-four years old that spring, his attending physician estimated the age fifty-five, for Parker had paced his life at the tempo he spurred concept innovation through his alto. Within days, all over New York but especially in its subways and alleys, the legend appeared spontaneously: “Bird Live Charlie “Yardbird” Parker had joined the rare line of black cultural charisma who were adopted by segments of both black and white cultures. Parker’s music epitomized the newly emerging culture of deliberate speed.

All his discipline was devoted to intensity. One first heard his spiky and nimble chaos, the sound of someone extraordinarily attentive to the present moment. Then the structure supporting the music’s surface of combobulations gradually appeared. Finally one realized the movin even mortal—risks Parker took circumventing limits others accepted. The progressive understanding of Parker’s dimensions shows well in a comparison of two successive responses by two admiring writers. In 1952, Kerouac defined bop as that music which surrounds its subject “indirect and too late but completely from every angle except the angle we all did know” (Visions of Cody 296). Twenty-one years later, Thomas Pynchon would remember hearing just that mortal angle nobody can verify Parker’s music: “down inside his most affirmative solos honks already
idle, amused dum-de-dumming of old Mister fucking Death he self” (Gravity’s Rainbow 63). Parker’s influence, like hop, like black culture, deepened its impression over time.

Within the month of Parker’s lethal hilarity, the first international meeting of unaligned nations, now known as the Third World, met in Bandung, Indonesia. Mostly Asian and African states, twenty-nine in all, sent delegates. Adam Clayton Powell attended from the United States as an observer, but reported more hindrance than help from his government. Nevertheless, he and Richard Wright, who analyzed the conference in The Color Curtain, confirmed the gathering’s inspiration. It had wide ramifications, ranging from tiny to large. From the beginning of the conference, Wright claimed, its cohesion “smacked of something new, something beyond Left and Right.” Instead, races and religions were the “vague but potent” new forces operating there. Quite consciously, the “despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed—in short, the underdogs of the human race” (12, 13)—were banding together not on ideological but on more instinctive grounds.

Bandung generated Herbie Nichols’s little-known piano composition, “The Third World” (recorded 6 May 1955). On a grander, if less specific level, it confirmed the self-consciousness necessary for the unaligned governments to cohere as a policy-enacting group. Thus the Bandung allies supported the Soviet threat to employ nuclear force against the British and French invasion of Egypt in 1956 to regain control over the then-recently nationalized Suez Canal. The Bandung Conference signalled that European control of the developing continents had ended, and thus marked an international equivalent to the emergence of black culture at the national level within the United States.

As their culture rose to prominence, blacks were continually in the news during the last half of 1955. Walter White was surely the last important Negro leader to have light hair and blue eyes. As Executive Secretary of the NAACP White had pushed the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas case to the Supreme Court, and he had heard Justice Earl Warren’s “Black Monday” decision (17 May 1954) promising to integrate the public schools. The Court did not then implement its decision; and Walter White died the same month as Charlie Parker, so he never heard the famous ruling Warren wrote and delivered to a packed courtroom the last day of May 1955. In his last paragraph, Justice Warren ordered the “District Court to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with this opinion as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to these cases.” The heaped syllables and perverse word order in Warren’s sentence perhaps lack eloquence, but the terse phrase “deliberate speed” stuck in the mind like a dart in the bullseye.

Where did Earl Warren derive his most famous term, one “so untypical of the normal Warren mode of expression” (Bernard Schwartz 121)? The phrase came directly from Felix Frankfurter, who first passed it to Warren in a memo he circulated among his colleagues on 15 January 1954 (G. E. White 167). Beyond that, the remarkably resonant phrase “deliberate speed” echoes and evokes all of America’s attempts to transform itself from an industrial to a postindustrial society. The real importance of the phrase is how it caught and crested a welling American mood. Warren would not have followed Frankfurter’s suggestion, nor would the phrase have become centered in American consciousness, had it not risen from a larger momentum running deep in the national life at mid-century. In many ways the state was catching up with and codifying the already deliberately speeding society—which in its turn was cuing off black culture.

Making integration stick at the practical level proved even more difficult, however, than achieving the abstract transformation in the courts. Smooth on the surface, the summer of 1955 was hot and dry, and race talk cracked under northern neon and southern Jack pines. Justice Warren’s decisions had stirred people on both sides of the issue, doubtless contributing to the Emmett Till case, which a few years before might have remained a routine horror, but in the summer of 1955 became instead a rallying point. The details remain lurid.

Emmett “Bobo” Till, a black and barely fourteen-year-old lad from Chicago, was spending the summer out of trouble and off the streets with his sharecropping uncle in the deep Delta hamlet of Money, Mississippi. Carolyn Bryant, a young white mother of two small boys, sold Till two cents worth of gum over her husband’s grocery counter one Wednesday evening late in August. She accused Till of asking her for a date, whistling at her, and bragging of his success with white women. There are reports that no one caused Till to whistle when he tried to enunciate clearly (Raines 13). But Huie has written that Till was intentionally bragging and clowning in order to win favor with his country cousins. In any case, early that Sunday morning, Carolyn Bryant’s husband and his half-brother, Ray Bryant and J. W. Milam, kidnapped Till at gunpoint and admitted later that they had done so. These men were the last to see young Till before the sheriff dragged him up from the bottom of the Tallahatchie River with the back of his head shot away.²

In Chicago, ten thousand mourners viewed his coffin. But the case was
processed in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, where there were then 19,000 blacks, 11,000 whites, and no blacks registered to vote. The all-male, white grand jury closeted itself for an hour and then acquitted everyone, claiming insufficient evidence. Nevertheless, William Bradford Huie’s lucid articles in Look and Reader’s Digest soon appeared with incriminating details and confessional quotes from the killers. Still, no one has ever served time for Emmett Till’s murder.

The week of the verdict in the Till case was also the week that President Eisenhower had his heart attack in office, reason enough for some conservative commentary to ignore what passed for justice in Mississippi. But others worried more about America’s than Eisenhower’s heart. I. F. Stone wrote in his Weekly, 3 October 1955: “To the outside world it must look as if the conscience of white America has been silenced.” Then he went on with uncommon foresight, because he could not yet have known of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was already waiting in the wings of Montgomery, Alabama: “The American Negro needs a Gandhi to lead him,” I. F. Stone wrote, “and we need the American Negro to lead us.” December fulfilled everyone’s needs.

At rush hour on Thursday evening, 1 December 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a forty-two-year-old seamstress at the downtown Montgomery Fair department store, sat down in the first Negro seat of a Cleveland Avenue bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Whether she was annoyed at the insistent Christmas decorations already up, thinking about larger indignities such as Emmett Till’s murder, or simply angry at the repeated and stepped-up harassment of blacks on Montgomery’s buses, she never said. When the white driver turned around and called out for the occupied black seats in the discretionary zone, however, neither Mrs. Parks nor three black men moved. Driver J. P. Blake came back, explaining to his recalcitrant passengers that he would arrest them if they did not yield their seats. The three men moved, but Parks told him to do what he had to. She stayed seated until Blake fetched the Montgomery police, who booked her at the station.

There were many successful improvisations that percolated through black (and white) culture in the fifties, from Mrs. Parks’ emphatic sitting to Little Richard’s ecstatic keening to what Ralph Ellison has called the “wild star-burst of metamorphosis” in his novel Invisible Man (xcvii). In each case, however, it is important to stress that there was much more work below than above the surface. Mrs. Parks was tired that evening from her job, surely, but her exhaustion was balanced by years of organizational homework. Just that summer of 1955, she had been studying political alternatives and interracial living at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Ten-

nessee; as a long-standing member of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church political discussion groups, her temperament, inherited she has said from her father, was activist; and she had been both a youth adviser and secretary for the Montgomery NAACP, whose leader, E. D. Nixon, had recently been trying to challenge the city’s rigorously segregated bus service.

Thus the conventional picture of a civil rights movement igniting spontaneously around the tinder of her passivity is inaccurate. Oppression caused lifetimes of scheming. A hardly incidental example is the time Montgomery bus driver humiliated Jo Ann Robinson, a teacher at Alabama State College who had absent-mindedly sat near the front of a Montgomery bus, in 1949 (Robinson 16). In tears when she quit the bus, Ms. Robinson took over the Women’s Political Council of Montgomery as “prepared to stage a bus boycott when the time was ripe and the people were ready” (17). She and the three hundred other women in her organization were waiting. She has since estimated that before the boycott “twen to twenty-five thousand black people in Montgomery rode city bus... and... about three out of five had suffered some unhappy experience on the public transit lines” (43). These were the people who were waiting for the civil rights movement, like people all across the South and in the North too. It was no single event but the longtime push and pull of institutional racism against a complex response within black culture that initiated the movement. Until 1955, however, the scheming lives among blacks had been largely isolated, impotent, and invisible. At year’s end they came together, gathered power, and marched in public.

E. D. Nixon’s scheming brought most of the principals together. He was particularly skillful in uniting the local black clergy with Mrs. Robinson and her Women’s Political Council, who worked militantly behind the scenes. As early as August of 1955, Nixon had been impressed by King’s speech in Chicago and had told a friend “I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but someday I’m going” to King to get a chance to speak (Rainey 48). But more than E. D. Nixon’s planning was involved in the black Montgomery’s respect to the city’s statutes and the region’s customs. There was also the readiness of the citizenry for change.

Nixon has recalled what he saw when he came out of court with Parks the first day of the boycott: “I’d been in court off and on for two years, hearing different peoples, and very seldom, if ever, there was an acquittal in the black man unless he was being tried. But that particular morning, morning of December the fifth, 1955, the black man was reborn again. . . . I couldn’t believe it. When we got outside, police were standing outside sawed-off shotguns, and the people all up and down the streets were l
sidewalk to sidewalk out there. I looked around there, and I bet you there was over a thousand black people—black men—on the streets out there" (Raines 46-47).

But it was Mrs. Jo Ann Robinson's political group, founded in 1946 by teachers at Alabama State College “for the purpose of inspiring Negroes to live beyond mediocrity” (Robinson 23), that started the idea of boycotting the city's buses. Between midnight the Thursday night of Mrs. Park's arrest and 7 a.m. the next Friday morning, Jo Ann Robinson had written and secretly run off tens of thousands of leaflets on the college mimeograph machine. She and two students had distributed them all across town so that the people would pass them around all weekend. The leaflet told of Mrs. Parks, made its brief case, then ended with its plea: “Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday... Please stay off of all buses Monday” (Robinson 46). They planned to stay off the buses only for one day. When they succeeded the first day in rolling the buses empty, the encouraged community agreed to push principles originally so moderate that they did not even include integrated seating.

Because he was as yet politically unaligned, articulate, and Mrs. Park's pastor, the boycott's Coordinating Committee elected Reverend King to be its president. In its first, improvised, speech at its first rally that Monday night, 5 December 1955, King spoke most presciently. King had less than an hour to consider his words, but his phrases were moving and mature (Garrow 23). “If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love,” he intoned, “when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, There lived a great people—a black people—who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization” (King 63). This early, then, King was consciously cuning his country and beyond.

East versus West, love versus analytical struggle: that was the dialectic in King's personality and advocacy. The synthesis he effected and represented first to the rally crowds, then to the nation at large, was in his particular voice. Recordings still confirm its coal-tar opalescence and its lingering latinate vocabulary, its cadence and balance, its entire amalgamation of South and North, heart and head. Like so many other crucial personalities of 1955—Allen Ginsberg, Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, Little Richard, Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, and Richard Nixon—the voice audibly bears and conveys the pressures of the moment. Of all the remarkable, physical voices of the time, however, King's resolved and bore the most, carried furthest.

Surprisingly enough, the voice of the twenty-six-year-old man in 1955 spoke virtually the same phrases it spoke the night before he died, age thirty-nine, when he said, "It is no longer a question of violence or nonviolence: it is a question of nonviolence or nonexistence." He'd been to the mountaintop, was not afraid to die, when racists bombed his home in 1957. He had been to the mountaintop, was not afraid to die, the night before James Earl Ray killed him in 1968. Racism could do to him nothing it had not already done to his people and to his youth. The way he acknowledged his victimization but refused to play his conventional role touched men and women of all ages and hues. He changed the process of victimization that all of America felt in the fifties into a growing process of passive aggression. To his principled phrases about dignity and love injecting meaning into civilized veins, King remained true the dozen years left him.

Surely King had an individual genius, but part of it was to phrase the rhythms and moods reverberant across the country. His maturity and fullness as a person is thus both remarkable and commonplace. There were many other youths becoming adult, victims refusing victimization, bi players methodically grabbing lead roles, and schemers becoming movers in the fifties. The time was peopled with emerging new forces, both black and those learning heart from blacks. King's martyrdom has inevitably heightened his significance. Except for his martyr's end, however, King's career is also a fifties type, anticipated in song and novel, varied in political and film. Blacks and youths and women and Southerners, individuals a nasse, were leaping limits and coming out of holes. King's deliberate speech was theirs.

The civil rights movement began that early December in 1955 when Mrs. Parks stayed sitting, Mrs. Robinson wrote and distributed her leaflets E. D. Nixon brought them together with the ministers, and King's voice reached out to consolidate the isolated anger in his audience, helping them into the mainstream. The Montgomery bus boycott spawned first the series of bus boycotts that spread across other Southern cities and town during the late fifties, then directly inspired the Greensboro sit-in of 1960 which again in its turn stenciled the South. The antiwar movement, the women's movement, indeed, all the movements for social justice whic people commonly associate with the sixties, have their debts to pay to the movements of the fifties. That was when the civil rights movement experimented with and created organizational strategies that have since succeeded every other insurgent group both within and beyond electoral politics.
The emergence of black culture into American prominence greatly altered the course of American art, balancing and lending it a completeness it had lacked. In addition to the civil rights movement, the other great force black culture unleashed on the land in 1955 was black music, most saliently and salubriously in the form of rock 'n' roll. “Tutti Frutti,” “Maybellene,” “I’ve Got a Woman,” “The Great Pretender”; all these were 1955 releases and represent the real beginnings of rock as a popular form.

Before rock 'n' roll came rhythm 'n' blues. Before rhythm 'n' blues came the blues. The progression had several causes, but the effect was to remake a minority, folk, form into a popular, pop, form. The real and rooted excitement of rhythm 'n' blues music thus prepared some musicians and some audiences (Chicago blacks, initially) for rock during the late forties and early fifties. Rhythm 'n' blues was the hybrid product of Southern, rural, “downhome,” blues and the electric amplifier into which bluesmen plugged when they moved north to Memphis, St. Louis, and Chicago. Muddy Waters, B. B. King, and Jimmy Reed at first needed electricity simply to make themselves heard in the noisier night of the urban club. Then they learned to like—or at least to use—the whine and fuzz, feedback and sustain that an amplifier could create. They began making not only louder but also metropolitans music. Rock occurred as whites and blacks started spreading black music beyond its southside clubs across the whole metropolis and out to the suburbs, too.

Black music moved forward also in jazz. Jazz became freed for esoteric development when rhythm 'n' blues and rock began servicing those parts of the audience that prized primitive basics during the forties, beginning with the likes of Louis Jordan and Jackie McVea. These two were significant, and very entertaining, bridges between the swing jazz style and the sparer combos of rhythm 'n' blues.

The remaining audience cheered the jazz tendency to be continually avant-garde, deliberately speeding, constantly changing. Miles Davis broke his heroin addiction, attracted John Coltrane to his group, synthesized bop and cool jazz into smart soul, and urged Coltrane’s famous “sheets of sound” (which convention incorrectly associates with the next decade). Art Blakey formed with Horace Silver the most significant of his
values once they began sharing the doubts and began feeling the lack of control blacks had long known. Then many parts of the mainstream sped toward black culture deliberately. The alembic of black folk life showed how there was pride to win for those who survived displacement and dispossession. Had not Brer Rabbit and that famous trickster slave, John, and countless other wily figures on the periphery of American consciousness proved so? Yes, came back the answer. Yes, slaves and their descendants had proved expert in kneading feelings of displacement and dispossession into leavened accounts, songs, and tall tales of victory down all their American generations. Brer Rabbit could laugh all the way to his hole that he was back in the briar patch. John could outwit the strawboss, marry the Devil's daughter, and spin her father so fast he fell on his head and died. According to his wife talking to his child, John could outrun Ole Massa masquerading as the Lord himself: "You know de Lawd can't outrun yo' pappy—specially when he's barefooted at dat." When all the white world goes down to its doom, the black trickster survives. Shine, black engine-tender on the Titanic, escapes the racist captain, the captain's seductive daughter, whales and sharks:

And Shine swum on,
Now when the news got to the port, the great Titanic had sunk,
You won't believe this, but old Shine was on the corner,
damn near drunk.

This rich manipulation paraded in the complexity, the constant doubleness, the making much with little in black art forms. It straddled nowhere more clearly than in black music and speech.

The important aspects of black lore and music in American life corresponded exactly with the significance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s improvising voice. Lore, music, and voice signified to American culture the capacity to turn adversity into play through orality. Just as rhythm 'n' blues grew from learning to incorporate the accidents and feedback trash which blues guitars generated when players plugged into cheap Chicago amplifiers, so turning adversity into play is what each of the secular black musics from jazz to reggae has always been about.

Behind all the Afro-American musics there is doubtless an Ur-music, some still-unmapped musical code about the merging of the African inheritance with European scales and instrumentation within the American experience. There is an adaptive genius there. Jazz, ragtime, blues, and rhythm 'n' blues all draw on that elusive source, but the stable form and commonly shared lyrics of blues provide the clearest and most convenient clues to it. Indeed, the persistent influence of the blues on American culture during and since the fifties necessitates analysis of the blues aesthetic and ethic.

The structure and content of the blues, reflecting that original music, indicate the ideals of black culture to which whites were particularly susceptible in the early-fifties slipstream of angst and possibility. Largely through its blues ethic, black culture taught a new generation to document its victimization so dramatically that the act itself became a way of coping with a way of playing within a repeatedly oppressive world.

Scholarship in the late seventies has debunked the old saw about blue; being the taproot from which ragtime, jazz, rhythm 'n' blues, then rock 'n' roll flowered in succession. A stable blues probably did not appear until the first decade of this century. W. C. Handy reported in his Father of the Blues that he first heard it in 1903, in the northwest or Delta region of Mississippi. The earliest evidence of the blues thus dates from some ten or fifteen years after the earliest evidence of jazz, and five years after our knowledge of ragtime. But these dates may well be misleading because while jazz appeared in urban New Orleans, and was accessible therefore to the people who wrote history down, blues players developed their art in the boodocks, in shacks known as juke joints far away from written history. In fact, one rese

Neither jazz nor blues developed until the end of the last century. T

music came then, and not before, because the failure of Reconstruction 1877 forced more segregation on blacks and their culture than they had known even under slavery—when, for instance, blacks had learned a sung European songs and hymns for mutually festive moments. For ti

while after Reconstruction during which jazz and blues developed, ho

ever, there were no racially mutual festve celebrations. Urban black
developed jazz as their own music in a vacuum. Rural blacks developed blues in the even more feudally sealed vacuum of tenant farming.

Originally the stable blues form was popular only very locally. That

the birth and earliest development of the blues was within the bounds a few Mississippi and Arkansas Delta counties, and a few more in East Tennessee. Growth followed the chance movements of professional singers betw
jobs and mates, Saturday afternoon streetcorners to Saturday night juke-
dances across the South—until 1920. Then Mamie Smith recorded "That
Thing Called Love" backed with "You Can't Keep A Good Man Down"
(OKeh 413), which was the first blues record (Tilton 204). But even in 1920
the recording location was Chicago; Mamie Smith was neither from the
Delta nor in its jukedance performance style (she did not even snap her
fingers); and her recording orchestra was white, a dilution that OKeh
rectified on her subsequent records. Mamie Smith ushered in the trend of
vaudeville entertainers performing the blues. The most famous and tal-
eted vaudeville blues singers were Ma Rainey and her protege, Bessie
Smith, both of whom made landmark recordings in the form before its
inventors did.

From its very beginnings, therefore, blues history illustrates the
speedy development of art forms in this century. Just seventeen years after it
certainly existed, the first blues that anyone in the world outside a few
cotton-picking counties along the Mississippi and Tallahatchie rivers could
have heard was already a second-generation phenomenon. These classic, or
jazz, or vaudeville blues recordings by female artists accompanying jazz
orchestras (black or white) are distinct from the original, downhome blues.
Vaudeville blues lyrics are usually highly organized, with development
from stanza to stanza that is thematic and progressive, even narrative—like
a poem, or a novel. That is, they have been influenced by literary aesthetic
standards. Someone other than the usually female singer frequently com-
posed (rather than improvised) classic blues songs. And the bands accom-
panying these women were sophisticated if not urban. This form's enorm-
ous popularity among the black audience, in backwoods and on back
streets alike, skewed the development of the original downhome form,
moving it away from its original looseness toward the tightness impres-
arios thought necessary for the recording studio. Whether it belongs
with blues or jazz, however, the musical accompaniment to the classic blues
is frequently highly accomplished, yielding some of the most interesting
examples of early combo work in black idioms.

Despite the jump ahead that classic blues took, the original form
eventually did achieve documentation. Sylvester Weaver's instrumental
guitar blues in 1923 inaugurated authentic downhome records by blacks for
blacks, but had no voice track. A few obscure recordings exist between 1923
and January 1926, when Paramount finally produced sessions of Blind
Lemon Jefferson's East Texas blues that cemented the trend to what even his
own company called "weird, sad music" (Tilton 113). Thus began the wide-
spread distribution of downhome blues records in urban and rural black

communities coast to coast. These sales represented a burgeoning recogni-
tion of and attraction to the ideals of the black experience in America.
Although this music did not precede jazz, its audience has treated it as the
root aesthetic, as the expression of the place from which they all came, the
place which made them. Hence the name, downhome blues. However, not
until June and November of 1926 did anyone record a blues by a singer from
the Mississippi Delta, where field workers believe the style began. And not
until 1928 and 1929 did Tommy Johnson and Charley Patton record their
definitive, kernel blues style.

Given the nature of American society and white control of the recording
companies, why, suddenly, the appearance of a black music whose
lyrics, ambition, and basic strategies were beyond white ken or condona-
tion? The answers lie within a new black market. Their ongoing migration
north was conveniently clustering southern blacks in Chicago and to a
lesser extent in New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. There-
fore, target markets were ready. Moreover, the post-World War I capacity
for mail-order sales extended this market. Mail-order reached past cities
and towns to the crossroads and remote plantation jukeboxes in Coahoma
and Leflore counties, Mississippi, where record salespeople visited only
reluctantly.

Most important, however, was a significant material difference in
post-World War I technology. As Jeff Todd Tilton reports in Early Down-
home Blues, the radio's becoming available in 1920 provided listeners with
fidelity superior to any on their extant records and players (204). Radio also
supplied constantly changing live programming of white performers. At
this point there were very few black artists on records and none on the
radio. Because whites started listening to the radio rather than to records,
and because there were no black performers on records for blacks to buy,
record sales dropped precipitously. For instance, Columbia's pre-tax net in
1919 was $7 million; in 1921—after the onset of radio—it lost $4.3 million,
cutting its stock to drop from 65 to one and five-eighths. And the largest
record company of the time, Victor, lost more than half its sales between
1921 and 1925, from $51 to $25 million. In their distress, the record com-
panies were forced to turn to the black market. By recording black blues
artists and by assiduously cultivating new black target audiences, Amer-
ica's record companies saved themselves. And the black audience gratefully,
greedily, responded by buying some ten million records a year in the late
twenties, according to plausible estimates (Tilton 205).

Such turnings of record companies to black culture to save themselves,
or, examples of black culture supplying the excitement to save a medium
recently made passé, has therefore occurred twice in this century. It operated first in the twenties, when radio stole the audience from phonograph records, then second in the fifties, when TV stole radio's content. The incident in the twenties is an early confirmation of the law of passé pursuit: record companies added to the racial (thus stylistic) dimensionality of their product only after radio surpassed the fidelity of records and stole their market. Records did not regain their relatively superior fidelity until the thirties. When that happened, the white audience returned, white interests becoming again the primary content, the white market regaining dominance. But the black content and market also remained. That they stayed confirmed the principle of species proliferation rather than Marcus's notion of species obliteration.

When TV created the fifties vacuum in radio's content, perhaps radio turned to black music so quickly because it had learned the trick watching the record companies respond to its own challenge some thirty years before. Both cases, in the twenties and fifties, indicate how racism provided American business a fallback, safety-valve market for its passed media and their entrepreneurial capital. Just so, the West would try with mixed success to use the Bandung Conference countries as an even larger market abroad.

The ace-in-the-hole subculture may be hidden one moment and appear bewilderingly everywhere the next. For instance, downhome blues existed twenty-five years on record before southern blacks and whites—Fats Domino and Little Richard in New Orleans, Elvis Presley in Memphis, Chuck Berry in East St. Louis—discovered how to jump it up a notch, turning the blues' regional appeal into national, even international, anthems.

Before blues and rhythm 'n' blues merged with white forms and voices and themes to become rock, popular culture had offered little more than silliness—"Oh, say, how much is that doggie in the window?"—to organize the values of the mainstream youth culture. Until the penetration of black music into the white mainstream, with recognizable black lyrics and vocal styles, there had been no capacity to create anthems alternative to the pop songs of Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney, and Snooky Lanson. Their "Hit Parade" ethic was the only ethic broadcast. This emphasis on the mode of dissemination is important because there were so many material differences between the way black culture emerged in the fifties and the way it had moved before—as when jazz moved across the racial divide in the twenties. In the fifties, black culture had much greater possibility of becoming mass culture, and in fact it did spread much more widely the second time around. Thus black music's new content, style, form, and rhythm—call it the blues ethic—inserted fresh iconographic elements for black and white performers into the middle decade of the century.

his song had been there all the time...
—Ellison, Invisible Man

A hard question in the aftermath of World War II concerned how American culture might resume. In his Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Tennessee Williams's Maggie posed this question when she reminded her husband, Brick, "life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is—all-over" (44). Along with the nightmare fruits of the analytical tradition, like Nagasaki and Belsen, there was the less radioactive but still pragmatic problem that the metastasis of cities and their communications media were closing off folk resources, one main lode for art and its dreams.

When the smoke cleared after the war, cities and their technology, autos and their asphalt, central casting and its celluloid, advertising and its billboard hype covered the landscape, dampening whatever impulses any remaining folk might have been murmuring. This bottom-up folk murmur had long served as constant choric commentary on the machinations of the state. In its place now was coming the glut of topdown popular culture, produced not by but for the people. Artists trying as they always had to hear the country's heartbeat by listening to its folklore were now like doctors placing stethoscopes against chests baffled by pillows. If folk hearts were beating at mid-century, artists couldn't hear them. Artists heard instead the external noise of the people's barkers and saw their bright electric signs. As early as 1953, in the first of his Maximus poems, written while he was in Mexico studying Mayan culture's ancient antidote to the recent American bafflement, Charles Olson asked:

  o my people... where shall you listen
  when all is become billboards, when, all, even silence, is
  spray-gunned?
  ... when sound itself is neoned in? (2)

Faster than anyone else, it also seemed, the folk were undoing themselves, like Lolita in her novel, by entering into willing partnership with developers who would dissolve their separate identities. By mid-century, few people in the United States would admit to being folk or lower class. With the entire population of the country joining the great middle in fact or
consciousness, America seemed to be losing her folk resources for art and thus her agency of political change, as well. C. Wright Mills, as a left-liberal, lamented this loss of an alternative agency in *The Power Elite* (1956). Daniel Bell, as a right-liberal, claimed it meant *The End of Ideology* (1960). And so it might have been, had the lore of the folk truly disappeared. But it did not, not entirely, in two ways.

First, the position of black culture in the fifties helped demonstrate how contemporary culture might find ways to reclaim the lore that cities and media hid. Second, anticipating an even more blanketed urban future, Americans learned how to transmute the very obstacles to lore—electronic media and city life—into topics for a new lore, not folk this time, but pop: poplore. That second transformation is a topic in two later chapters, “Congeniality” and “They All Juggled Milk Bottles.” The topic here is how the once essentially rural blues ethic became a significant model for the resumption of the increasingly urban and suburban American culture.

Ralph Ellison makes the issue of starting over a central theme and formal property of his novel *Invisible Man* (1952). The young man who tells the story (but never his name) continually plays parts providing only discontinuous identities. Every time he is reborn, every new father figure, or mentor, betrays him. He finally sees that the roles he has played have been external, thus having nothing to do with his intangible and invisible, internal and indivisible self beneath. That he has such a self and that it stems from black culture are the primary discoveries differentiating his latest societal engagement from his fumbling first. By novel’s end, his roots no longer embarrass him, nor does he flee them. Rather, he understands his life as a continuing affirmation of the lore at his source, a testing of both the lore and the proper way to say yes to it, but no to the hostile, dominant world.

From the clear-cut racism of the downhome South to the displaced complexities of the urban North, the invisible youth's story recapitulates his people’s emergence during this century, tracing its geographic course, as well as its psychological history. Winning a scholarship to a Southern black college, the invisible youth hopes he may excel and rise to assist his college president. Instead, the president expels him. Though daunted, the youth continues to New York where he hopes to rise in business. But his letters of recommendation in fact direct their recipients to “keep this nigger boy running.” Now desperate, he takes a job in a factory which actually explodes in his face. Recovering from the explosion and the sinister hospital in which he awoke, he wanders onto the eviction of an old couple, rousingly speaks against their dispossession, is noticed by a communist leader, and trained to be their Harlem spokesperson. Adapting once again, he now hopes to rise as a prominent organizer. In the by now familiar pattern, however, his new “Brotherhood” mentor betrays him as all the others have before. The invisible youth watches his disillusioned followers drop out of the movement and a white policeman kill his best friend.

The invisible youth’s final oration is a stirring eulogy for this friend. It is inspired by the music of the crowd as they march to the service—a spontaneous duet between a euphonium and a baritone voice rising from an anonymous man’s knife-scarred neck. This will be a life-transforming moment for the invisible youth, not least because the song evokes in him latent, folk knowledge. The singer’s “song had been there all the time” the youth confesses, “and he knew it and aroused it; and I knew that I had known it too.” But he himself “had failed to release it out of a vague, nameless shame or fear” of such primitive ways. He thought he had been running toward goals, but was all the while running from the lore of his folk. Listening to the song, however, he says, “I was listening to something within myself, and for a second I heard the shattering stroke of my heart” (332). It took the whole novel long for the youth to lift the baffling pillows of miseducation, cultural interference, political dogma, and his own “shame and fear,” so that he could hear the end which was there all along in his beginning.

In this key second the youth hears that his self connects to others who have no designs on him but do have designs—their own rich lore epitomized in their song—and that the connection is carried in black music. The music in this case, the funeral for the invisible youth’s friend, is the spiritual “There’s Many a Thousand Gone” (also known as “No More Auction Block”). In this eulogy, the youth tells the crowd to go home, which is code for returning to their roots, going downhome. But he also tells them to climb out of the boxes that keep them disengaged. Thus his speech captures the stirring contradictions of the blues ethic. So effective is this speech that it sets off a surreal riot in Harlem that engulfs even its instigator, leading to his final revelation.

White thugs wielding baseball bats chase him through the anarchic riot until he suffers a fortunate fall into an open manhole at the border area between Harlem and white New York. Closing himself up in a basement of a building abandoned significantly since Reconstruction, he mulls over his experience, repeating it imaginatively, then yet again as he reforms it into the narrative he calls *Invisible Man*. The youth holeed off from the world—like black people during the nadir that spawned jazz and blues—grows up to create his blues novel as his folk created the form: “Ontology recapitu-
lates philology." He narrates a story of black experience as well as his own. It recounts coming to self-knowledge, learning by degrees to recognize, remember, and trust the folk vernacular. It is also a parable of reengagement, showing everyone how to resume. It shows how to go on by going home. As such, it moved to solve the crisis modern literature had reached in the years before Ellison's novel appeared.

J. Alfred Prufrock thought at the end of World War I—and the end of his "Love Song," by T. S. Eliot—that the asking of large questions would set him ineluctably apart from his era. Prufrock wondered in his paralysis how he should presume to "Disturb the universe." Neither daring nor disturbing, he drowned in his own sensuous ineffectuality. The invisible man at the end of the next World War does disturb his universe because he realizes that beginning is no longer presumption but necessity, no longer alienating but integrating. Thus the novel's last line is also its largest question, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" With that, he leaves his hibernation hole, resumes social life, and poses his large questions to everyone he meets—including us, via the novel. Like the Brers and bears of folklore, like the blues singers of Saturday night juke joints, he keeps on keeping on, reclaiming his past to make it over as art.

The story is thus peculiarly double. It speaks for the black individual and also the largely white reading audience of the early fifties. It speaks to their experience and of it. Telling how the invisible youth kept rushing eagerly into yet another surely painful, explosive, and shocking trap, this story strikes many readers as excruciatingly innocent. But it is wisely controlled, too, with its obvious patternings, webbed symbols, and allusions to literary and extraliterary sources. Readers are soon aware that they are reading a double consciousness dealing in doubletalk, delighting precisely in its capacity to improvise elaborately at length. These are of course leading characteristics of blues performers at the Saturday night rite. Both this novel and those blues performances stress the latent doubleness in reality: something good may come from something bad; something bad from something good. Complexity lurks in simplicity.

The doubleness also reflects the two sorts of attitudes the youth has toward society as he gathers experience. First, he wants to rise within it. Second, he gradually becomes aware, like so many other fictional characters who follow his wanderings across the postwar American landscape, that he needs to break away from society's clutches. Ellison is performing a delicate integration here. He is signifying on the "twoness" that W. E. B. Du Bois described in _The Souls of Black Folk_ (1903) as essential in the experience of black Americans (who feel always that they are both black and American). And he is making that twoness stand for the new culture of the fifties that is also both conventionally American and deliberately speeding.

Like the blues performances behind and in it, the novel must integrate those central conflicts in its own urges and those of its main character. Indeed, _Invisible Man_ is at least as much about this intellectual and emotional integration as about its social counterpart. But since all these resolutions are difficult to achieve or even imagine, the youth spends most of his time either championing or avoiding his society's dominant creeds. Instead of integrating the central conflicts of his time, as a youth he listens to Louis Armstrong records, soaks reefer, has clairvoyant hallucinations, wires his walls with 1,369 light bulbs, and avoids the grid of conventional expectations that had so driven him before his fall. Will he come out of his hole?

He will as a man, no longer as a youth. His coming out to resolution, to a full manhood, will be the achievement pointed to in the title. He will come out because his novel is a blues book. It is structured like a blues song, based on the blues ethic and trying desperately to live up to the blues, reclaiming its endangered lore for literature. The invisible man might have rested on the telling of his story, might have remained an underground hermit, might have broken away to private places, real or fantastical, as Joseph Heller's _Yossarian_ would do nine years later. He might have run like John Updike's _Rabbit_ did in 1960. He might have gone trout fishing in America, à la _Brautigan_ in 1967. Embittered, he might have preached apocalyptic fire or pushed political revolution, as so many in the meantime wished Ellison had made him do. He might have made a separate peace. He might have remained incomplete, a youth, but he did not.

Instead, he returns with his story to society. Early in the book he emphasizes in the language of lore and rite that "a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring; then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from its shell" (5). This is but the first of innumerable tropes about hibernation, birth, and rebirth in _Invisible Man_. From its beginning the novel addresses the American need to begin again, responsibly borne by tradition.

Just as the novel itself starts with the invisible man asking himself, "What did I do to be so blue?" so it is important to ask how blue is it really? Very. Often called an episodic novel because of its pulses and apparent disconnectedness, or a _Bildungsroman_ because it recounts the invisible man's formation, both these terms coordinate the novel on the same European grid it takes pains to elude and which frequently though not alone oppresses its main character.

Recent critics have also recognized the novel's connection to folklore,
in general, and to the blues, in particular. Stanley Edgar Hyman and Albert Murray, two of Ellison's closest intellectual friends, have both written at some length about Invisible Man as a "blues novel" (Hyman, "American Negro Literature") and "a literary extension of the blues...scored for full orchestra" (Murray, Omni 167). Ellison himself confirmed this attention when he remarked in his introduction to the novel's Thirtieth Anniversary Edition that he began the book when its "ironic, down-home voice...as irreverent as a honky-tonk trumpet" and "persuasive with echoes of blues-toned laughter" disrupted another fiction he was composing (xv). He started Invisible Man knowing he "would have to improvise upon [his] materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis" (xxi).

That metamorphosis is significant because the novel not only simulates and orchestrates blues tones but takes its transformational shape from the ethic behind the tones. The blues ethic is its grammar. The episodes of Invisible Man are as disconnected, repetitious, and similar as the stanzas of a blues song, its themes as reiterative as the lines of a blues song. For all his eagerness to discover his authentic self, for all the existential overtones in this search, for all the rhetoric of individuality in the fifties, the formation in Invisible Man is not of a unique person but a socialized self. The youth hears his own heart when he acknowledges the specific shape of experience that his people developed living in America. The invisible youth's growth into the invisible man is his recognition of his blues self. What is truly unique about both the narrator and his author is the way both of them learn to manipulate and profit from their positions as members of a community.

The knowledge that Invisible Man teaches is the education of a blues song. Both proceed incrementally toward neither didacticism nor overwhelming revelation but toward understanding and engagement. Like the blues, Invisible Man offers its audience not the chance to transcend their condition but the capacity to cope with life's unconditional onslaught. Just as a blues song's opening stanza compactly conveys the singer's story and strategy, the first episode of Invisible Man, its often anthologized battle royal scene, projects the novel's themes and shape. Subsequent episodes elaborate that message, entertaining us more, emphatically repeating the world's evil. They indicate the same epistemology blues songs always express—the gradual dawning of a sufficient strategy for coping with, rather than evading or overcoming, the world.

By repetition of events in patterns as formulaic as those in blues songs, Ellison shows the invisible youth learning to see both the duplicity and the doubleness of things. Pieces of paper that purport to promote in fact
the first of his characteristic cognitions—not yet recognitions—which will pulse as regularly as the summary lines of blues stanzas. He has perceptions about his self and situation that for all their truth he cannot yet absorb because he has not—or has not acknowledged—the conceptual framework to illuminate them. Only when he recalls them at the end, telling the tale, will he recognize their meaning and pattern. Only then will he have learned to illuminate his perceptions by slicing off power from the monopolized power company (read: from tradition, from the establishment).

Back on the rigged rug, he does notice that he "could contain the electricity" (22) and even achieve the requisite detachment to observe as well as feel. He sees a boy heaved onto the mat to dance upon his back while his elbows tattooed the floor. He describes how he himself tried to tumble one of the whites onto the mat, was detected in the subversion and kicked viciously back onto the electric current, to fall as in a dream, fall seemingly for a century, fall out of one time sense into another more surreal. He notices these events but does not acknowledge their meaning. Acknowledgment comes only at his consummate fall into the Harlem manhole. Then he will understand that his particular sort of attention to these events is what makes him so positively blue and his story a novel, if universal, blue. Then he will illuminate his existence with electricity rather than dance victim to its charge, as he had on the battle royal rug. Understanding this positive and patterned side to his position, understanding his possibilities, will make the invisible youth at long last the invisible man.

Still very much a youth at the battle royal, however, he has no frame by which to understand. Such is the consequence, Ellison is clear, of the youth's flight from the lore and knowledge of his culture to the pitiable phrases of his schooling—which the authorities finally permit him to deliver in his speech, the novel's first of many. Its valedictorian mode earnestly reworks Booker T. Washington's epochal remarks at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895 ("separate like the fingers of the hand"), particularly stressing Washington's biblical figure "Cast down your bucket where you are" (Washington reprinted the speech in the fourteenth chapter of Up from Slavery, 1901). Ellison will play changes on this idea during the novel so that, by the end, exploiting one's apparently barren place has real menace beyond its evident meekness—as when, telling the funeral crowd to go "home," he starts the Harlem riot. But at this early point the idea is entirely traditional. Therefore, not until the youth chokes on his own blood still flowing from the battle royal and urges "social equality" when he means to advise "social responsibility" does anyone heed his words and reprimand him to know his place at all times. The elders award the youth a briefcase and a scholarship

the state college for Negroes. Excitedly thanking them, the youth drools body saliva on the leather, "forming a shape like an undiscovered continent." Characteristically still embarrassed by the unacknowledged mess of his experience, he "wiped it quickly away" (26). Although never named, the college he will attend is Tuskegee Institute. Ellison himself studied musical composition and trumpet there from 1933 to 1936, and Booker T. Washington founded it. The youth cannot yet go off to this school, however, because he must first dream the meaning of his experience and summarize his pain, as the blues form dictates.

As in so many other deliberately speeding books that would follow, Invisible Man rejects immediate authority figures, fathers and spurious mentors, for grandfathers—for the traditional lore which prestigious modernism baffles. He dreams his grandfather took him to the circus—but refused to laugh at the clowns—then made his grandson open the new briefcase to read a state document inside. The youth unfolds a series of envelopes, each inside another; "Them's years," according to his grandfather. The final envelope contained not the scholarship but these formulated phrases which fix his image throughout the novel: "To Whom It May Concern, Keep This Nigger-boy Running." The youth awakens with his grandfather's laughter ringing in his ears and "no insight into its meaning" (26). Later, when he is grown and able to recreate these scenes in the novel, able as a thinker to tinker with his experience, he will realize that he himself was the real clown all along.

His grandfather knew the significant guerrilla potential in clowning. That's why he refused to laugh at the circus clowns in the dream. He was temperamentally with them, for they were serious agents of the almost inevitably comic conversion into one's real self. Here, then, is the novel's first and most powerfully intimate representation of the "blues-toned laughter" which Ellison later fingered as the fundamental impulse of the narrative (xv).

In episode after episode of Invisible Man, the elements of this battle royal chapter will repeat themselves. At college, in New York's factory right and political left, even in Harlem, the youth will adopt and be adopted by such surrogate parents as the town fathers at the battle royal. They will make him dance the clown at their whim. They will make him entertain their purposes, not his, nor will he yet suspect his purposes might differ from theirs. Sometimes with their eloquence, sometimes with their intensity, sometimes just with their jargon they will hide from him his actual struggle and turn him against his peers. They will shock him sometimes figuratively but also really—as when corporate doctors try to erase hi
memory in an electroshock coffin while he “fairly danced between the nodes.” (Noticing the rhythm of his spasms, the doctors urge him to “Get hot, boy! Get hot!” [181].) His frequent speeches, until his final one, will always be someone else’s truths rather than his own. The real, if undiscovered, countries of his life will sometimes drool unwittingly out of his mouth. Wherever he goes, mentors and their papers—such as the battle royal scholarship—will define him in ways which inhibit his slowly emerging real self. He will stash all these documents in his briefcase, culminating in the paper Sambo doll that his friend, Tod Clifton, was peddling when the police killed him. This doll showed people as puppets to unseen hands, shuckin’ and jivin’ on invisible strings. Thus it encapsulated much of the symbolism of the story. But neither the invisible youth nor the street audience then understood so much.

Bringing the youth and all his audiences to another understanding is what the novel and its blues structure are about. The novel illustrates at this juncture a facet of the black ethic that is a common denominator of all its local instances, be they blues songs or fictions, dances or jokes. By being stored in community memory and replayed, gestures of all sorts—lines and tales, names and notes, dance steps and punch lines—become double. They become charged nodes. They become representations of meaning beyond the obvious—the way a fish, in the contexts of adolescents discovering sex or early Christians hiding and displaying their faith, can be much more than mackerel. As such these remembered gestures are particularly useful tools for people under surveillance—adolescents, for instance, or early Christians, or slaves’ descendants, or performers of every stripe. Using these tokens, performers make themselves seen and invisible, too. Using these tokens, a tale teller or novelist converts the banal into meaningfulness, even while hiding, as necessary, in the banality. These are the tokens that make apparently accidental reality ritualistic and deliver its inhabitants to their traditional selves.

In their instant of watching Clifton promote Sambo’s features, the crowd simply sees the doll’s smiling surface—“little Sambo, the joy spreader” (327)—and is thus irate when the youth spits on it. The youth, however, is operating reflexively from an understanding opposite to the crowd’s. He sees the doll’s demeaning spinelessness. Unlike his Grandpa, he still does not yet see how the art in clowning hides subversion behind apparent harmlessness. If he sees its function at all, he understands it as supporting not undercutting established prejudice. However, the police do understand the threat, if only intuitively, when they hustle off and summarily assassinete Clifton—Sambo’s spiller—for “resisting reality”...

(349) Likewise, the Sambo peddling infuriates the Brotherhood theorists employing the invisible youth. They call it obscene because its ritual way of working undercuts their declarative methods and united-front pretenses as thoroughly as it mocks the practices of the power elite.

Which is the Sambo peddling scene to be—the peddling of obscenities or a catalyst forcing the invisible youth to know himself in all his particularities? It is both but cannot catalyze without first banalizing. It must minimize its commonness, must matein the audience’s consciousness, before changing it. To set its hooks, a rite must not reveal its barbs, must not indicate that its function is to change people, or even to reorganize their thoughts. Partly, this necessary indirectness is a case of not being able to have one’s cake and eat it too. To have the experience, the audience cannot be reflecting on it at the same time. The reflection and its attendant clarification must follow if they are not to dilute the emotional experience of the ritual action. This necessity for unconscious ritual is particularly pronounced on American shores because of the national hostility to overt ceremony as that which clogged the arteries of antiquated cultures. Whereas older, for instance African or European, cultures “glorize themselves through rituals,” Ellison has written, “Americans tend to require supplementary rites that are more modest, more down-to-earth, and often it is these which serve to give dramatic form to our warmest emotions.” What matters is that these rites not be noticed as rites: “it is precisely in their being regarded as unimportant that they take on importance” (Territory 50).

What importance? They have several, of which two are relevant here. First, rites cluster actions that reveal important truths about what their participants value, that speak especially acutely about the deepest needs—the “warmest emotions”—of the people who practice, so reinforce, the rite. Second, rites enact transfers of power. They cluster around moments of change when control or power transfers from one person or group to another. Thus, most of the community-disciplined performances of black culture, from blues songs to jazz dance, from the dirty dozens to rapping, from telling tales to writing certain sorts of novels based on oral culture and blues ethics—all these are rites, secular rites. They show the culture’s gradations of power. And one way or another their performers know it: Ellison is particularly conscious: “rites are actions,” he has written, “the goa of which is the manipulation of power; in primitive religions, magic power; in the South (and in the North), political power” (Territory 98).

By this principle, the birth of the blues was likewise the birth of a rite. The blues, like other rites, comes on as entertainment—in a club c
backstreet alley—but ends fostering action, understanding, and reengagement. This "familiar music," Ellison’s narrator wrote in his prologue, "demanded action" (10). But this is a puzzling imperative. How can familiar blues demand action? The answer lies in the connections between performers in apparently different roles. Essentially the blues performer is a Sambo, a Sambo is a blues performer, and both are licensed fools who tell the truth to audiences of every color and class.

This is a practice  
As full of favor as a wise man's art.
— Viola in Twelfth Night

In the fifties, the nation was riddled with Sambo rites whose associations, conventions, and license had been ripening since minstrel shows fixed the role in the first third of the nineteenth century. What Sambo represents is doubtless older than the recorded history of Euro-American race relations. But by the middle of the eighteenth century, certainly, English speakers had adapted "Sambo" from the Spanish for mulatto, thereby referring to the mixed-race figure at the bottom of the pecking order of color. The significant doubleness of the Sambo figure thus inheres in the roots of the name. Sambo is etymologically neither black nor white, by definition neither this nor that. Rather, he or she is a figure occupying a middle ground between races. Helped by such etymological solicitations, the Sambo figure developed into the masked figure who shuffled onto the minstrel stage enacting formulaic, protective behavior: yasUH. Ellison has picked a figure and trope that is particularly suited to raising issues of how black foolery may speak for the whole culture. Ellison's Sambo, however, is only one of the Sambo figures that multiplied during the fifties. This space of Sambo spasms probably mushroomed from the time's increasing attention to race issues, which always highlighted the role's usefulness. Equally important for this proliferation of low-dignity figures was the concurrent hope on actors' parts of transcending their role's demeaning features. To emphasize it might mean to turn it inside out and move beyond it even while accepting its protection.

The historical pattern in black performance is broad, having many types and tributaries, but the doubleness of Sambo figures is one common trait. A second is the standoff embrace audiences give their infra dig performers. These two traits are related. Mocking or distancing oneself from Sambo and from blues performers, downhome or classic, are variant responses to the same figure. Both sequences derived historically from the same source. Jazz players' light mockings of blues singers—which is evident in Bessie Smith's records—developed in vaudeville minstrel shows—at the fixing point, that is, of Sambo strategies. For it was in the minstrel show, the most popular form of entertainment in America in the nineteenth century, that the complex Sambo strategy developed.

There, the natty Interlocutor grilled the raggedy endmen—Tambo and Bones, Sambo’s cousins—during the formulaic show’s first part. Cuing from the Interlocutor, vaudeville musicians likewise expressed their distance from the demeaning clowning by their ironic commentary on the staged activities. This glossing of the passing scene by vaudeville and classic jazz musicians was known as “signifying,” a commentary which every successive jazz generation has carried on, and which black lore also voices in sophisticated verbal patterns.

A good example of the way the minstrel tradition taught audiences to respond to blues performers and to the Sambo role in general is audible on Bessie Smith’s “In the House Blues.” Her accompanying musicians are self-conscious about the singer’s simple sentiments and display a flash attitude toward rubes and rural rudiments—perhaps particularly evident during the singer’s moaning last stanza, where Louis Bacon’s trumpet and Charlie Green’s trombone go past complementing Smith’s voice to cartooning it. As urbane jazz musicians, they absorb their primitive sources complexly but simultaneously insist that audiences notice their spit-shined shoes. Historically, supporting players have attached this affectionate putdown to clowns and other low-dignity performers at center stage. One present remnant of the gesture is the whack to the high hat with which drummers in the pit still mark corny jokes from talkshow comics. Such clues importantly indicate the constant labeling of blues performers, both by themselves and by others, internally and externally. They are infra dig either in projected demeanor or manner of audience acceptance, indignity, being the price of their license. Similar indignity permitted the Elizabethan fool and other parasites to speak and sing their truths, too.

Given this wealth of associations attending on infra dig performance patterns in black cultural history, it is appropriate that the Sambo scene catalyzes the whole closing of Ellison’s novel. That is, the invisible you goes below ground after Clifton’s peddling and murder, meets zoot suiters, thus questions the Brotherhood and its whole scientific theory of history, thus confronts Brother Jack’s blindness and rouses the Harlem riot at Clifton’s funeral. Consequently dropping out himself from Broth
erhood politics, the invisible youth becomes a lone actor and speaker of his own private subversions, which he finally knows enough to improvise into his own literary blues. The novel is itself a sort of Sambo rite, but, writ large, a long write and long rite of transformation. During the novel, power moves from others defining a youth to the youth becoming a man and defining himself—not lastingly, not permanently, but tentatively and still open to constantly continuing change.

The Sambo scene does all this in a small version of the larger novel’s process. Like a stanza within the novel’s song, Ellison set it up as early as the battle royal, the novel’s first stanza. There the white observers called the youth “Sambo,” made him dance for coins on their rug, paraded the woman before him on whom he merely wished to spit whereas he later does spit on Sambo, her paper surrogate. In both the battle royal and Clifton’s Sambo-peddling scenes the audience ignores the power relationships so lucidly and obscenely on display — but for opposite reasons: the battle royal audience is too powerful and the street crowd too powerless to admit the social implications. And in both the rural and urban cases the transaction is all the more resonant because of the connotative baggage that clowning and laughing at clowns may trigger in communities that are repressing their unequal power distributions. In such situations clowning is: a way to make money, fawning to surveillance, a double masking and signaling of one’s vulnerable fragility, a way to make others happy, and, through it all, a mockery of the controlling group’s power.

All blues-derived performances share in this swampy ambiguity, perhaps most notably in the sexual clowning and fooling of blues lyrics and in the extreme characterizations performers project along with their stylized sound and words. Chippie Hill, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong, Charlie “Yardbird” Parker, Bo Diddley, Little Richard, even Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee “The Killer” Lewis (who performed memorably during the fifties in a leopard-skin bathrobe): all these performers extended their significance beyond what their often amazing voices and repertoire could achieve by fooling in a Shakespearean shadow area between propriety and promiscuity. Ellison recognized this aspect of black performance, too, with every outrageous performer in his novel’s gallery, from the street-corner Clifton/Sambo to downhome Trueblood, from protein Rinewater and angry Rastafarian Ras to jive-talking Peter Wheatstraw. All are expert at multivalent black performance, but none more so than their author, Ralph Ellison himself.

Ellison based his character Wheatstraw on the real blues singer, William Bunch, from East St. Louis, who recorded and sang under the

name “Peete Wheatstraw, the Devil’s Son-in-Law, the High Sheriff from Hell” (Palmer 115). At the beginning of Chapter Nine, Ellison has him sing a Count Basie/Jimmy Rushing song variously known as “Boogie Woogie” and “Boogie Woogie Blues.” The song has lots of animal imagery, as Ellison cites it (“She’s got feet like a monkey / Legs like a frog” 131), but its recorded versions and the variant Wheatstraw chants in the novel remain relatively polite. The actual Wheatstraw was considerably racier: “Well, the first woman I had,” he sang on one of his slow blues, “she made me get down on my knees / And had the nerve to ask me, ooh, well, if I like Limburger cheese” (Palmer 116). Ellison’s allusion to Wheatstraw is therefore just the sort of ambiguous connection with the taboo to which all black infra dig modes tended. His allusion was as scrubbed or as suggestive as the audience might make it. He mentioned no cheese; he just counted on cheesiness spicing the reference. Some audiences would be in the know and some would not; but the allusion would reach out doubly to tie both together.

Wheatstraw, or Bunch, was one of those performers, like James Joyce or Hemingway in this regard, who tossed around clues on how to understand him. As Hemingway would describe a bullfighter’s economy of motion and grace under pressure in ways that suggested his own aesthetic, so Wheatstraw sometimes sang lines that telegraphed his extra level of meaning. For instance, take these chilling lines recorded in September 1931: “I did more for you than you understand / You can tell by the bullet holes, Mama, / Now, here in my hand” (Palmer 116). Here was a performer ambitious for extra levels of meaning and willing to display his stigmata to any interpretive doubting Thomas. It would be silly to romanticize infra dig performers, but it would be equally mistaken to ignore their scapegoat function. They suffered for their audiences what they sang about, talked about, danced about.

Black performers perfected their vernacular doubletalk because once they sang beyond the single-race, single-class, sealed-off world of the juking, joint they were playing to many audiences simultaneously. Fanning out toward the villages and towns of the South, singers encountered an increasingly volatile and conflicting sense of audience expectations. Then the blues joined all the other black performance forms since the nineteenth century in the American force fields of complex surveillance. There were real differences between the conditions of blues performance and jazz or vaudeville or black theater and dance. But that all these types frequent traveled together and marketed themselves under the rubric of minstrel c “minister” shows (David Evans, Big Road Blues 187) corroborates the shared features. And their most frequent denominator was the especiall
multifarious meaning each developed to soothe the complex tensions it engendered, addressed, and suffered.

Because of the radical uncertainty prevailing in post-Reconstruction southern life, blues performers played to an even more unstable and shifting set of powers than prevailed in other national minstrel traditions, as in mead halls or medieval court, where race was not a dominant issue (though Negroes were traditional sources for fools). Nevertheless, to be a professional fool has always been difficult, primarily because of the performer’s multiple patrons and the relativity of truth. The central comment on this difficulty is in King Lear, when the fool tells his choleric master, “Thy daughters...have me whipp’d for speaking true, thou’ll have me whipp’d for lying; and sometimes I am whipp’d for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o’ thing than a fool” (I.4.179-82). And equally telling is Viola’s remark in Twelfth Night about Feste—especially coming as it does in the midst of barrenage about whom he serves—that to be “wise enough to play the fool/...craves a kind of wit”:

He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time,
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man’s art. (3.1.61-67)

Such were the conditions that might obtain for the historical fool, who must behave like an untrained hawk (haggard), checking every moving feather. If to be a fool was to be proverbially haggard in Elizabethan England, far worse conditions prevailed in the American South following Reconstruction. Such conditions were common for performers but also potential for all blacks until well after the mid-fifties and the onset of the civil rights movement. When the tenant farmer Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer was asked if whites in her neighborhood knew in the fifties that they were treating blacks wrongly, she answered: “Some of ’em really didn’t, ’cause I don’t think they really saw us as human beings. We would smile and that would just fool ’em, that would just trap ’em. Now we have been some of the greatest actors on earth, ’cause we could smile when we would see ’em coming and they’d get about ten feet and we would say—you know it wouldn’t be right to put it in the book what we would say” (Raines 255).

This fooling and acting was what the blues and minstrel performers of the region reenacted as art for their audiences, whose members were themselves practiced performers in Hamer’s sense. Such performance was not political in the sense of consciously hoping to change or directly oppose the era’s and region’s pecking orders. But it indirectly reflected those order and it certainly kept them in consciousness. Its representations of the human order included the political order. And that the blues and the civil rights movement had their greatest successes in the same spots throughout the Delta is doubtless more than coincidence. The blues prepared for the overcoming of victimization, even providing a downhome, passive-aggressive model for the movement’s early ethic of nonviolence.

Say what one will about Gandhi and his Salt March to the sea, blues performers and their audiences knew about the long passive march toward what they needed just by treading between all the watching eyes, some powerful, some powerless. To sing the blues was to negotiate among many publics. The blues performer sang for nickels on a Clarksdale, Mississippi, loading levee on Saturday afternoon, for clear whiskey and smoked ribs at a tenant-shack juke party deep in a plantation that night, sometimes preached or sang in Sunday’s church or social, then slipped over to Lula or Fishtown for the next week’s action. The immediate audience was usually black, but there were variations between the needs of town and plantation audiences, as between street-corner and juke-joint performance styles. Moreover, whites controlled most scenes and hung at the edge of the town circles. They certainly monitored the goings-on at the plantations which they owned and where they pulled the ultimate strings.

Charley Patton and others of the distinguished songsters early and late in this development also played directly to whites in the big houses or social clubs for special occasions—even giving command performances a wayside for casually passing landlords. Both Ellison’s Trueblood scene (Invisible Man, Chapter 2) and James Agee’s moving report early in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (26-31) document this role-playing on demand in ways that indicate the substantiality of the rite. Agee’s scene is particularly apposite because so painfully clear is it how varied the surveillance could be, thus how multidimensional the white audience for black performance can be. And Ellison’s Trueblood scene importantly indicates how internal contrasting the black audience is also. In any case, everyone in the riot realizes at some level usually not conscious how the roles simultaneous collect and cover the social structure of the performance. Collecting it, they bring it to the fore. Covering it, they gird its transactions from conscious scrutiny.

Clowning and masking, then, became a way of transforming constant surveillance, shifting patronage, poverty, and mandatory mobil into an art that appeared harmless even while it cut into and commented all its formative forces. The more harmless it appeared, the more it show
the pressure and superintendence it felt. The trick was to stay in control of one's creation and therefore reside in that excluded middle area which resists concrete interpretation.

As Tod Clifton found out selling Sambo dolls in Invisible Man, to slip out of the shadow area into an identifiable interpretation could be fatal. This was no passing point for Ellison, who, by years later in commenting on the way civil rights activists might need to slip behind, Sambo roles for protection: "the outcome of abandoning the role is frequently tragic, for it leads to terror, pitiful suffering, and death" (Territory 101). Likewise, in the youth's dream at the end of the battle royal scene, his grandfather had "refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did" (26), but began the chapter advising clownish behavior: "overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins" (13). The old man's puzzling remarks put an American twist to Shakespeare's images, and demonstrate how a similar strategy can develop equally along, say, the Tallahatchie and Thames rivers. By the banks of both streams, performers "ministered," to use the Mississippi metaphor, in a similar maw between power and powerlessness. Their lot was to "Live," as the grandfather commanded his charges, and as later rights activists knew, "with your head in the lion's mouth" (15). While the lion thought minstrels were tickling his tonsils, they were stealing some of his power.

Well aware of the covert but significant power of rites in black life, Southern and Northern, Ellison treated it often and richly in Invisible Man. The selling of Sambo, as street theater with mortal significance and power to transform the youth's life, is only one of the novel's zooms to ritual at key moments. Rites of passage and eruption, rites of recognition and identity permeate the work, from the battle royal to the Golden Day and the final riot, with Trueblood, Peter Wheatstraw, and Rinehart only some of its Masters of the Dance. Ellison learned, he claims from T. S. Eliot and "The Waste Land" (Shadow 159), the significance of ritualistic doubleness for the purposes of a novel: barren actions encased in rites permit uncannily fruitful meanings.

Subsequent to Invisible Man, Ellison has spoken steadily of the blues as ritual. He went to lengths in his groundbreaking essays of the fifties, collected in Shadow and Act (1964), to show how blues performers are secular ministers, singling out Jimmy Rushing as a "master-of-the-dance... the leader of a public rite" (237). Calling attention to the "mysterious potentiality of meaning which haunts the blues," and "their ability to imply far more than they state outright" (238, 239), he explains why he wanted a blues structure to hold his novel's blues content. As when folk rituals base Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's holiday comedies, or Faulkner's puberty madness in The Hamlet, Invisible Man also uses the doubleness folk rites provide.

One truly experiences a rite innocently without contemplating its meaning. Should conscious meaning come later, then it is all the richer for the first, unconscious, experience. Cesar Barber, who has thought best about the way Shakespeare used folk rites in his festive comedies, noticed a rhythmic pattern both in their performance and the audience's perceptions. Both performers and perceivers proceed "through release to clarification," he wrote, and the plays therefore serve functions similar to those of the rites they supplanted historically and fulfilled aesthetically (Barber 4, ff).

"Through release to clarification" is finely descriptive of the blues as a ceremonial form, enacted in Saturday night juke parties, and perfect for Invisible Man, a literary reinscription of the folk form. The natural holidays Shakespeare drew on, as his culture was becoming rapidly urban during Elizabeth's reign, had developed during Medieval centuries, so were enriched by time and varied by region. Much more quickly, but in just that way, tenant-farming blacks developed their own distinctive ceremonies during their isolation between Reconstruction and the civil rights movement. The nadir generated blues, jazz, and their attendant rites much in the same way that the material differences of the fifties generated a distinctive aesthetic, ethic, and attendant vernacular rites in the national culture. In both cases, there was a deliberate speed, a willed adaptation of the cultural climate to the altered material reality.

Chief among these African-American rites were the Sunday morning gospel service, with its distinctive preaching and singing, and the secular frolic on Saturday night, the weekend's central eve. They have a clear connection perhaps properly understood as one extended rite: the weekend safety valve. The Sunday experience fed on the Saturday excitement—closing it off, chastising and clarifying it. And Invisible Man comments on both, linking them in one spectrum. The novel shows orality as their common trait, and establishes its narrator as a budding speaker. It parodies black preachers in blind Barbee at the book's beginning and unprincipled Rinehart toward its end. In short, Invisible Man followed, glossed, and made compact the complex structure of feeling that a juke-party blues performance must have raised in its audience.

The novel also expresses the rhythmic pattern by which rites teach and change their participants. The lyrics of blues songs follow a rhythm of depression and control, disengagement and engagement, psychologica
pain and its adequate mastery. Critic Cesar Barber generalized these elements as release and clarification, and Albert Murray particularized them as the blues and their stomping. Ellison achieves this rhythm when he disrupts both his novel's and character's calm growth with violence. The battle royal, Trueblood's volcanic story, the Golden Day, the Liberty Paint Company explosion, the police murder of Clifton and the invisible youth's spearing of Ras during the Harlem riot—all these, and more, stutter the story. They are reminiscent of Richard Wright's active fictions, of the razors and floods and kicking mules in blues songs. They disrupt his plans and depress the youth. But they are only a fraction of his novel.

The important remainder is in the quiet links which hold such violations together. There in the modulation, engagement, and sufficient articulation of his pain, the youth balances his violent disruptions into a blues rhythm. If the explosively memorable pieces of the novel are gems, the rest of the narration links, sets, and frames their sparkle. In vivid scenes, events break out of the youth's control; these moments happen to him. In the links, he regains control of his story partially as protagonist and, more thoroughly, as narrator; he stoms the memorable moments into place; he happens to them. Thus, clarification occurs in his life as well as for readers attending to it.

This linking process is as much a part of the blues structure of the book as are its explosive moments, dialogues, and diatribes. Indeed, they may have been more important to Ellison (Territory 53) because they show the youth becoming articulate, gradually learning to think for himself, seeing through his victimization and doing something about it. Ellison used the basically conservative tendency of folklore here in a radical way. By having his invisible youth follow blues repetitions to their incremental recognitions, Ellison made him into a figure who overcame the despair riddling the works of such modern predecessors as Eliot, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dreiser, and Wright.

Ellison was consciously going against such modern models in the novel, he says in his introduction to Invisible Man. Unlike Jay Gatsby, Clyde Griffiths, Joe Christmas, Quentin Compson, Jake Barnes, or Bigger Thomas—all victims of the times and troubles in the century's first half—the invisible youth would sidestep social forces. Specifically, he runs from the white men and their clubs during the Harlem riot, then has a fortunate fall out of their clutches into the manhole he will inhabit, allowing him to think over his predicament. This accident well fits the author's intention to write a novel that would show a “subtle process of negating the world of things as given in favor of manmade positives” (xix). Ellison wanted his youth, "like Brer Rabbit and his more literary cousins, . . . to snatch the victory of conscious perception from the forces that overwhelmed them" (xx). And to the extent that he does so snatch, he helped create a distinctively different aesthetic for the American novel since the fifties.

The simplest way to put it is to say that the links between excitement are the novel's equivalent to summary lines in blues stanzas; in them, the youth becomes a man. His growth follows the dictates of the novel's blues structure. Until Invisible Man, black fictions had not yet delivered such a full vision of maturity, because they had neither studied nor followed ruthlessly enough their folk traditions. James Baldwin noticed part of this point just months before the publication of Invisible Man. Writing about Richard Wright's Native Son, Baldwin claimed that Bigger's estrangement from his family, friends, and community in Wright's novel creates a climate of anarchy and unmotivated and unapprehended disaster; and it is this climate, common to most Negro protest novels, which has led us all to believe

—Baldwin is writing this in December 1951—

that in Negro life there exists no tradition, no field of manners, no possibility of ritual or intercourse . . . . But the fact is not that the Negro has no tradition but that there has as yet arrived no sensibility sufficiently profound and tough to make this tradition articulate. (“Many Thousands Gone” 28)

That the invisible youth's crucial "second," when he hears black traction sung at Clifton's funeral and thus hears his own heartbeat, corr during the song "There's Many a Thousand Gone" (341) is surely important in this connection. Responding to the Jamesian echoes in Baldwin's remi ("no field of manners. . . ."), Ellison proves like Constance Rourke bef him that there has indeed been a usable past. It has been as available a relevant for black writers in the lore of their community as it has been generally true for every writer, every citizen. Everyone is from somepl everyone has a tradition.

Ellison stated this principle directly in the early sixties, at a seminar "culturally different youth":

The children in question are not so much "culturally deprived" as products of a different cultural complex. . . . If you can abstract their manners, their codes, their customs and attitudes into form expression, if you can convert them into forms of art, if you can
stylize them and give them many and subtle ranges of reference, then you are dealing with a culture. People have learned this culture; it has been transferred to them from generation to generation, and in its forms they have projected their most transcendent images of themselves and of the world. (Territory 68)

Ellison, along with diverse others of varying profundity and toughness, in music and politics, from Bo Diddley to Martin Luther King, Jr., did articulate those rituals and intercourses, did stylize and abstract them, did convert them into forms of art, rhythms, tropes with subtle ranges of reference. They did, therefore, prove a black tradition in the mid-fifties.

In Baldwin’s terms, these varied performers individually and together composed a “sensibility sufficiently profound and tough” to articulate their tradition and teach it to the world. It is as difficult, now, to suppose a time when customary perception hid that black tradition from everyone as to imagine when consensus claimed Americans had no usable tradition setting them off from the European inheritance. There is always a usable past, as there is always a usable present. The problems are knowing where to look and staying open to the news.

The American mainstream still owes its unpaid debt to fifties black culture for showing paths through their mutual thicket of troubles. To those who would listen, the blues ethic discovered how to mine and kindle the deeply buried lodes of energy in its history. That Ellison wanted to lever this energy up for all is clear from his novel’s last line: “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?” It was the postwar period and he would show everyone—blacks, novelists, Americans—how to come out of the hole.

For Ellison the idea was to return to the sustaining lore and traditions that preceded and—he demonstrated against the grain of his time—were succeeding modern despair. When he discovered literature at Tuskegee Institute in the middle of studying trumpet, Ellison later reported, “The Waste Land” seized my mind (Shadow 161). He found ritual the organizing basis for modernism. He also saw how the longing in modern writers for the putative completion they attributed to ancient culture led them astray of their own time. Nevertheless, Eliot’s poem staggered Ellison, by his own account driving him back through American literature seeking answers to the poet’s riddles and paralysis, searching for the sources of the poem’s greatness, which he has always saluted in print. But Ellison is a particularly cagey man and Invisible Man is no simple extension of Eliot’s poetry—as deliberately speeding culture does not simply extend modernism.

“I learned a few things from Eliot, Joyce and Hemingway,” Ellison has told interviewers, “but not how to adapt them” (Shadow 174). He learned about lore’s importance to art from these modern mentors, but he came to
NOTES

PREFACE

1. I cite Dr. Johnson's phrasing from the second edition (also 1765) of his eight-volume Shakespeare (28). F. R. Leavis used this phrasing—deliberately instead of the first edition's deliberatively—as the epigraph to his first chapter in The Great Tradition (9).

One MATERIAL DIFFERENCES

1. Written in 1942, the poem itself has seemed to fuel the hibernation thesis, except that its exhortation to surrender to "the land of living" and create its vernacular stories, art, and enhancements was precisely the creed the fifties did espouse. Frost's sort of out-of-favor modernism found fruition beginning in the fifties, as will become clear in chapters three and four below.

2. Carl Davidson popularized this term in talks he gave during the late sixties, although neither he nor his SDS mates may have coined it. Since it attempted to democratize energy consumption, the concept was galvanizing at the time. But because it ignores any complementary idea of stewardship for future generations, and is naively indiscriminate about sorts of energy, the "post-scarcity state" concept is too present-oriented. There can never be plenty of energy for the ideal future, which is a long time.


4. Frank photographed The Americans during 1955-56, but published the volume almost exactly like Nabokov published Lolita, first in Paris (1958) then a year later in the U.S., and for the similar reason that the land of Frank's topic only reluctantly admitted his apparently negative images of itself.

5. The full remark appears on a postcard Kerouac sent Robert Frank: "Dear Robert—That photo you sent me of a guy looking over his cow on the Platte River is to me a photo of a man recognizing his own mind's essence, no matter what." Frank printed the message on the page facing his photograph in The Lines of My Hand.

6. No word "Interstate" until 1968, says Webster's—but what then did I drive on when I
Two

DELIBERATE SPEED

1. Earlier figures in this line would include the vaudeville and Ziegfeld Follies comedian Bert Williams, as well as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.
2. The fullest gathering of the primary material about Till is Stephen J. Whitfield's A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till.
3. The accounts of this event have reached mythic proportions. Their sanest recounting is in Garrow's opening pages, and in Branch, pp. 128-34. I have supplemented these versions with the oral accounts Raines collected.
4. Leonard Feather: Davis "was the first to make use of moodal themes, a development later associated more closely with John Coltrane but actually going back to... when Coltrane was a sideman in Davis' group" (226). For a fuller, accessible explanation of this issue, see Martin Williams' "How Long Has This Been Going On?" in Jazz in Its Time.
5. These John tales are from Hurston pp. 74, 51-58, 75-78; her definition of John is useful:

Jack or John (not John Henry) is the great human culture hero in Negro folk-lore. He is like Daniel in Jewish folk-lore, the wish-fulfillment hero of the race. The one who, nevertheless, or in spite of laughter, usually defeats Ole Massa, God and the Devil. Even when Massa seems to have him in a hopeless dilemma he wins out by a trick. Beer Rabbit, Jack (or John) and the Devil are continuations of the same thing. (485)

6. These lines conclude one version of the toast, "The Sinking of the Titanic," from Abraham's Afro-American Folktales (283). He gives several variants to the toast, and many like it, in Deep Down in the Jungle.
7. In an epigraph to Word and Object, Willard Van Orman Quine is responsible for making public James G. Miller's maxim that "Ontology recapitulates philology."
8. I wrote about characters breaking away from social patterns in American literature of the 1960s in "Breakaway," particularly pp. 300-306.

10. The minstrel tradition in America is related to the vaudeville show but preceded and succeeded it. That is, during the period leading up to and following from the Civil War, the minstrel show achieved its enormous success. It came then to dominate the vaudeville show, which absorbed it. Because of this association, the two terms tend to merge, as in the label "vaudeville blues," which is a synonym for jazz or classic blues sung mostly by women with jazz combos or orchestras; these blues songs developed as part of the minstrel entertainment in vaudeville shows.

Before the growth of the vaudeville institution in America, however, there were black minstrel entertainments and skits. And the minstrel troupe persisted after the decline of the vaudeville tradition in the twentieth century. These minstrel troupes continued in ever more

Three

OUT OF THE HOLE

1. These lines doubtless lurk as a source for Ginsberg's opening line in "Howl," written four years later.
2. For Joan Crawford, see "Joan Rawshanks in the Fog," one of the most wonderful sections of Ghosts of Cody, pp. 275-340. For The Three Stooges, see pp. 300-6.
3. Baldwin wrote in his introductory notes to Blues for Mister Charlie, "the germ of the play is that of Emmett Till." (2). Two of the stories in Newsweek appeared 12 September and 3 October 1955. The first identified the weight around Till's neck as a cotton-gin pulley, the second called it a fan; one looks through these stories today for a single detail that individualizes the picture, but it remains entirely in amber clichés: Till's mother, Mrs. Mamie Bradley, was a Chicago civil servant; the jury were mostly farmers, all white, all male; Carolyn Bryant, from whom Till bought his gum, was "an attractive, dark-haired mother of two"; the eulogy in Chicago included Christ's words: "For as much as ye have done unto one of these, my little ones, ye have also done unto me."
4. Black woman: Berry was originally calling "Maybellene" "Ida May," after the country song "Ida Red," a standard to which he had added his own touches; he changed the title at the behest of producer Leonard Chess. Berry insists that the new name was racially neutral, taken from a third-grade schoolbook story called Maybelle 

That Berry believed in his autobiographical symbolism is clear in his autobiography, there he

"B"