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Jazz Black and White
Part IV

In the late summer of 1831, in Virginia, a man named Nat Turner led "the only effective, sustained revolt in the annals of American Negro slavery," as William Styron put it in the author's note to his novel based on the incident. During this insurrection, Turner and his followers killed 55 white persons. Turner and 17 of his followers were captured and hanged. His body was delivered to doctors, who skinned it and made grease of the flesh. For some years, at least one man carried a money purse made of leather tanned from the skin.

While he was awaiting trial, Turner made a seven thousand word confession that was published in a pamphlet of 20 pages. The man who took the confession, a lawyer named Thomas R. Gray, and the six Virginians who verified it and passed sentence of death on Turner seemed completely baffled by the revolt. Gray wrote of the confession:

"It reads an awful, and it is hoped, a useful lesson as to the operations of a mind like his, endeavoring to grapple with things beyond its reach. How it first became bewildered and confounded, and finally corrupted and led to the conception and perpetration of the most atrocious and heart-rendering (sic) deeds. It is calculated also to demonstrate the policy of our laws in restraint of this class of our population, and to induce all those entrusted with their execution, as well as our citizens generally, to see that they are strictly and rigidly enforced."

There is dark irony in the condescension of the comment that Turner endeavored to understand things beyond his reach. For it is Gray who endeavored to grapple with things beyond his reach; it escaped his comprehension that Turner and his followers and their ancestors had endured torment and provocation enough to drive anyone mad. Further, Gray's comment reveals that attitude on which slavery was based and justified: the unquestioned belief that blacks were some sort of higher form of ape. He wrote, "No acts of remembered kindness made the least impression on these remorseless murderers."

Acts of remembered kindness? When one is in no position to refuse it, even a kindness is condescension.

The idea of inherent genetic difference was one of the cornerstones of slavery. The English political economist and statistician Sir William Petty (1623-1687), one of the founders of demographic and economic statistics and also of the Royal Society, hypothesized gradations among human groups. Petty's background was amazing. He'd studied medicine at Leiden, Paris, and Oxford, and had been a seaman, physician, a professor of anatomy at Oxford, a professor of music, inventor, surveyor, and member of Parliament. His views were taken seriously. He was an advocate of religious toleration, yet emphasized physical differences of the races according to anatomy, paying particular attention to the hair, lips, noses, and bones of black Africans. He said that they differed in their "naturall manners" and the "internall qualities" of their minds.

Another Royal Society member of the period, a surgeon named Charles White, took note of ways in which, he said, blacks resembled apes. He wrote of their skull capacity, length of arms and legs, body scent, and shorter (he said) life span, and suggested that like some animals they had superior hearing and sense of smell and, interestingly, better memory.

Growing up in Tidewater Virginia, the future novelist William Styron was troubled even in boyhood by the racial division of Southern society, its incomprehensible contradictions, injustices, repression, and cruelties. He was drawn to and fascinated by black culture, including its music, as indeed many Southerners have been. He wrote, "I felt (an) anxiety about my secret passion for blackness; in my closet I was fearful lest any of my conventional racist young friends discover that I was an unabashed enthusiast for the despised Negro. I don't claim a special innocence. Most white people were, and are, racist to some degree but at least my racism was not conventional. I wanted to confront and understand blackness."

So, curiously enough, did I, but for a completely different reason. Growing up in Canada, in the Niagara Peninsula of Southern Ontario, where there was almost no black population, my only perception of blacks and blackness was jazz, and the only blacks I ever even saw were men with shining musical instruments whose autographs I shyly but very determinedly sought. They were gods to me, Duke Ellington, Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Count Basie, Lester Young, Jimmie Lunceford, and all the others in my private pantheon.

My fascination with jazz contributed to an interest in the United States and to my decision to move there. Thus it helped determine the direction of my life. Styron's interests led to his writing his novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner,* one of the most remarkable works of imagination in American fiction.

By the time it was published, in 1967, I had a prodigious number of black friends, most but by no means all of them musicians, and felt I had, for a white, a much more than ordinary insight into the American black culture, including its comedy, which at that point was completely unknown to the vast majority of Americans. I remember nights of seeing Moms Mabley from the wings of the Regal Theater in Chicago; an evening in a South Side nightclub watching Nipsey Russell and Redd Foxx exchange hilarious insults while Art Farmer explained those references that were outside my experience. Yet the Styron book came as a shock. The persons we know in life, even our most intimate associates, are always to some extent opaque, but those we encounter in fiction are transparent. We can enter by imagination into their lives and for a while even live them.

As Styron himself says, his Nat Turner is a fiction. The

character could be nothing else, since so little is known of the real man and even of the events of his insurrection. The book is, as Styron states at the outset, "less an 'historical novel' in conventional terms than a meditation on history."

The horrors of slavery, and of the forms of discrimination that succeeded it, are dramatic and obvious enough: the packed slave ships, the floggings, brandings, casual mutilations, the hangings. One becomes, in Shakespeare's term, "supp'd full with horrors." Horror compounded becomes abstract, as in the fire bombing of Dresden: like huge sums of money or the distances to the stars, it becomes incomprehensible. We are incapable of understanding, much less accepting, the millions of Cambodian deaths resulting from the United States' effort to get out of the morass of Viet Nam. The photos of great piles of skulls tell us nothing of the lives and final agonies of those who inhabited those crania. What Styron did in the book went far beyond making the reader aware of the physical enslavement of its protagonist: he evoked his emotional and spiritual enslavement, debasement, and humiliation, and ultimate consequent dementia, and yet failure of the surrounding society to conquer character. He did this by an ingenious device, one that at one point would influence my own writing.

He juxtaposed the thinking of his character with the speech in which he hides, the "Yes, marse" posturings of a man who does not dare reveal his intellect. Styron's Nat Turner has, in contravention of the law, learned to read. His thinking is literate and lyrical. Thirty-one years old, he says to a pimple-faced white guard of 19 in his jail cell: "Marse Kitchen, I'm hungry. I wonder if you could fetch me a little bit to eat. Kindly please, young mastah . . . . Just a little piece of pone."

Twenty years after Styron wrote the book, when I was researching *The Will to Swing*, my biography of Oscar Peterson, I came across tapes of radio broadcasts Oscar made in Montreal when he was nineteen. Slavery may have been gone, but its legacy was not. The Uncle Tom language Oscar was forced by the script to use sickened me. I took an interview Oscar had done in later years in which he described, in specific and eloquent terms — and Oscar is nothing if not eloquent — the training and mental processes he was going through at that time and I intercut it with the script materials of those broadcasts. The effect jolted people. One of Oscar's close friends, who is black, and who was reading the manuscript for me as the book unfolded, said, "It's awful, it's embarrassing, and don't change a word." Oscar said that the scripts were more than humiliating, they were insulting. But he had a goal, a determination to achieve some real clout, and put up with them. I have seen his eyes mist as he remembered those days. To some extent he was going through an experience like that of Styron's Nat Turner: the true life of the mind and the false life of the mask. That's how valid Styron's novel was — and is; it is still an electrifying book.

The Confessions of Nat Turner got glowing reviews, and Styron received an honorary degree from Wilberforce University, an important black university in Ohio. The president of Wilberforce thanked Styron for the book, and the author gave a brief talk at a ceremony in his honor. He had no hint of the calumny about to be heaped on him. Within a year, a book appeared bearing the title *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*. Styron was said to have "a vile racist imagination," to be a man "psychologically sick" and "morally senile."

In essence the attacks asked how a white dared to write intimately of the black experience, even to put himself inside of the protagonist's skin by doing so in the first person singular. The fact that all art is artifice, a series of devices and accepted conventions, didn't enter into it. The first person singular is commonly used, and almost universal in detective fiction. In real life people never think through or set down on paper clear and structured narratives of their experiences, but that never bothers us when we read tales thus told. Nor, for that matter, are we disturbed when we read fiction in the third person in which the writer presumes to tell us the thoughts of all his characters. Fiction is by its nature an act of narrative intimacy, whether in first or third person. (Among literary forms, only lyrics and verse are commonly written in the second person.) The irony is that it was the black writer James Baldwin, a friend of the Styron who had made his notes for *The Fire Next Time* while living in Styron's home, who had urged him to make the leap of imagination and write the Turner story in the first person.

In an afterword to a 1992 paperback edition of the book, Styron writes, "Baldwin was wrestling with his novel *Another Country*, which deals intimately with white characters, and we both ultimately shared the conviction that nothing should inhibit the impulse that causes a writer to render experience which may be essentially foreign to his own world: it is a formidable challenge and among an artist's most valuable privileges. Baldwin's determination to pursue this course aroused the ire of many militant blacks, who saw such a preoccupation as frivolous and a betrayal of a commitment to the black cause. He stuck to his belief though his conscience and his persistence brought him rebuke and bitter alienation. My attempt, of course, was an even greater effrontery, and after *Nat Turner* was published, Baldwin told an interviewer most accurately: 'Bill's going to catch it from black and white.'"

In other words, the white man should not write about a black man because the former has no soul and cannot understand one who does; the black man should not write about the white man because the latter has no soul and is not worth the waste of time required to comprehend him. If such views were universally held among blacks, this would amount to an astonishing resegregation of the country, this time not of schools, soda fountains, and buses, but of the mind.

More than 20 years after it appeared, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* has gone largely unread by blacks. It is on an index of

forbidden books. Some of the attacks on it sound as if the writers had not read the book. Indeed, when in the mid 1980s, the New York Times Book Review asked a number of writers to make a list of "Books I Never Finished," Paule Marshall was quoted as saying she had never even started *Nat Turner,* having been assured that it was racist.

There is one major point that all these black writers overlooked or were incapable of seeing. They did not examine, perhaps could not examine, the effect of the book on a white audience. Black writers are preaching to the choir; Styron is not. No other work of fiction has ever so illuminated the horrors of chattel slavery in America to a white reading audience.

High on the list of white works that attempt to come to terms with the black experience only to encounter obloquy are *Porgy and Bess* and *Show Boat.*

I first became aware that at least some blacks are hostile to Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* when, during an evening in the company of the late pianist Calvin Jackson, I asked him to play one of the songs from it. With a meaningful chill in his voice, he said, "I don't play anything from that score."

A commonly encountered attitude is that George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward had no business writing an opera about blacks because they were not black. Todd Duncan, who originated the role of Porgy, defended the work, pointing out that it is an opera. And, he added, there were not in those days too many roles for opera-trained black singers like himself. (There still aren't, for that matter.) And many major black jazz performers, singers and instrumentalists alike, have found the score a rich source of material.

Gershwin's compositions are probably played by jazz musicians more than those of any other composer. Miles Davis, whom no one ever accused of being a Tom, made a magnificent album with Gil Evans from the *Porgy and Bess* score. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong recorded the songs from it in a memorable album, and various other black singers, including Sarah Vaughan and Nina Simone, have made selections from it powerful elements in their repertoires, particularly *I Loves You, Porgy.* (Few persons know or have even heard the full score. They know songs from the score, but not the score, which is a work of genius.)

Show Boat preceded *Porgy and Bess.* First presented in 1927, it was based on a novel by Edna Ferber. It had a magnificent score by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II. Revolutionary for the time, with an integrated plot and a serious, indeed tragic, story, it was closer to opera than to the strings of light sketches that had characterized the New York musical stage until then. And some of its characters were black.

In October, 1993, *Show Boat* was revived in a production that originated at a new performing arts center in North York, a city contiguous to Toronto. It caused a storm of controversy; or more precisely a single woman caused the storm. A Jamaican named Stephanie Payne, a trustee of the North York school board, vowed to destroy the show, calling it racist. She had apparently never seen a production of it. Almost immediately the newspapers devoted huge amounts of space to the controversy. On March 19, 1993, the Toronto Star gave nearly a full page to it, under the general heading "Is 'Show boat' racist hate literature?" with pro and con viewpoints. A little over a week later, on March 27, the paper devoted a full page to the discussion. Along the way, there were shorter stories in all three of the city's dailies. The fact that the viewpoint of the show is staunchly anti-racist and on the side of its black characters somehow got lost in all the fervor.

Stephanie Payne kept up her attack. She introduced a motion to the North York Board of Education to denounce the show. The Toronto Star reported, "Payne, who is black, said she particularly introduced a strong motion because she and several black community leaders have not yet been allowed to see the songs and script of the musical." In other words, a minor school board member from a Toronto suburb assumed to herself national and international rights of censorship.

Soon members of the black community were aroused — at her. Several wrote letters demanding that the newspapers stop reporting her complaints as protests from the black community. The protests, they said, were coming not from the black community but the Jamaican community, which, some said, knew nothing of black history in Canada and the United States.

Wrote one: "I am a person of color, an immigrant of 20 years and, above all, a proud Canadian, who has long been engaged in voluntary work with visible minorities.

"Jerome Kern is loved around the world .... I know many friends and acquaintances of color in Canada and around the world who feel uplifted by *Show Boat.*

"Paul Robeson's *Old Man River* did a great deal toward developing meaningful sympathy and constructive concern for the blacks in the United States. This is no Uncle Tom stuff.

"With music, song, and humor, Kern continues to do far more than narrow-minded bigots and their grating ill-considered comments."

The producer of the new *Show Boat* was Garth Drabinsky. And on a nation-wide television news show, Payne finally said, echoing Wynton Marsalis, "Most of the plays that portray blacks or any other ethnic group in a negative way is (sic) always done by a white man; and always usually a Jewish person is doing plays which denigrate us."

That did it. The Toronto Sun carried an editorial condemning Payne. On March 10, she made an apology of sorts: "My purpose . . . is to try and apologize for remarks that I made, which can be correctly construed as anti-Semitic." It was bizarre, since it seemed to be an admission of anti-Semitism. And then she vowed that she would "stop" the staging of *Show Boat,* apparently never having heard of freedom of expression in

a democracy.

She did not succeed. She and perhaps 150 other persons, many of them the children of the real protesters, picketed the opening night in October. Crossing the picket line was Lincoln Alexander, then lieutenant governor of the Province of Ontario. Alexander is black. The show was given rave reviews, and the newspapers were filled with letters from the black community praising it, many of them finding comfort in its portrayal of blacks victimized by the white society around them.

One of them, a man named Carlton O. Watson, wrote:

"I attended with several members of the black community expecting to see a racist production. Racism does exist, but not in this show. The show is wonderful, well worth seeing, and is void of any racial stereotypes.

"Many of the protesters, however, are guilty of racism themselves by trying to turn this into a black/white/Jewish issue. Let us not forget that when it comes to racist targets, blacks and Jews are usually interchangeable at the top of the racist's hate list . . . .

"Members of the black community, *Show Boat* is not the problem. Do the intelligent thing. See the show before forming an opinion. I am sure you will leave the theater seeing *Show Boat* for what it really is — great entertainment."

Payne and her pickets faded away. She had written one of the most curious chapters in the emerging history of anti-white racism, with its undertone of an even more vehement anti-Semitism. She was not alone in her thinking, however. A month after she began her attack on *Show Boat*, dozens of black students stole the entire press run of the Daily Pennsylvanian, the newspaper of the University of Pennsylvania. They disliked a conservative column in the paper, the only conservative column. A few months later, in November, not long after the North York opening of *Show Boat*, black students at the University of Maryland stole 10,000 copies of the Diamondback, the university's student newspaper, leaving behind fliers saying, "Due to its racist nature, the Diamondback will not be available today — read a book!"

All concept of democratic dissent and discussion is abandoned. Payne and her doppelgangers at the Universities of Maryland and Pennsylvania apparently have never heard of Voltaire's statement, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Or if they have heard of it, they have not understood it; or if they have understood it have dismissed it. It is, after all, Eurocentric.

The conclusion to be drawn from *Show Boat, Porgy and Bess*, and *The Confessions of Nat Turner* is that no white man can or should even try to write about black characters, since whites lack the intellect, sensitivity, talent, and "soul" to do so effectively.

By this logic, Verdi should not have written *Aida* because he was not Egyptian, Puccini should not have written *Madame Butterfly* since he was neither American nor Japanese; Corneille shouldn't have written *Le Cid* since he wasn't Spanish, and Shakespeare should not have written *Hamlet* since he wasn't Danish, *King Lear* since he wasn't Scottish, and *Romeo and Juliet* because he wasn't Italian; Howard Fast shouldn't have written *Spartacus* since he wasn't an ancient Roman; the German Jewish Mendelssohn should not have composed the *Scotch Symphony*, the Russian Tchaikovsky should not have written the *Cappiccio Italien* and that other Russian Rimsky-Korsakov should not have written *Sheherazade* since he wasn't an Arab, the German Brahms should not have written his *Hungarian Dances*, the Hungarian Bartok should not have written his *Rumanian Dances*, and the American Aaron Copland should not have written *El Salon Mexico*. And, of course, Jessye Norman, Kathleen Battle, Martina Arroya, and Leontyne Price should never essay European opera or lieder, since they are not white Europeans. Andre Watts should never play Rachmaninoff or Debussy, nor should any black American write string quartets or symphonies or any other music in European forms, and they most assuredly should not ask for jobs playing in or conducting symphony orchestras. Finally, Wynton Marsalis should never have recorded the Haydn and Hummel trumpet concerti, since black Americans did not "invent" that school and style of music.

The absurdity of this reasoning is patent. But it is precisely to this absurdity that the policies and statements of Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch, and others of their persuasion lead.

The inversion of all this, the idea that white musicians should not — indeed, cannot — play jazz, growing in virulence in recent years, is one of the most pernicious in the history of American aesthetics. The writer W. Royal Stokes refers to it as "the separatist school of thought that has been making its way into jazz." James T. Maher, one of the elder statesmen among the writers about American music, refers to it as "genetic jazz."

Stokes wrote recently:

"A number of musicians, white and black, have in the past several years voiced to me their own displeasure over the tendency of some black musicians, and their supporters, to look at the music as the preserve of the African-American component of our make-up as a society and as a culture." He cited a comment of Whitney Balliett, reviewing the Lincoln Center jazz program in 1991. Balliett concluded an essay on Marsalis in the October 14, 1991, issue of the New Yorker by saying:

"It appears that (Marsalis) is reviving not only the older music but also the reverse racism popular among black musicians in the fifties and sixties. Just six of the fifty-four performers used this week at Lincoln Center were white. Blacks invented jazz, but nobody owns it."

The Royal Stokes comments appeared in the Winter 1992-93 issue of the quarterly of the National Jazz Service Organization, based in Washington D.C. and headed by Willard Jenkins, its executive director. Jenkins, who is black, wrote for that issue a

front page editorial on Jazz at Lincoln Center.

After praising the positive accomplishments of Wynton Marsalis and his associates, Jenkins says:

"All that aside, there is indeed room for spirited discussion and outright criticism of the presentations of Jazz at Lincoln Center. The most cogent quibbles have to do with the sense of narrowcasting which seems to permeate the whole Jazz at Lincoln Center programming philosophy. Point of fact, while we recognize the need for Lincoln Center's jazz program to proceed in slow, incremental steps (this current season being only the program's third), there is no clear sign . . . that a gradual evolution towards expansion of the program's stylistic vision . . . is even the remotest possibility.

"Case in point is the issue of commissioned new work. Granted, the third season . . . has finally moved a tad beyond the compositional charms of the program's artistic director (Marsalis), who garnered the lion's share of the first two seasons' commissioned concerts. However the two most recently executed commissions went to two of (his) close musical associates, Terence Blanchard and Roy Hargrove — stylistically remaining within the artistic director's comfort zone — questionably begging nagging questions of cronyism.

"That same issue of cronyism comes into play when one considers the musicians selected to perform repertory works . . . . Marcus Roberts may have been more comfortable with the group of relative jazz youth chosen to play this season's . . . Thelonious Monk big band re-creation . . . .

"As long as Phil Woods, Johnny Griffin, Steve Lacy, Ben Riley, and Eddie Bert (to name but a handful of big band Monk mates) still walk the earth, one would think the Lincoln Center faithful . . . deserve the best, most seasoned, most representative recreation of that repertoire. Fact is the selection of artists from the shallow pool of Marsalis-mates . . . for nearly every tributary concert . . . need not always be . . . his associates."

Jenkins points out that the latest Monk concert featured among the soloists every member of Marsalis' ensemble at that time "and again no Lacy, no Woods, no Larry Ridley or Paul Jeffrey (the latter two having been members of Monk's final quartet)."

Jenkins continues: "As for questions of racism, it's true that none other than African-American artists have been commissioned and in the vast majority of cases, presented. Why are those questions only asked when something appears to be 'too black' for certain folks' comfort zones? While it is provocative to ask such questions — relating to perceived racial imbalance in programming, and certainly valid, one wonders why when the shoe is on the other foot those same questions are not asked from the other side of the coin by those same critics; or why we're still dealing with racial issues nearly 100 years into this supposedly most democratic of musical aesthetics in the first place. Would these same questions be as pointed if someone like Gerry Mulligan or Phil Woods were artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, and they were utilizing a majority of African-American artists?"

The parallel is improper. First, when things have been too white, critics such as Leonard Feather and Nat Hentoff have indeed raised questions. Questions assuredly would be raised if Woods or Mulligan used all-white orchestras in such a situation. Sure-footed up to this point, Jenkins suddenly succumbs to his own conditioning.

The world of jazz is increasingly politicized. Peter Watrous in the New York Times put it nakedly: "Wynton Marsalis has further solidified his position as the most important jazz musician working, both politically and musically."

Since Jenkins occupies an influential position in the politics of jazz, it is important to try to understand his thinking.

On August 16, 1990, Jenkins wrote me a letter. First of all, he accepted at face value the statement of Miles Davis about white musicians who had come to prominence in black groups using only white musicians in their groups. I have already discussed this point: Miles was wrong. Or lying.

Then he says, "I have always wondered why the superior Canadian big band, Rob McConnell's Boss Brass, was forever all-white. Surely there must be any number of qualified black Canadian jazz practitioners."

Jenkins was taking a leap into theorizing about a country of which he — in common with most Americans, black and white alike, it must be said — knows virtually nothing. The black Canadian experience is different than the black American experience. Technically, slavery existed in Canada over a long period of time, but the last slave was sold in Canada on August 25, 1797. Slavery was abolished in what is now Ontario by act of Parliament on May 31, 1793 and in what is now Quebec in 1834 by the general order banning it throughout what was then the British Empire. It was never a pinion of the economy, and in 1804 there were 142 slaves in Montreal. Of them, quite a number had been brought to Canada with Loyalist refugees from the American Revolution. In a book titled *Blacks in Deep Snow* (J.M. Dent and Sons, Toronto, 1979), Colin Argyle Thomson of the University of Lethbridge notes that a slave was "in at least one instance, tortured to death" in Canada. One known instance. Compare that to the United States.

Canada's first substantial black population, something under a thousand persons, arrived in Halifax where the British resettled them after rebellions in Jamaica toward the end of the eighteenth century. The next group came to Canada on the Underground Railway, fleeing to freedom there and most of them settling around the Windsor area. Among their descendants were Kenny Kersey, Buster Harding, and Lou Hooper, all of whom went to the United States. Almost all of the few black jazz musicians Canada has produced have emigrated to the United States. Darren Barrett, one of the best young black

Canadian jazz players, went to New York on a Canadian scholarship to study with Donald Byrd, and has settled there.

An outstanding Canadian black musician is pianist Wray Downes. Rob McConnell remarked to me that he would love to have Wray Downes in the band. But Wray lives in Montreal, and works mostly there; Montreal is five hundred miles from Toronto, where the Boss Brass is based. Another outstanding black Canadian jazz musician is guitarist Sonny Greenwich, who is enormously admired by the Toronto musicians. But he too lives in Montreal.

Oscar Peterson is a little older than I, Rob McConnell a little younger. But we are roughly the same generation, and so are most of the members of the Boss Brass. In 1949, the year Oscar made his debut at Carnegie Hall, Canada had about 18,000 blacks in a population of about 13 million. There were (and are) more blacks in the United States than whites in all of Canada. One American in ten was black, but only one Canadian in about 722. Even today, after a substantial black immigration from the Caribbean, there are only about 19,000 blacks in Toronto, a city of about three million. Colin Argyle Thomson notes in his book: "At no time in Canadian history has the black population exceeded two percent of the population." Much of the present black population of Canada came voluntarily to the country, as immigrants, from the Caribbean, and few among them have any interest in or understanding of jazz. Darren Barrett, whose parents are from the Caribbean, is an exception.

So no, there is not a large body of first-rate black musicians in Canada and Jenkins, in his letter to me, gives a classic example of reaching a conclusion without examination of the pertinent information.

Interestingly, his question about the personnel of the Boss Brass came not long after he and I had watched two big bands at the Chicago Jazz Festival, one of them led by McCoy Tyner. One of the bands was all black. The other contained only one white musician. Jenkins saw nothing untoward in this.

Lest it seem that Willard Jenkins is one with Stanley Crouch, Herb Boyd, Amiri Baraka, and others of their persuasion, I must note that he is fully as supportive of gifted young white players, including Geoff Keezer and Benny Green, as he is of young blacks such as Marlon Jordan and Roy Hargrove. I have studied his writing thoughtfully, and can attest that it is not racist. It is, however, highly racial, and he actively seeks reasons to take offense, even where there are none.

In this he does not amaze me. I am amazed instead by those blacks, Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry among them, who have had every reason to do so and didn't.

Soon after high school, Clark Terry traveled with Ida Cox and the Darktown Scandals in the Reuben and Cherry Carnival. After finishing a tour, the group went south from Pennsylvania to its winter quarters in Jacksonville, Florida. Clark said, "I was hanging out with William Oval Austin. We called him Fats Austin. He was a bass player. We had no warm-weather clothes. We went to the five and ten cent store to buy some T-shirts. They cost about 15 cents in those days."

The store was crowded and Austin bumped into an elderly white woman who used a cane. She started screaming, "That nigger tried to knock me down. Kill him, kill him!" Clark and his friend edged their way to the door, and as soon as they were outside began to run. A huge, screaming mob formed behind and ran after them. They came to a construction site, where a new round building was being erected. Fortunately for them it was a Saturday and the site was deserted. They ran into it. Clark pulled Austin down into an excavation and the two young men covered themselves with mud and debris. They could hear the crowd running above them. At last a silence descend[illegible] "But we stayed buried in that mud till dark," Clark said. At last, cautiously, they crawled out of the excavation and left.

It is one of numberless incidents of that kind I have heard, variations on an ugly theme. But it remains especially vivid in my mind, and it is one reason Clark's magnanimity of spirit amazes me. Clark is passionately opposed to racism of any kind.

Some years ago he formed a big band to teach music to boys in Harlem. "I started that band out of my own pocket," Clark said. "It was the forerunner of what turned out to be the Jazzmobile. I got all those little kids together and bought instruments for them. One of those kids is now head of the jazz department at Boys High School in Brooklyn.

"We were rehearsing at this little cold-water walkup flat on 125th Street. There was a very talented kid named Fred Wayne who wrote me about 60 charts. We had a full big band, and I was teaching these kids how to read.

"Don Stratton at the Manhattan School of Music made it possible for us to use the school. Here we've got kids coming off the corner, and for the first time they've got access to classrooms, to blackboards, to music books, to tapes — real college atmosphere.

"After a while I had to go out a lot. I had Don and a few other people to help me teach the kids while I was away. Attendance started falling off. I found out that one kid was a sort of ring leader in the hate-Whitey movement. He had instigated the kids to not pursue the program any more.

"I came back. Don Stratton said, 'Things are not going too well, Clark. I notice a tremendous drop in attendance. I kind of suspect what it is, but you'll find out.'

"I called a little meeting and came to find that that's what it was. One of the little dudes had the nerve to say to me, 'Man, we don't want Whitey teaching us about *our* music.'

"There they were with university facilities, instead of climbing up those damned stairs, five flights to rehearse in a cold studio.

"I just gave it up. I just completely forgot about it. I don't even know where the library is, I got so disgusted.

"A long time ago, I had a problem with this when I had a big

band at Club Baron. The band was about fifty-fifty. I had people come up to me and say, 'Man, what kind of shit is this, bringing Whitey up to Harlem?'

"I'd say, 'Well man, Harlem is known as the home of good jazz, and I thought it was up to somebody to bring good jazz back here. In doing so, I picked the best cats I can get, and I don't listen with my eyes.'"

Oscar Peterson encountered opprobrium when he hired Herb Ellis as the guitarist in his trio. "We," he said, meaning himself, Herb, and Ray Brown, "really became a close-knit unit. Our friendship became even tighter, and we were criticized for having a white person in our group.

"I would get hate letters in Chicago about Herbie Ellis being in the group — from both races, by the way, just so everybody gets their rightful recognition. I'd get hate letters about, 'What is that white cat doing in the band? He can't play nothin' — he's white.' Whatever that had to do with it, I don't know. I'm black, and I think I can play, and if you bleached me, I'd still be able to play the way I do right now."

Clark Terry puts it vividly: "My theory is that a note doesn't give a fuck who plays it, as long as he plays it well."

Repeatedly we have heard that jazz is about the black experience. Yet if a black American composer writes a string quartet, there is no reason why he should filter out his personal experience. Art is about personal vision, and no art as much so as jazz. This has been true since Louis Armstrong — and, which is often overlooked, Earl Hines and Sidney Bechet — defined it as the art of the soloist.

The great pianist and bassist Don Thompson thinks it is impossible for a player not to have an individual tone. He is probably right. A musician's tone is the consequence not only of his personal experience, emotional makeup, and thought processes, but of physical characteristics. The shape of your fingertip will affect the tone you draw from a guitar. When Eddie Harris asked Lester Young for tips about his embouchure, Prez said, "I can only tell you about my mouthpiece in my mouth. I can't tell you about your mouthpiece in your mouth."

For anyone from one culture habitually to imitate the characteristics common to another renders his art false. It is on this rock that more than one white jazz player has foundered, producing music that is neither his own nor anybody else's. The Anglo Saxons have contributed almost nothing to jazz, and very little to the evolution of European concert music either. There was no Anglo Saxon presence whatsoever in American musical theater. The white jazz musicians have been almost entirely (and Roger Kellaway is one of the exceptions) drawn from the American population pools of Italian, Jewish, Irish, Scottish, and German. Interestingly, the music of most of them reflects their national roots. So Irish was the music of Zoot Sims that the late Judy Holliday used to say he played "Barry Fitzgerald tenor."

You can easily observe a Puccini-like lyricism, a truly Italian melodicism, in the playing of many Italian-Americans.

Given the musical character of the two lands of origin, the question "What would an American jazz pianist of mixed Welsh and Russian background sound like?" deserves the answer: Bill Evans. Yet Bill had explored every aspect of jazz. One night late at the Village Vanguard, when the audience was almost all gone, he began to play blues. His gorgeous golden tone was abandoned. He was playing hard and funky, dark Southern blues. After that final set, he said to me with a grin, "I can really play that stuff when I want to." And so he could.

But why should he? It wasn't him. He had deeply digested Bud Powell, Lennie Tristano, Sonny Clark, Oscar Peterson, and other influences: Benny Golson told me that the first time he heard Bill, Bill was playing like Milt Buckner. But out of it came what we think of as Bill Evans, one of the most distinctive, original, and finally influential forces in the history of jazz, and one of the most original in the whole history of music.

The black xenophobia in jazz is antithetical to this. But its implications stretch far beyond it. On an overpopulated planet, the strife for turf control is growing ominous. There are countless people who do not want reconciliation between religions, races, nations, even regions.

In the Middle East, extremist Israelis and Palestinians strive to destroy the peace accord that offered a glimpse of possible stability. We have lived through terrorism between militant Catholic and Protestant elements in Northern Ireland. We have watched Czechoslovakia break into separate ethnic units, fortunately without bloodshed. But the most hideous bloodletting has attended the breakup of Yugoslavia. Canada may well break down into two nations, although the indications are that it would do so peacefully, even amiably. In Chiapa, Mayan Indians have rebelled against the Mexican government. In Germany, neo-Nazis kill foreign workers. In Sri Lanka, the separatist guerrilla war of the Tamil minority grows more bloody. The Soviet Union has broken down into its component nations, and within them there is new fighting to break these smaller countries into ethnic units. The Armenians war with the Muslims. There has been ghastly internecine warfare in Africa. The Lombardy League presses to separate the north of Italy from the rest of the country. In Los Angeles and other cities, gang-bangers kill to control turf, and there is a deep animosity between blacks and Koreans.

What is happening in jazz, then, is an echo of all this. When resources, including space, what the Germans call *Lebensraum*, grow scarce and the ambiance ominous, men and women tend to cluster with their own kind in suspicious and sullen union against the outsiders. This has been exacerbated in jazz by the shrinkage of opportunities. Once there were countless jazz clubs all over the country; there are few now. And there was a great deal of studio work, in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago to

augment the incomes of jazz players and give them a base of operations. This included a great many black musicians, although white musicians formed the preponderance of the studio pool. Nonetheless Clark Terry and Hank Jones and others worked regularly at the television networks and on studio recording sessions. In Los Angeles, many jazz players worked in sound-track recording for the movie industry.

But most of that work is gone now. It has been replaced by synthesizers, and a generation of television producers and executives raised on rock music doesn't know good music from bad anyway, or electronic moanings from real music made by real musicians. And there is the ubiquitous Muzak in restaurants, as well as the new computer-driven grand pianos in the lobbies of fancy hotels, producing bland standards while the ghosts of vanished jobs sit at the keyboards.

In an increasingly academic jazz world, what remains is a kind of hot-house jazz dwelling on the past, supported artificially by grants and other aid, like the most precious and obscure classical music, and programs to "save" jazz.

Discussing Wynton Marsalis in his commentary titled *The New Dark Age* for the March-April, 1991, issue of Bass Player, the bassist Anthony Jackson wrote: "We are witnessing no less than a cultural parallel to Germany in the 1930s, with a megalomaniacal 'arbiter of good taste' undertaking a redefinition and reclassification of a country's expressive potential, ostensibly to weed out contaminating influences." His point is not as exaggerated as it might, at first glance, seem. Richard Wagner was a virulent anti-Semite who wrote that Jews had no place in Germany's artistic or musical life. Wagner left much of his estate to anti-Semitic causes, and his example and influence contributed substantially to the rise of the Nazi movement.

"Consider this," Anthony Jackson, who is black, continued. "A well-known pianist was recently discussing a record deal with a major label. The deal was rejected, whereupon the company's representative, either unaware of or unconcerned about the possible consequences of revealing information clearly intended for insiders only, told him why: 'First, you're too old. Second, you're not black.' Does this mean we should dig up Benny Goodman's grave and hack the corpse to pieces? What about Scott LaFaro's?"

It is not, then, only whites who are concerned about this neo-racism. Aside from questions of justice, it can in the end only alienate the audience.

Jazz has always had a largely white audience. As Johnny Griffin said in an interview for the Dempsey Travis book *The Autobiography of Black Jazz*, 'Let's hope that those faithful white connoisseurs of jazz will hang in there long enough for the people back in the hood to get the message." The continuing insult of whites by Wynton Marsalis in his policies and public statements and by his friend Stanley Crouch in his writings sooner or later is bound to turn that audience off.

Marsalis is always invoking the names of the gods, particularly Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. It is instructive to consider what they have had to say on the subject.

In 1970, Louis Armstrong told the British journalist Max Jones, "These people who make the restrictions, they don't know nothing about music. It's no crime for cats of any color to get together and blow. Race-conscious jazz musicians? Nobody could be who really knew their horns and loved the music."

In 1945, Duke Ellington told a reporter from PM, "Jazz is like the automobile and airplane. It is modern and it is American . . . . The Negro element is still important. But jazz has become part of America. There are as many white musicians playing it as Negro . . . . We are all working together along more or less the same lines. We learn from each other. Jazz is American now. American is the big word."

In 1965, he told Nat Hentoff, "In the 1920s I used to try to convince Fletcher Henderson that we ought to call what we are doing 'Negro music'. But it's too late for that now. The music has become so integrated you can't tell one part from the other so far as color is concerned. Well, I don't have time to worry about it. I've got too much music on my mind."

In his 1973 autobiography, Ellington wrote, "Although his background seemed to give the black musician the edge, because environment is intensely important as a shaping factor, jazz was so contagious that many white musicians were infected by it and grew close to the black soul. Today, jazz is international music that is played everywhere in the world."

There are, clearly, those who do not want to use jazz as an art form celebrating the human spirit. There is an element in jazz that craves retribution and revenge and would use jazz as a weapon of exclusion and insult to get redress. Black America has already had massive retribution. Nat Turner's uprising did not fail, if its purpose was retribution rather than revolution. The Virginia legislature, William Styron points out, was on the verge of abolishing slavery. Had Virginia done so, the rest of the south would have followed. The insurrection so terrified Virginia that it tightened the laws of slavery instead. The subsequent events led directly to the Civil War. Nat Turner's revenge was massive: 617,000 white dead out of a population that was then quite small.

Jazz is at a crossroads, and the roads intersect at Lincoln Center in New York.

One of two things is true. Either jazz has evolved into a major art form, and an international one, capable of expressing the whole range of human experience and emotion. Or it is a small, shrivelled, crippled art useful only for the expression of the angers and resentments of an American minority. If the former is true, it is the greatest artistic gift of blacks to America, and America's greatest aesthetic gift to the world.

If the latter is true, it isn't dying. It's already dead.

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