

THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE ON AMERICAN SHORES:
INFLUENCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN CONTACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAZZ

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past century, musicians and researchers alike have argued how specifically “African” or “European” jazz is. Some camps stand by a clearly African origin of Jazz with its common elements of syncopation, polyphony, and presence of “blue” notes and raspy timbre elements that cannot be traced to Western music, while others who attribute jazz a more Western parentage often cite non-African elements such as a written music tradition and the use of Western harmonic structure. An inconsistency in these arguments, however, emerges in some styles of jazz; for example, early jazz, blues, and ragtime were not always “swung.” This inconsistency, among others, might be attributable to European music, to some styles of African music, or even to Native American music, a possibility that has been largely overlooked by jazz scholars. Jazz is often characterized by the “African” elements of oral transmission, repetition, and the centrality of rhythm; these elements, however, are also characteristic of most Native American musics.

Despite the debates above, the exact origins of jazz remain obscure. One point that scholars most often agree on is that, regardless of where jazz’s musical roots lie, the very beginnings of this American music were synthesized by the “African experience on American shores” (Gerard 136), which involved cultural contact with both Europeans and Native Americans during and after slavery and into the period when jazz started to develop in cities such as New Orleans and Chicago. The living experience of Africans in America, in at least some

parts of the country, was often collective with Native Americans. These two groups frequently shared blood, culture, and sometimes even the experience of slavery together.

The shared African American and Native American history can be seen not only in remaining musical and cultural remnants in New Orleans (often considered the birthplace of jazz) but also in the heritage of many of the jazz “greats,” such as George Lewis, Don Cherry, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Baby and Warren Dodds, Oscar Pettiford, and Don Pullen, who all claimed both Native American and African American heritage.

In such a project, methodology and interpretation are difficult tasks. Because race, identity and cultural negotiation were key elements in this contact and the subsequent formation of jazz, I utilize Winton and Corr’s model of “Hybridity, Mixture, and Racial Separation” as a starting point for this project. With few exceptions, little research has been done on the Native American influence in the development of jazz. Ron Welburn is one of the few who has done significant work on the Afro-Native American identity in the development of jazz (Welburn, ed. Brooks 2002). In addition, several jazz artists have generated crossover albums, including Jim Pepper, Don Pullen, and Catherine Dupuis.

This thesis does not seek to “prove” anything new about jazz. Rather, I examine some burning and perhaps unanswerable questions regarding jazz history. Is it possible that even jazz, a traditionally African American music, has a little bit of Seminole, Creek, or Cherokee embedded within it? Is it at all likely that the Native American stomp dance may partially originate from Africa or at least influenced by Africans? This ethnography explores both the historical and musical “common ground” that I believe could have influenced America’s native music: Jazz.

DEDICATION

This thesis belongs to many. I dedicate this work to my daughter, Mahaska. May she always remember her ancestors and be proud of her heritage. This thesis also belongs to my grandmother and my father, who kept their heritage alive through stories and songs, even when it was dangerous. This story is not mine to dedicate, as it belongs to the ancestors. Mitakuye Oyasin.

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PREFACE

This project has been a long time in the making, and has been fueled by many inspiring people. I came to study Native Americans in jazz during my undergraduate program at Tiffin University almost by chance. I had been studying my heritage extensively and was introduced to Jim Pepper's *Pepper's Powwow* and Don Pullen's *Sacred Common Ground* by fellow jazz musician Justin Binek, who knew that I had Native heritage and a scholarly interest in jazz history. From there, I was inspired. I started to think that surely, there must be some sort of Native connection in the development of jazz. Like many of my African American friends, my grandmother's people, including my great grandmother, had been slaves too, and most of my African American friends had at least one thing in common with me – Native heritage.

I decided to write a short paper on this topic for a jazz history class and was surprised at the many connections I found between Native Americans and African Americans. However, there were very few works on Native American connections in jazz. By luck, I stumbled across the website of Native American jazz musician John Carlos Perea. I went out on a limb and contacted him to see if he thought there was a connection. He responded affirmatively, and a nine year quest was borne to connect two of my biggest passions: my Native American heritage and my love for jazz.

I was convinced that I would not unearth enough information for a small project, let alone a thesis, but as I traveled to powwows and spoke with jazz musicians, it became apparent that I would put my energy into writing about the *possibility* of a Native American influence in jazz. I've spoken with many people since 2000, among them scholars, powwow drummers, elders, storytellers, and many people of both African American and Native American descent, including jazz legend John Hendricks, who revealed his very fresh Cherokee lineage and the inspiration it

has provided him. During my fieldwork, I have heard stories with the common thread of “connectiveness”: of slavery remembered by elders, of hard times, and of how music and ceremony have served as a safe place and a common ground for cultural sharing.

The Hogan Jazz Archive and its archivists, Bruce Raeburn and Lynn Abbott, have been a phenomenal help in this project by providing me with interviews of jazz greats and countless resources I never knew existed. A leading scholar in the field, Ron Welburn, has also provided ideas and inspiration to my thesis. His work on Native American identity and Natives in jazz has been far-reaching and groundbreaking. As a jazz artist with Native heritage, I thank him for his contributions and for shedding long-awaited light on Native Americans in jazz.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One, an introduction, discusses race and identity in Colonial North America. I make use of Whitten and Corr’s “Model of Racial Hybridity” to illustrate how the colonial racial hierarchy brought together Native Americans and African Americans in a shared experience that would last for more than three centuries. Chapter Two is a discussion of slavery in the Americas, with particular emphasis on North America. I also explore slavery in Native America and introduce both Patrick Mingos’s work on the African presence in the Trail of Tears and the participation of Native American tribes in their own “underground railroad.” Chapter Three, “A Second Africa,” discusses the move of many African Americans to Indian Territory, a trend that Miles and Holland describe as an effort that may have been rooted in a desire to reenter tribal life and find a “second Africa.” In Chapter Four, I occasionally use italicized font to represent my experiences and reflections during field research in New Orleans. This chapter investigates the history of Native American and African American cultural contact in New Orleans, which can be seen today in the Mardi Gras Indian practice. Chapter Four also looks at contemporary Native American - African American jazz

identity through interviews with Ashlin Parker, a New Orleans jazz trumpeter, and with Greyhawk Perkins, a Native American blues artist who runs the Native American section of the New Orleans Jazz Festival. Chapter Five attempts to unravel musical and cultural practices that may have served to facilitate musical sharing between Africans and Native Americans. Chapter Five also explores the Native American heritage of many important jazz figures. Chapter Six concludes the thesis and rearticulates the themes presented in the text.

Throughout history, jazz has been both a catalyst for change and a space for integration and memories of what jazz musician Alva Nelson calls “the African experience on American shores” (Gerard 136). I have no doubt that the rich history of jazz blossomed out of the African American experience, and that Western Europe and many other cultures have also had an influence on its development. My aim has not been to dispute this rich history, but rather to point to another history that has been neglected by history books: that shared by both Native Americans and African Americans.

With over two centuries of interaction and cohabitation during and after slavery and all the way through the antebellum period, it is hard to imagine that these two groups of tribal peoples did not share musical experiences and ideas. It is hard to conceive of America’s native music, jazz, developing without some influence from Native Americans. It is my hope that the reader of this thesis walks away with a realm of possibilities and an enriched sense of history, not only of Native Americans, but also of African Americans. These two cultures have collectively contributed so much to modern American society, and I believe, to jazz. “Mitakuye Oyasin” is Lakota Sioux for “all my relations,” and that is precisely who have supplied the inspiration and the historical events for my project. This thesis is not about “proof,” but rather about possibilities. I cannot think of a music that represents the realm of possibility more than jazz.

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

“Before you can talk about the nature, the very soul of music, you need to talk about who created it and why. . . . Jazz is the product of the African’s experience on American shores”
-Alva Nelson, Jazz pianist (Gerard 136).

For the past century, musicians and researchers alike have argued how specifically “African” or “European” jazz is. Some camps stand by a clearly African origin of Jazz with its common elements of syncopation, polyphony, and presence of “blue” notes and raspy timbre elements that cannot be traced to Western music (Gridley 2006). Scholars who attribute jazz a more Western parentage often site non-African elements such as a written music tradition and the Western harmonic structure utilized in jazz music. On the other hand, a conundrum emerges for some styles: Although maintaining the African elements of orality, repetition, and centrality of rhythm, early jazz, blues, and ragtime were not always swung (Raeburn 2009), thus negating one major element often considered “African.” In addition, orality, repetition, and centrality of rhythm are also essential elements of Native American music. These inconsistencies make pinpointing some early elements as belonging to one group or another highly problematic.

Thus, the exact origins of jazz remain obscure. One point that scholars most often agree on is that, regardless of whether or not jazz’s musical roots lie in Africa or Europe, the very beginnings of this American music were synthesized by the cultural contact that took place during slavery when people from vastly different cultures were brought together both culturally and musically in a collaboration that would continue to be evident in cultural and musical remnants for generations to come. Therefore, this thesis cannot begin with Dixieland, ragtime, or even the blues as the starting point for the jazz experience. Instead, the story must begin on

the shores of the “New World” and include a second tribal society whose contributions to jazz and American culture are often overlooked: Native Americans.

Aside from the initial contact during slavery and the subsequent Native American involvement in the Underground Railroad, a sizeable African American and Native American migration took place to both urban areas and to the area designated in 1834 as “Indian Territory.” In fact, similar migration patterns of African Americans and Native Americans stretched into the first half of the twentieth century (Miles and Holland 2004). Cities such as New Orleans were hubs for both displaced peoples, especially before and around the time of the development of early jazz forms. Some remnants of this contact, such as the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, helped to set the scene in New Orleans and elsewhere for the birth and development of jazz. The shared history between African Americans and Native Americans can also be seen in the heritage of many of the jazz “greats,” such as George Lewis, Don Cherry, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Baby and Warren Dodds, Oscar Pettiford, and Don Pullen, who all claimed both Native American and African American heritage. Today, New Orleans boasts a visual reminder of the African American and Native American connection within the New Orleans Jazz Festival, where a section is devoted to Native American heritage.

Is it possible that jazz, a traditionally African American music, has a little bit of Seminole, Creek, or Cherokee imbedded in it somewhere? Is it at all likely that the stomp dance may be partially from Africa or at least influenced by Africans? This project will explore both the historical and musical “common ground” that I believe could have contributed the birth of America’s music: Jazz.

The Model: Whitten and Corr's Hybridity, Mixture, and Racial Separation

“Geronimo as a Banjo Player.

Geronimo and his renegade Aache will remain at Mount Vernon barracks, Alabama, during the winter. Geronimo has become quite civilized. He has learned to twang the banjo and his surly manner has left him”

– Salt Lake Weekly Tribune, November 21st, 1889.

Following Columbus to the New World, the concept of an economically rooted slavery based on a color hierarchy also arrived (Whitten and Corr 1999). Color hierarchy not only tainted the first interactions between the settlers and their “exotic” neighbors, it would also be employed by future governments as a way to justify slavery and colonization in Native America. In “African and Native American Perspectives,” Whitten and Corr introduce a model of *Hybridity, Mixture, and Racial Separation*, as existed in Latin America; it is this author’s belief that this model can also be applied to slave relations in North America. The model is set up as a pyramid, with the “White” race at the very top, “Black” and “Indian” at the bottom two corners, “Zambo” (Black/Indian) in the middle bottom, and “Mulato” (White/Black) and “Mestizo” (White/ Indian) hybrids comprising the middle regions (Whitten and Corr 1999, 226). By juxtaposing white with the more adjacent “colors” of black and Indian (as in Whitten and Corr’s model), white assumes a (false) sense of superiority, an almost “omnipotent” position. From this perspective, slavery could be viewed as a way to keep social order and to establish and maintain a “civilization” in the Americas. The following is a representation of the Whitten and Corr model of Hybridity, Mixture, and Racial Separation (1999, 226):

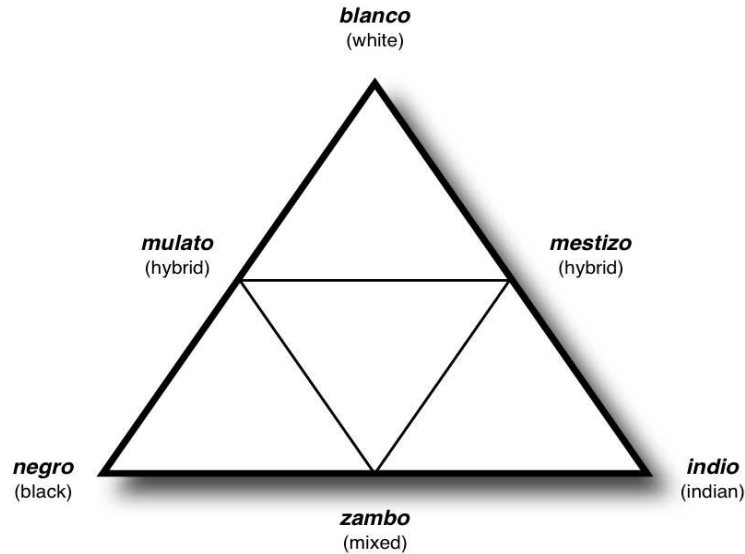


Figure 1: Whitten and Corr's model of Hybridity, Mixture, and Racial Separation (Whitten and Corr 1999, 226).

Whitten and Corr's model can also be useful in studying race relations in North America during slavery. Whitten and Corr give a history of the beginnings of what they call the “color paradigm”:

Five hundred and fifty years ago, during the early-modern “reconnaissance” of Africa, Portuguese slavers . . . began to mark the diverse peoples of Africa as *negros* (blacks), whom they brought to Iberia in the caravels to be sold for profit as chattel slaves . . . This cultural practice of glossing all of the people of a continent . . . by a monochromatic color term, *negro*, coincided, perhaps ironically, with the beginning of large-scale conversions of diverse Africans to Christianity in the region of the Congo (quoted in Russell-Wood 1995, Thornton 1995, by Whitten and Corr 1999, 214).

This emphasis on color was then used as both a tool of colonization and enslavement in the Americas. Slavery was a means of maintaining the economy and, when viewed under the lens of the color hierarchy, slavery became much more palatable.

Whitten and Corr say that “the idea of distinct imagined systems of biocultural ‘beings’ – *blanco, negro, indio*, empowered a vast system of colonial values of white supremacy and black and Indian subservience” (Whitten and Corr 1999, 225). As a result of the Colonial race

perspective, the first colonial slaves in the Americas were the first Americans themselves: The Native Americans.

“Blackness” and “Indianness”: In the Eyes of the Labeled

“Black is a race. I do not view being Indian as my ‘race.’ Indian is a way of life”

-Wilma Roberts, Mingo tribe

In order to examine the effects of this color hierarchy in the Americas, it is necessary first to examine factors that contributed to slavery and the subsequent cultural sharing, to delve into, as Alva Nelson states, “who created it [jazz] and why,” in order to get to the “very soul of the music” (Gerard 136). Racial and cultural identity played a key role in early interactions. A discussion on what the labels within Whitten and Corr’s model may have meant to those that were marked as “black” and “Indian” is a sensitive, but essential subject. From its very beginning, jazz has been both laden with identity and negotiation. As a genre, jazz has seen segregation and has also acted as grounds for some of the first instances of integration.¹ Due to its problematic position, a discussion of the transformation of Whitten and Corr’s model to identity and labeling is essential.

A few “disclaimers” are necessary at this point. “Blackness” has a variety of connotations, and it seems both disrespectful and impossible for me, a person of European and Native American descent, to try and capture the essence of “Blackness.” For this reason, I turn to the words of two African American scholars in the area of African American identity: John McWhorter and Ron Wellburn.

¹ One instance of ground-breaking (and long overdue) integration in jazz was The Benny Goodman Trio, which was one of the first publicly integrated musical performance ensembles.

John McWhorter, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and author of *Authentically Black* writes about the term “Black” and its connotations, both negative and positive:

So, we will have a name for ourselves - and it should be Black. "Colored" and "Negro" had their good points but carry a whiff of Plessy vs. Ferguson and Bull Connor about them, so we will let them lie. "Black" isn't perfect, but no term is.

Meanwhile, the special value of "Black" is that it carries the same potent combination of pride, remembrance and regret that "African American" was designed for. Think of what James Brown meant with "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud." And then imagine: "Say it loud, I'm African American and I'm proud."

Since the late 1980s, I have gone along with using "African American" for the same reason that we throw rice at a bride - because everybody else was doing it. But no more. From now on, in my writings on race I will be returning to the word I grew up with, which reminds me of my true self and my ancestors who worked here to help make my life possible: Black (McWhorter 2004).

Although McWhorter writes of the struggle of proper terminology, in doing so he touches on the Black or African-American experience, which has many connections to and similarities with that of Native Americans.

“Indianness” is also not without a slew of both positive and negative connotations. In fact, the very term “Indian,” like the term “Black” seems to be an insider term, a term which should be used by Native Americans themselves, and not by outsiders. The term “Indian” itself is a paradox; it is associated with both a strong sense of identity and preservation by those inside tribal culture. However, when used by outsiders, it is often taken as a sign of ignorance.² I use the terms “Indian,” “American Indian,” and “Native American” interchangeably as a means of acknowledging this dilemma.³ When discussing specific tribes, I avoid both of these terms at all costs in favor of acknowledging each tribe as an independent and rich culture.

² The origin of the term Indian is infamous, but nonetheless worth note. It was the first label applied to the aboriginal peoples of the Americas by a mistaken Christopher Columbus, who thought he had sailed to India.

³ While the term “red” was also often used to describe Native Americans, it was and is used less prevalently than the term “black” for the African American and is often considered very offensive. I use the term only when it is necessary to illustrate concepts relating to Whitten and Corr’s color paradigm.

In an interview with Wilma Roberts, a Mingo elder, she describes what it means to be an “Indian,” that it is not a race, but a way of life:

Anybody can be Indian, cause it’s here [points to heart] – It’s not your skin, it’s not how you look, it’s here [puts hand over chest]. Race. Who put the name for race? God didn’t. And out from Adam and Eve come all these “races” of people?! . . . You know, because it’s hard to find white clay. It’s hard to find white clay, you know what I’m saying, and when you find it, you gotta work it cause it [is not] real white when you get it. So you gotta really work with it. God didn’t put a name on things. Man did. . . . If you put a zipper on us we’d all be the same, and “black” and “Indian” are not really races. We’re the aboriginals of this Turtle Island is what we are – we’re of Turtle Island” (personal interview October 20, 2007).

I propose that Roberts is right: the concept of race, at least as it appears in the Americas today, came with European contact.

According to Whitten and Corr, the concept of a color hierarchy and the enslavement that followed was first introduced to the Native Americans by Christopher Columbus himself:

These [racial] terms were applied initially by Cristobal Colón as part of the Admirals claims to have reached India [. . .] He initiated slavery in the Americas and tried to show wealthy and powerful Europeans how “Indians” could be easily outwitted for the wealth of their land and how their bodies could be turned into substantial profit (1999, 228).

In this historical context, it may at first seem out of place to talk about race and the concepts of “Blackness” and “Indianness.” These concepts, however, are central to understanding why these groups would be compatible and how and why they would seek each other out both physically and musically.

The compatibility of Africans and Native Americans and the identities tied to these terms also offer insight into why the government made such an effort to separate these two tribal cultures, originating from opposite sides of the globe, in the U.S. The fear of what could happen if the two groups united was real, and this concern inspired both slavery and other oppressive policies. Efforts to separate the “black” from the “red” started early, continued into the twentieth

century (Miles and Holland 2004), and culminated in urban migrations by both populations to places like New Orleans and Chicago, where jazz was being born.

A key scholar in the area of Native American-African American heritage and identity, Ron Welburn, has also written scholarly work on jazz. As a Cherokee-African American, he writes on the compounded trouble identifying as both African American and Native American. Because of the one-drop decent rule, many Native American-African Americans were classified as “black” and sent to live in African American communities. As a result, much of Native culture became lost or fragmented. Ron Welburn discusses growing up as a person of mixed heritage:

Most of us living on the Indian-Negro color line grew up with mixed signals and coded information. Our elders had learned to protect us from the ridicule and abuse they had experienced . . . Many children of the 1940s or 1950s did not or could not conceptualize or imagine themselves as Indians since the idea of being part Indian seemed to stop with a parent or grandparent. A humorous aside of this conundrum is in the following exchange:

Non-Indian: “My grandmother was an Indian”

Indian: “So was mine” (Welburn 293).

In “Uncle Tom was an Indian,” Tiya Miles writes on the overlapping identities of persons with dual heritage:

The children and grandchildren of Indian and Black families were considered Native by their Native relatives and Black by their Black relatives. They belonged to dual and overlapping tribal/racial communities and were most likely fluent in the values and cultural practices of both. Because of phenotypical characteristics that marked them as “Black” and because of their location in Black families, children of Native and Black couples were especially vulnerable to enslavement. Whether by birth, trade, or capture, they could easily fall prey to slave dealers and slave owners. Even as Native Americans were enslaved outright in early America, Black Indians, or people of both Black and Native descent, were enslaved in large numbers along with African Americans into the nineteenth century (Miles 2002, 145).

The transformed, coded, and often times secret “Indian” identity found its way into jazz in both African American and Caucasian artists of mixed decent, but was heavily negotiated by

dominant society and by those having to choose a singular identity. As discussed in chapter five, the recognition of Native American heritage can be seen (albeit sometimes diluted and misconstrued) in both personal interviews and in the heritage of many historically important jazz contributions. The Native American presence in both American and jazz culture can also be seen in the subject matter of several compositions, such as “Cherokee,” “Witchi Tai To,” and in both William Parker’s *Peach Orchard* album and Don Pullen’s album, *Sacred Common Ground*.

CHAPTER TWO. SLAVERY IN THE NEW WORLD

Slavery in the New World

Many scholars date the beginning of slavery in America to 1619, when the first ship of Africans arrived in the “New World.” Without a doubt, widespread slavery of Africans did begin at that time; however, slavery and contact between Native Americans and Africans has been traced to an even earlier period in the Americas. “In America itself Black Africans and, to a lesser extent, North Africans were thrown into intensive contact with Americans soon after 1500 in the Caribbean and shortly thereafter in Brazil, Mexico, Central America, and Peru” (Forbes, as cited by McDonald 2002, 25). Often overlooked in history books, however, is the enslavement of Native Americans, which began shortly after the first colonies were established and, in many cases, did not technically end with physical emancipation in 1865.

According to McDonald, Native Americans were released from formal slavery in 1542 (2002, 25). McDonald says that “because Indians and Africans both were considered laborers, if not outright slaves, the first extensive relations between the two groups centered on their mutual enslavement” (Ibid., 25). Slavery was the beginning of several centuries of contact and cultural sharing between African Americans and Native Americans, but this relationship was not limited to cohabitation as slaves. Miles writes that in the face of racism and the color hierarchy, economics did not differentiate between “black” and “red”:

The single-minded vision of “empire as a way of life” did not discriminate between Black and Red people. Both groups, representing multiple nations and tribes, were seen as ripe for the picking. Indigenous Americans in South America, Central America, North America, and the Caribbean, as well as Africans were coerced and pressed into labor by the British, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Omi and Winant argue that “the seizure of territories and good, the introduction of slavery through the *encomienda* and other forms of coerced native labor, and then through the organization of the African slave trade – not to

mention the practice of outright extermination – all presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans, as the children of God, full-fledged human beings, et., from “Others.” As this statement intimates, Native Americans were the first slaves in the Americas. With the majority of the indigenous population in Central and South America decimated by European diseases, the remaining population was weakened and vulnerable (Miles 2002, 140).

The lack of awareness of Native American slavery can be attributed to the lack of documentation, but if oral history is valued as much as the written word, accounts of Native American and African American cohabitation and cultural sharing abound. According to Miles:

Though absent from the written record, Native American slaves are remembered in the oral testimony of their relatives. Mary Allen Darrows, a former slave from Arkansas, explained that her grandmother was “a little full-blooded Indian girl” who was captured and enslaved by White men in the Indian Nation (Alabama).” In another example, Sweetie Ivory Wagoner, a former slave from Oklahoma, reported: “my father was a slave, but he wasn’t a Negro. He was a Creek Indian” (2002, 143).

In the beginning of African enslavement in the Americas, many slave owners had already acquired Native American slaves. As a result, many Native Americans were housed with African slaves for considerable periods of time. Native American slavery, at least in conjunction with Africans on plantations, was gradually phased out.¹ Reasons for this may have been threefold: 1) The Native Americans often knew how to survive on their own if they escaped; 2) conflicts would often erupt when a tribe became aware that one or more of its members had been enslaved; and 3) that, in addition to merely “replacing” the Native American slaves, the United States government made additional efforts to ensure that the Native Americans would assimilate into American culture and that the African and Native American populations would never unite against the dominant society (Miles and Holland 2002).

¹ Slavery for the Native American continued in different ways into the 20th century. Many children, such as my grandmother, were stolen from reservations to be used as forced labor on farms, at orphanages, or at “boarding schools.”

The Five Civilized Tribes: Slavery in Native America

Slave holding was not limited to European culture. Especially in the nineteenth century, the “Five Civilized Nations” (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole), so named by the settlers and eventually the government as those “nations” that showed “promise” of civilization, were given slaves to help further “civilize” them into a “higher space” in the racial and socio-economic hierarchy (Seibert 2006).

It must be noted that slavery, though uncommon, also took place among some Native American tribes before European contact. However, the Europeans introduced slavery for wide-spread economic benefit based on racial factors. According to historian Tony Seibert:

Native American tribal groups practiced some form of slavery before the European introduction of African slavery into North America; but none exploited slave labor on a large scale. . . . In fact, the word "slave" may not even accurately apply to these captive people. The situation of enslaved Indians varied among the tribes (Seibert 2006, 104).

Before European residency in North America, slavery was often a result of war. At the onset of the colonies, slavery became a form of business. The shared experience of slavery became a breeding ground for the genetic and cultural sharing that influenced both African American and Native American cultures.

According to Melinda Micco in her article “Blood Money: The case of Seminole Freedmen and Seminole Indians in Oklahoma,” African slaves among the Five Civilized Tribes and other Native Americans were often treated much differently than others in the United States, in a way that promoted cultural sharing:

As Littlefield (1977) notes, the system of slavery adopted by the Seminole Indians had more to do with political cooperation than with an inherent position of blacks as inferiors. I contend that twin factors of freedom for runaway slaves and the maintenance of aboriginal homeland for Indians led to shared cultural practices (Micco 1977, 128).

The other groups within the Five Civilized Nations also tended not to mistreat their slaves.

Barbara Krauthamer states that, “Native American slaveholders did not practice the systematic violence and dehumanization embraced by white slaveholders in the southern states” (2004, 105). As a result of cohabitation, it is not surprising that culture began to be exchanged between slaves and many tribes, and a shared way of life emerged that would affect future generations of Africans, Native Americans, and African-Native Americans.

Conversely, the African culture also influenced the Five Civilized Tribes. In many instances, Africans were allowed to maintain many African traditions while living with Native Americans. Miles and Holland describe the African experience at Diamond Hill, the largest Cherokee plantation before the widespread Native American relocation into Indian Territory:

The adoption of Cherokee cultural ways by enslaved blacks on Diamond Hill is even more apparent in their fluency in the Cherokee tongue and their use of Cherokee healing techniques in times of illness. . . . They had a subtle but discernible influence on the Cherokees around them. Cherokee adults sometimes attended dances in slave quarters, and Cherokee children who were being educated at the mission school socialized with black children [. . .] to the extent that the missionaries feared the Indian children would be led astray (2004, 2).

The cultural contact between African Americans and Native Americans was not limited to slavery in the Five Civilized Tribes, as other Native American nations were also in contact with Africans. Ron Welburn, an African American Cherokee scholar writes of this long term and sustained contact. Early on, designating between “Black” and “Indian” was not always possible: Indian communities not in the direct path of white racist influences sheltered fugitive Blacks (just as the act so celebrated in African American lore). . . . Plausibly, some of these fugitive Blacks could also have been Indians (Welburn 2002, 299). History suggests that the relationship between African Americans and Native Americans was mutual. A catastrophe

that affected thousands of Native Americans, the Trail of Tears, claimed African American victims as well.

The Trail Where We Cried: African Footsteps on the Trail of Tears

In 1838, a widespread effort to remove the Native American tribes from the eastern part of the United States culminated in a plan to march them during the coldest winter months into what would be called “Indian Territory.” This plan included members of the Five Civilized Tribes, as well as their slaves. According to Patrick Mingos, at least twenty percent of those on the Trail of Tears were African Americans and many chose to follow the Cherokee by their own accord (2001, 468). The following is an excerpt from Mingos’s work “Race, Religion, and the Trail of Tears”:

The U.S. troops rounded up Indians, Africans, and other members of the Cherokee Nation and placed them in ‘concentration camps,’ where they were kept as ‘pigs in a sty.’ Starvation and disease were so rampant among those forcibly marched to the West. . . . Without a doubt, the ‘Trail Where We Cried’ was hard on those African Americans who were forced to march, many without shoes, through the dead of winter into Oklahoma. In spite of the hardship, the Africans were committed to the Cherokees: ‘My grandparents were helped and protected by very faithful Negro slaves who . . . went ahead of the wagons and killed any wild beast who came along’ Even though they were given responsibility to guard (with ‘axes and guns’) the caravans at night, few of the slaves made their escape. What for the Cherokees became known as the Trail Where We Cried was for the Africans an exodus (2001, 468).

What made the African slaves stay with the Indians? Would those Africans have felt such a connection to white slave owners? The latter seems unlikely. Rather, intense and *intimate* cultural sharing was taking place. Many adopted Africans felt extreme loyalty to the tribes.

Finding a Home Among the Natives: Runaways and Freedmen

The Native American contribution also echoes from the depths of the Underground Railroad. Many tribes acted as safe harbors for fugitive slaves, hiding the runaways among its members. Others helped the “fugitives” reach the north, and still others adopted African runaways into their tribes.

In a personal interview, Wilma Roberts, a Mingo elder, discusses why many Native Americans took in runaway slaves before and during the Underground Railroad:

See - That’s another thing that to me is a terrible misconception. We didn’t seek people out to come. But the thing we did see – the Blacks weren’t coming and taking our land. They weren’t taking our women and children. So then we took them in. Then here come the Whites to take any damn bodies, to take anything they can take, so what you gonna do? Stand there and say, “Oh, you are our great White Father and we love you, take our people, take our people, take these people and put them in shackles” (personal interview October 20th, 2007).

The Native American Underground Railroad began much earlier than the movement officially known as the Underground Railroad; this fact is well documented in history books (see, for example, Landers 2004). From early on, many of the misplaced African tribesmen knew they could find safety and perhaps even solace among some of the American Indian tribes. Landers lists early examples of “harbor” tribes in the Southeast:

African resistance to slavery in what became the United States began as early as 1526, when slaves joined an Indian revolt that destroyed the Spanish settlement of San Miguel del Gualdape on the modern-day Georgian coast. . . . Africans escaped . . . and found refuge among the Aye Indians. For the next centuries, the vast Indian Nations of the Southeast would be one destination for escaping slaves (2004, 118).

This phenomenon has also been documented by some anthropologists. Siebert (1968) writes of the tendency of some northern tribes to take in African runaway slaves:

The inhabitants of the Ottawa village of Chief Kinjuno in northwestern Ohio were kindly disposed towards the fugitive; and the people of Chief Brant, who held an

estate on the Grad River in Ontario west of Niagara Falls, were in the habit of receiving colored refugees (Siebert 1968, 92).

Even after Africans were “freed,” many felt a desire to return to a tribal life of some kind. After emancipation as well as during and after the removal of many Native American tribes into Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma, many Africans and African-Native Americans fought to remain part of or at least near Native American society, despite the fact that some of these tribes had kept them as slaves. One such example is the many Freedpeoples who fought for citizenship in Native tribes, especially in the Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations.

Freedpeople’s commitment to securing their status as citizens in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations rested on both their personal history of enslavement in the nations and their determination to control their own lives as free people. African Americans had lived in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations as slaves since the late eighteenth century (Krauthamer 2004, 104).

The time frame Krathamer discusses is over a century long, which is quite a long period of contact and possible cultural sharing. If contact in New Orleans before the turn of the twentieth century is to be included, African-Native contact spans at least two centuries.

CHAPTER THREE. A SECOND AFRICA

After emancipation, both segregation and Native American removal sparked an urban migration to cities such as New Orleans and Chicago. When Africans were finally “free,” many felt a desire to return to a tribal life of some kind (Miles and Holland 2004). Many African Americans still sought to be in close proximity with Native Americans, and many Freedmen moved into Indian Territory. Many had not even been slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes, but instead viewed Native America as a way to somehow go home to tribal traditions, without actually going back to Africa. Miles and Holland write of Native America as a second African homeland: “By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many African Americans had come to see the Western lands called Indian Territory as a refuge in America, and more, as a potential black space that would function metaphorically and emotionally as a substitute for the longed-for homeland” (Miles and Holland 2004, 4). Compatibility of cultures is one reason that such a movement occurred. A second reason often cited by scholars is the reality of violence and racism faced by many African Americans in white society after emancipation (Miles and Holland 2004, 4).

According to Miles and Holland, Indian Territory was often seen as a place where they could reenter tribal culture and obtain a sense of belonging. “Perhaps more than any other space in the United States, Indian Territory, broadly defined, has held out the promise of home to black slaves and their descendents” (Miles and Holland 2004, 4). In a 1932 piece, “Contacts as Allies,” Kenneth Porter addresses the intermingling of Native Americans and African Americans in the early 20th century:

. . . The great factor in amalgamation of Negroes and Indians was intermarriage between freed Negroes and reservation Indians. This intermixture began under slavery and was greatly speeded up by Emancipation (Porter 1932, 310).

Barbara Krauthamer cites a study by Celia Naylor Ojorongbe (2002), who claims that many cultural exchanges and negotiations took place between African and Native:

African Americans understood the ties to Native Americans in terms of ‘specific cultural markers – namely clothing, language, food, and knowledge of herbal remedies.’ This and other studies have argued strongly for a keener awareness of the intricate, and often intimate relationships forged between African Americans and Native Americans from the mid-eighteenth century in the southern colonies through the antebellum period in the southern states and Indian territory (Krauthamer 2004, 102).

Krauthamer cites Daniel F Littlefield: “Treaties’ provisions for Freedpeople’s citizenship were a deliberately calculated effort on the part of Congress to use former slaves as ‘a wedge to factionalize the tribe [and as] a means of sapping their resources and energy’” (Krauthamer 2004, 103). Native American culture was being attacked by the United States in a large-scale effort to erase Native culture. Every aspect of life was changing for Native Americans, and the presence of a new people among them was not the only agent for cultural change. According to Heth (1992):

After European contact, many Indians were dispersed from aboriginal lands to new homelands, cities, or reservations[.] . . . While some disappeared altogether, other smaller groups intermarried with neighboring peoples, both Indian and non-Indian, or were adopted by larger tribes. Often Government agents grouped peoples together arbitrarily, because of language, cultural similarities, or geographical proximity. This widespread destruction and dislocation of tribes and their cultures affected music and dance greatly (7).

Despite the hardships faced by Natives and Africans, both groups still found spaces where they could co-exist.

Although African Americans have met rejection as often as acceptance in Indian communities, and although African American and Native American historical relations have been characterized by a range of negative as well as positive

interactions, a celebratory invocation of Indian peoples and blacks has persisted in African American cultural life (Miles and Holland 2004, 10).

After Emancipation, the United States government did not stop pushing Native American culture into the far western corners of the United States.¹ As a result of both wanting to drive out Native culture and having an overwhelming fear of Africans and Native Americans combining and gaining power, the United States government took many actions to permanently separate the “black” from the “red.”

One avenue used to prevent cohabitation and intermarriage of African Americans and Native Americans was through the legal system. Blood quantum, intermarriage laws, and segregation laws all served to separate Native Americans from African Americans, and these laws also helped the government to categorize the African-Native American. I have heard many Native Americans say, “It takes one drop to be considered black, but I must have a blood quantum to register as Indian.” This reality of being black by birth but Native American by proof is addressed by Melinda Micco:

By the vagaries of imprecise laws, blacks have often been reduced to a fraction of their identity by the ‘one-drop’ rule of descent. However, Indians needed a requisite amount of ‘pure blood’ to substantiate their identity claims. With either category, the designation devolves into a fixed biological determination that either confirms or denies one’s connection to a tribal group (Micco 129).

As a result of these laws and segregation, many of the African-Native Americans were classified as black and were sent to live within the black communities of cities, such as New Orleans and Chicago. Established groups, like the Black Seminoles, were forced to live separately from their full-blooded counterparts, and established their own communities because of the pressure to live as African Americans. In his article “A Most Secret Identity,” Ron Welburn writes that the push of part-Natives to become fully African American was rooted in the quest for land.

¹ In fact, Native Americans were still often being used as unpaid farm labor, a form of slavery that lasted arguably into the early 1900s. This is an under-examined instance of a contemporary form of slavery.

At the heart of this Indian-Black issue is the possession, dispossession and sovereignty of Indian Country. We must contextualize the grand design by the English and American governments; their political and colonial object was to divest Native peoples of their homelands and later of their reservations (Welburn 2002, 299).

The cultural contact and synthesis of Native and African Americans, many scholars say, went beyond just shared genetics and could have stemmed from commonalities between the two cultures. Naylor-Ojuronbe, a scholar in African American and Native American studies, traces historical cultural markers that connect Native Americans with African Americans not only historically, but also culturally:

Was “blood” the deciding factor linking African American ex-slaves to Native Americans in Indian Territory in the decades immediately before and after the Civil War? There were, however, ex-slaves born and raised in Indian Territory, living among Native Americans for all or a significant part of their lives, who closely identified themselves with Native Americans and their customs yet did not mention a “blood” connection. An illuminating way to understand how such a nonbiological bond was forged and conceptualized is to cast the connection as an example of what A. Irving Hallowell calls the “phenomenon of transculturalization.” Hallowell defines transculturalization as “the process whereby individuals under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree. . . . Cultural signs of acculturation or “Indianization” of enslaved African Americans occurred in nineteenth-century Indian Territory. In their WPA interviews, Oklahoma ex-slaves spoke of a number of ways that such acculturation took place (Naylor-Ojuronbe 2002, 165).

Naylor-Ojuronbe writes that a few of the avenues of “Indianization” were in the areas of clothing, language, food, and herbal medicine (2002).

Despite the loss of Native tradition among those with mixed heritage, some African American – Native American communities are still active. Just a few of these instances of continued tradition-bearing can be seen in the Cherokee freedmen, who cover much of the Southern United States, and the Black Seminoles in Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. Even after leaving Native tradition, many of the Black Seminoles found ways to continue contact

with their Native relatives. Angela Shelf Medearis's "Dancing with the Indians" is based on a true story about Medearis's grandfather, an escaped African slave who found refuge with the

Seminole Indian tribe:

Mama's packed our supper,
The sheep are in their pens,
It's time to go and visit the Seminole Indians.
Golden threads of sunlight trickle through the trees
Turning leaves above us into lacy canopies.

We hear about our grandpa,
As our wagon creaks along,
Living with the Indians
Because slavery was wrong.

He worked on a plantation before he ran away,
Traveling by night, hiding by day.
Seminoles rescued Grandpa,
Making him their friend,
Calling him blood brother,
Black and Indian.

Each year we go to visit,
Honoring those he knew,
Joining in the dancing,
Watching what they do.
Our wagon nears the camp.
Drums pound and move our feet.
Soon everyone is swaying to the tom-tom beat.

Moccasins of dancers
Make gentle raindrop sounds.
Satin ribbons spin
Around, around, around. . . .
"Dance the Indian Stomp Dance,
Join us one and all."

We move into the circle,
Hearing the drummer's call.
Dancing with the Indians,
We dip and stomp and sway.
Dancing with the Indians,
Until the break of day (Medearis 1991).

In a note at the back of her book, dated January 15, 1991, Medearis says that one hundred years after the story took place, her relatives still have contact with the Seminole Indians in Oklahoma and still attend the powwows. This cultural contact and amalgamation, which occurred throughout the Southeast and most of the United States, also happened in New Orleans, and makes the pinpointing of specific cultural markers in present-day New Orleans culture and jazz difficult, to say the least.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE CRADLE OF JAZZ:
COLLECTIVE CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAZZ



Figure 2: Ashlin Parker, New Orleans jazz trumpet player
Photo courtesy of Ashlin Parker (2009).

A Glimpse into Contemporary Native American – African American Jazz Heritage and Identity: Ashlin Parker at Snug Harbor

Snug Harbor is one of the most popular jazz clubs in New Orleans. It has been the musical home of jazz greats, which recently include the famous Marsalis family, the Neville family, and a rising trumpet player; Ashlin Parker. Visiting this club was a sheer coincidence – and a good one for my project. Having dreamed of the Native American – African American connection in jazz for the past five years, I went to New Orleans hoping to find some mixed heritage jazz musicians and hopefully some Mardi Gras Indians.

Because I traveled there during pre-Mardi Gras season, I missed speaking to any Mardi Gras Indians. Out of disappointment, I decided to talk to the concierge and take a walk downtown to find some jazz clubs. In the lights, New Orleans is a multi-faceted jewel. I saw out-of-towners drinking mixed specials in the warm streetlight, looking for an escape from everyday drudgery and business deals. I saw New Orleans residents sitting on their porches taking in this out-of-town Mardi Gras culture. I had been told by the front desk that there was an event at Snug Harbor, a weekly session led by Ashlin Parker, a young trumpet player. Hoping to catch Ashlin's show, I headed down Bourbon Street wanting to get away from the bustle. These people were visitors – they were not the spirit of New Orleans. Where was the heart of the city?

*As I approached Snug Harbor, I took note of the sign which was small and silently beckoning. I walked through the entryway and into the restaurant where I found the African American-Native American connection right away. In the dark atmosphere, portraits of Mardi Gras Indians sprinkled the walls, some almost larger than life. The music from the combo played in the background and in this environment, the pieces of my project coalesced. One portrait, a man in a huge blue "chief" costume stood looking proud. Next to him sat a little girl in a matching woman's costume. I stared in amazement as I realized that these costumes were beyond the imagination, and sometimes whole neighborhoods went into creating them. There was one marking characteristic of these "Indians": In no way were the costumes traditional Native American regalia, but they echoed powwow dress, and the wearers were African American, many of them with strikingly Native features. This was no mockery – these photos were stating a shared history. A memory of what **was**, with "Native American" as an identity negotiated and adapted to the African American community. I had found it, but that is not all that I found that night.*

As I approached the bar, the bartender asked me what I was doing in the neighborhood. I told her I was a singer and that I was writing my thesis on the Native American influence on jazz. “You’re in a good place for that,” she said and told me to wait until the musicians took a break. She would talk to Ashlin and see if she could make a connection. “Go on in”, she said. “There’s no charge until the later show.”

The band looked to be in college or graduate school, but they could SWING. The bandleader and trumpet player was Ashlin Parker. At break I approached him outside and told him about my project. He told me that his family was from North Carolina and they were once “owned” by the Reynolds Plantation. “I’m part Indian too – I got Indian on one side. Cherokee,” he said as he exhaled smoke into the warm air around him. “Hey I gotta go back in soon. You wanna sing? What do you know?” We agreed on the well-known standards “Summertime” and “Anthropology,” a bop tune written over rhythm changes.

I had never felt as at home as I did with that band on stage at Snug Harbor. Ashlin had a commanding and calming stage presence. The audience was captivated as he ripped through blaring bop runs with a characteristically New Orleans flare. I did not feel any less at ease the following night when I sat down to interview him. “Of course, you’ve been looking into the Mardi Gras Indian connection,” he said. “You’ll find a lot there.” The following is a portion of my interview that would lose meaning if I tried to do anything other than relay it for what it is:

Stiegler: So tell me about your heritage.

Ashlin: *Well, I’m African American and one eighth Cherokee – My grandmother’s mother was Cherokee.*

Stiegler: Did she retain any traditions?

Ashlin: *My grandma’s mom did, and she looked it. I remember they were talking about it [my family], but I never met my grandma. I’m talking about my*

grandma's sisters – this is all bleeding in on the Reynolds side [The Reynolds owned my family in the days of slavery].

Stiegler: Tell me about your family.

Ashlin: *My father was born in 1941, and his father was born in 1898. There was a gap.*

S: So your family was not too many generations removed from slavery.

A: *No. Not that many generations far from slavery. Bertha was the Cherokee one – my great grandma. I don't know much about her. She had nine children, and they were all some characters. They were Cherokee from Eastern North Carolina.*

S: When did you start getting into Jazz?

A: *My father played jazz, and had a huge record collection. At first it sounded really foreign to me. I was listening to whatever was on TV. When I started playing, I had an ear for Classical music. It sounded more legit to me.*

S: I'm curious, why did Classical music sound more legit to you than Jazz?

A: *It isn't, but my ear was not developed. I had no sense of what music was besides Janet Jackson. I wanted to deal with Dizzie [Gillespie]. The first jazz I ever listened to was [Charlie] Parker – I was 15 – I checked it out and it gave me a technical kick. It caught my ear, and once I understood what was going on, I could hear it was not just fast bullshit. It was technically advanced. – “Night in Tunisia” – that solo break was – I had to really dig into it. So I got a Charlie Parker transcriptions book. I could hear it was killin', but couldn't tell what was happening until I really dug into it.*

S: Your style sounds a bit like Dizzie. Has he been an influence?

A: *I've dug into Dizzy at certain points, but I'm not as directly influenced by Dizzy as I'm by Miles or Freddie Hubbard, whom are both coming straight out of Dizzy. So much of the language is passed down and around in the lineage of great trumpeters*
-Silence- Ashlin looking out on the street, then talks about the jazz clubs in New Orleans.

S: So what do you know about slavery in this area, about the history in this area?

A: *It must have happened pretty fast – slavery – That's probably another reason why we're so mixed heritage, with Creoles and all.*

S: What do you know about Creoles right before jazz was forming? I mean it's hard to even find a consistent definition of what it was to be Creole at various times.

A: *There was a Creole higher social class – even right now it's like they have their own secret society. They have balls and arranged marriages. That's some serious stuff.*

S: Really? I had heard that after emancipation that had kind of dissipated.

A: *No – not here. It's serious. There's such a mix of all kinds.*

S: What about you? What are your other roots besides Native American and African American?

A: *My mother's white – from Stow, Ohio. My father was born in Virginia – his family is from Winston Salem. My father's father was a music teacher and concert pianist. That's where the music side of me comes from I'm sure – I heard the Parkers were never enslaved. My father's grandfather was. My father's mother was a Reynolds and was owned by RJ Reynolds.*

S: This was the Indian side?

A: *I didn't ever really know about it, I just knew it existed. I knew that my great aunt looked really Indian but had black culture too.*

[Long period of silence. Ashlin starts talking about jazz again]

...

Ashlin gets a text – conversation veers away. We chat a bit more, and the free jazz coming from inside the club beckons him in.

A: *You know, those are my cats in there. And no one's in there. I need to go in, because I can't leave them alone with their music. I can't leave them alone. That's how we operate.*

Cultural Contact in the Cradle of Jazz: A Brief History

Also known as “The Cradle of Jazz,” New Orleans was no stranger to slavery or to Native Americans. Often attributed as being the birthplace of early jazz,¹ New Orleans experienced instances of combined African-Native American slavery, and a great deal more collaboration between Africans and Native Americans. In his article “Jazz as American Culture,” Levine discusses a 1918 *Times-Picayune* article documenting such collaboration in New Orleans:

In 1918 the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* described the “many mansions in the houses of the muses.” There was the ‘great assembly hall of melody’ where “most of us take our seats,” while a smaller number pass on to the “inner sanctuaries of harmony” where “nearly all truly great music is enjoyed.” Finally, there was still one more apartment “down in the basement, a kind of servants’ hall of rhythm. It

¹ This is a contested point, as early jazz also could have developed simultaneously in stages in other urban centers such as Chicago, which was also a place of urban migration for both African Americans and Native Americans.

is there we hear the hum of the Indian dance . . . the thumpty-tumpty of the negro banjo, and, in fact, the native dances of the world.” . . . The Times later returned to the subject again and again insisting that jazz is “merely a return to the humming, hand-clapping, or tomtom beating of savages” (Levine 1989, 103).

Additionally, New Orleans was an urban migration “hub” for many people of African, European, Creole, Native American, Hispanic, and Caribbean decent. Gwendolyn Hall (1992) also writes of early African-Native American intermingling in the New Orleans area:

Documents surviving from the 1730s and 1740s record the departure of Indian and African slaves, who often left together to seek refuge among Indian tribes[.] . . . A network led by African-Indian couples that encouraged slaves to escape and that led them to the Choctaw surfaced during King George’s War (Hall 1992, 115).

This African-Native cohabitation outlived the Civil War and was especially prominent in the New Orleans area, right before and during the development of early jazz music. “Throughout the 1800s the unique mix of Spanish, English, French, Native American, Caribbean, and African cultures provided a complexity that Fiehrer labeled ‘a thickness of local culture,’ assuring early jazz a wealth of inspiration” (Washburne 1997, 61). Many Native Americans that had been displaced through slavery, tribal removal, poverty, or had intermarried with Africans or whites ended up in and around New Orleans. As a result of these and other factors, New Orleans became an extremely multicultural area. It may have been out of this genetic, socioeconomic, and cultural sharing in New Orleans that the early jazz started to form.

Cultural Remnants Made Visible: The New Orleans Jazz Festival

“From the very beginning, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival was envisioned as an important event that would have great cultural significance and popular appeal. The Festival was the culmination of years of discussions and efforts by city leaders who wanted to create an event worthy of the city’s legacy as the birthplace of jazz. A couple of other festivals were held in the years leading up to the first New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, but those events, different in

format, did not take hold as the Jazz & Heritage Festival would” (New Orleans Jazz Fest History 2009, <http://www.nojazzfest.com>).

A warm morning in New Orleans is a welcome sight in February for most any Ohioan. I sat at a corner table at the small, yet bustling and infamous Café Rose Nicaud and watched the sunlight filter onto Frenchman Street. I was here on a whim hoping to speak to the two people who run the Native American portion of the New Orleans Jazz Festival. I had a winning notion, for as each of my contacts came through the door I knew that this may be one of the most interesting and revealing conversations I had had yet.

Rachel Ornelas, a folklore expert in New Orleans Native culture and the Louisiana folklife coordinator, arrived first. We shared ideas about what exactly having Native American heritage means in modern Western society and about her scholarship and work at the festival. Rachel told me that Greyhawk would have some great ideas about my project and she was right. Greyhawk Perkins, a cultural specialist, blues musician, and actor in documentaries on Native American culture spoke to me for an hour in the small café about specific cultural markers and shared experiences between African Americans and Native Americans during and after slavery.²

Greyhawk Perkins points out that the historical connection between African Americans and Native Americans ran deeper than just a temporary cultural contact. He speculates that the contact and resulting music sharing was enabled by commonalities between the two tribal cultures, which can still be seen in New Orleans culture today:

Stiegler: Do you think there was substantial cultural sharing?

Greyhawk: *I think so. You’ve got two cultures at one point that got along, and they did share, like Red Bone, a Native African community. You can see it in the rhythms and words of our music. Even in other cultural elements. Look at Creole food – they took their recipes and used Native ingredients, but you’ve got those dishes that were brought over and they’d make it work. The same thing happened*

² In chapter five, I cite Greyhawk’s discussion of specific musical elements that may have contributed to a musical sharing between Native Americans and African Americans and possibly, as a result, the development of jazz.

with music. You know they celebrated and mingled. These things happened with clothing, housing, food, and other cultural elements. They had to adapt to the environment and each other. And in music, there was the shared element of trance. It's the ceremonial aspect (interview with the author, February 10, 2009).

In addition to cultural markers such as food and clothing, one remnant of cultural sharing that is highly visible in New Orleans today is the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, which many scholars have sighted as being a source of early jazz music (Smith 1993). In my journey to find a Native American link to jazz, most of my contacts mentioned this practice at least in passing, some with disdain, and others with enthusiasm. Despite the ongoing debate of how much or little “authenticity” is present in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, it is likely a remnant of Native American and African American contact and, subsequently, a possible direct link between Native Americans and the development of jazz.

The Mardi Gras Indians

A few examples of modern music that may provide evidence of culture sharing are jazz, blues, and the Mardi Gras Indian tradition in New Orleans. The latter practice began in the 1880s and involves African Americans who dress as Native Americans and dance in the “second lines” of Mardi Gras parades (Smith 1993). It must be noted that although “authenticity” is not usually present (the clothing only remotely resembles Native American regalia and is also reflective of the Caribbean influence in the area), many of these Mardi Gras Indians have Native American blood and use this practice as a way to honor those who helped their ancestors (Unser 1998).



Figure 3: A picture of a Mardi Gras Indian.
Monk Boudreaux (2006) Photo by Masahiro Sumori



Figure 4: A photo of an elaborate Mardi Gras Indian outfit.
Mardi Gras Indians Blue A (2006), photo by Marie Carianna

In an interview with Unser, one Mardi Gras Indian participant discusses the tributary aspect of the practice:

‘It all started when young men ran away from their masters and lived with the Indians,’ according to one Mardi Gras Indian who began marching in 1929. ‘After slavery they never forgot the tribes they lived with. . . . At first the Native Americans thought we were making fun of them. But they found out better’ (Unser 1998, 125).

Some scholars argue that these African Americans have no clue about Native American culture, and, perhaps on a surface level, the original concepts of the dance have faded and been negotiated. The performance has been adapted to fit into the Mardi Gras experience. These scholars point out that these African Americans are merely playing Indian for political and social reasons:

African Americans propagated the image of the rebellious Native American in their families as an expression of their own resistance to both slavery and legalized segregation. They also used the image of the savage Indian to resist indirectly ordinances and situations that would have been dangerous for them to oppose openly. One of the most readily apparent instances of this type of resistance was the Plains Indian costume adopted and then modified by African Americans participating in Mardi Gras parades. [Mardi Gras Indian Dancing began] in the 1880s, [within] groups of African Americans. . . . By invoking Native American ancestry in parade, African Americans symbolically resisted the white consolidation of power and segregation imposed in the city of New Orleans, once considered one of the most fluid racial societies in the United States. As Reconstruction ended, the New Orleans white elite used a biological argument about race to impose racial hierarchies and control [.] . . . Invoking Indian imagery in terms of ancestry and emblem provided a symbolic avenue for resistance (Lovett 2002, 199).

Lovett may be correct in the assertion that political motivation and social masking were key motivators for the Mardi Gras Indian practice, but to stop there is only scratching the surface of this practice. Just as Unser says, the motivation was at one point, and may still be, deeply seeded in commemoration. Perhaps the participants are identifying and negotiating a Native American identity as a way to remember the American Indians. They are performing retention of their

shared experience before the eyes of the bewildered and perhaps intoxicated Mardi Gras audience. At a gut level, it seems to be an attempt to remember the shared cultural experience, as far away as it may be.

Although jazz and blues are both genres described as African American music, they may also have been influenced by shared African-Native American retentions. I would argue that if European art music gets to claim a piece of jazz history based on prolonged interaction, a “slice” of recognition should also go to Native Americans (especially in the New Orleans area), who seemingly carried on a more intimate and peaceful relationship with the African slaves than did other groups. Scholars such as Michael P. Smith (1994) have stated that the birthplace of jazz is in New Orleans, and very possibly in the second line dances of the Mardi Gras Indians:

The black Indian phenomenon is common throughout the hemispheric Carnival complex and dates from the earliest colonization of the islands and rim lands of the Caribbean Sea and South America. The common masking tradition is both a continuation of Old World African culture and a natural synthesis with Native American tradition (quoted in Smith 1994).

The struggle for establishing a single identity as a person of mixed heritage has been documented many times and is not unique to the African-Native American, but the identity issue has certainly not been an easy one. It is especially complicated when examining jazz, as jazz was born into such a multicultural environment.

CHAPTER FIVE. UNRAVELING MUSICAL AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS

“In those days, there were supposedly hip guys who really were squares, pseudo hip cats. How do you distinguish between the pseudo and the truly hip? Well, first, a really hip guy wouldn’t have any racial prejudice, one way or another, because he would know the hip way to live is with your brother” – Dizzy Gillespie (Monson 1995, 396).

Because of the intimacy of the shared African American - Native American experience and the commonalities of the two cultures and musics, it is nearly impossible to dissect jazz and categorize any single element as specifically “African” or “Native American.” Most likely, jazz arose out of an experience that took place over centuries and not a short term conscious combining of specific musical elements. Scholars have been perplexed by the issue of jazz roots for decades. According to Porter:

In jazz ever-present problems of tribalism are incredibly complicated. Jazz is . . . the creation of African descendants in America. [Jazz] draws upon the African American culture that developed during contact with European peoples and, to some extent, Native Americans (1997, 198).

It seems that the identity and development of Jazz lies less with being “African” or “Native American” and more in the midst of the African American experience in a multicultural society. In an interview on influences in the development of jazz, Alva Nelson, an African American jazz pianist says to “forget music. Before you get to the music you have to have culture. . . . Jazz is the product of the African’s experience on American shores” (Gerard 1998, 136-37).

One cannot forget the contact with Europeans as having had an impact on the history of jazz. Some of the first jazz musicians in New Orleans were Creoles, who were of mixed blood (European, African, and often, Native American) and occupied a higher socioeconomic status. Although many Creoles were slaves, because of their European heritage they were often house servants and a lot of them were given a Western education, which regularly included training in

the Western art music tradition (Halsey 2008). According to Porter: “Out of the tribal mix, from the very beginning of jazz, European Americans got involved. (White Americans are barely aware of it, but Native culture had a major impact on them)” (1997, 198). In this light, the jazz portrait becomes less of a clear depiction and more of a blend of boundaries, color, and sonic aspects.

In the post-emancipation environment of segregation, jazz also became a place of integration with artists of all colors finding a way to play together. Despite the intricate history of jazz, investigating its roots is not a hopeless task. Researchers can examine these shared elements and the compatibility of the two cultures as a breeding ground for the formation of a new music.¹

Common Ground: African and Native American Musical Compatibility

In their introduction to *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, Miles and Holland affirm that a cultural sharing took place after slavery in various parts of North America. The displacement of both Native Americans (due to the continuous removal from tribal lands) and African Americans (post-emancipation) brought many African Americans and Native Americans together: “Indeed, the idea of and desire for connectivity with Indians and Indian spaces has found expression in a variety of African American cultural forms, including song, story, and visual art” (Miles and Holland 2004, 11). Miles and Holland examine several media in their discussion of Native American – African American cultural contact and sharing, including the possibility of shared music. However, they do not give specific musical markers that may have served as grounds for such an experience.

¹ It must be noted that, though outside the scope of this thesis, European culture and music also had an influence on the development of jazz.

Discussing culture sharing and potential Native American retentions in jazz is impossible without discussing characteristics of Native American music. Being aware of some very general characteristics of Native American music may provide clues as to why these two cultures could have adopted each other's practices, and why the two cultures were musically compatible to begin with. First, it is very important to note that still today at least 500 different Native American cultures are in existence, and each tribe differs a great deal linguistically, culturally, and musically. The following characteristics are part of a very pan-tribal description. In other words, these characteristics by no means apply to every tribe's music and musical concepts.² However, they seem to be relatively widespread among most North American tribes. *In Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, Charlotte Heth (1992) gives a broad-spectrum ethnography of North American Indian music:

On the whole, Indian music in North America is mostly vocal and monophonic with rattle and/or drum accompaniment. It comprises vocal and instrumental solo pieces, leader-chorus responsorial songs, unison chorus songs, and multipart songs (some of which are without instrumental accompaniment) (12).

Much West African music tends to exhibit similar characteristics, with the exception of a stronger presence of layering and polyrhythm. Native American music (especially that of the southwest) often relies on hemiolas, or a two against three feeling for a sense of polyrhythm. Notably, jazz compositions are also often centered on elements that are widely occurring in African, African American, and Native American music. These elements include an emphasis on rhythm, a driving metronomic feel, improvisation of melody and text, and call and response (more so in the African setting but still present in some Native American tribes, such as the Navajo).

² Pan-Indian generalizations do not accurately represent all specific tribes. I make use of some general observations here, as accurately discussing the music of all tribes would take a great deal of documentation.

Greyhawk Perkins cites Native American musical elements present in his own blues compositions. In the quote below, he illustrates the potential for shared music experiences between Africans and Native Americans from his personal experience:

I use the old [traditional] rhythms. A lot of our stuff starts off with the old songs and you take the old rhythm and the bass line just pops in there. One year at a show for the New Orleans Jazz Festival, a few African drummers said, “Can we back you up?” I started with a rattle song. They were using African rhythms and they fit right into my strictly southeast Indian vocals. . . . We did the same thing when the Brazilians came [to the Native American stage]. We just meshed together. South African dancers came into Native music with the Native American dancers. They [the dancers and musicians] were in unison, but had never met each other – it’s the greatest picture I’d ever seen: Indian and Zulu guys. . . . Our rattle rhythms and dances with turtle shell fits great with African polyrhythm. You can actually mix the musics and have it fit (Perkins, interview with the author, February 10, 2009).

In addition to rhythmic compatibility in both musics, Greyhawk emphasized tribal identity and similar outlook on life as the biggest commonality.

I think it’s because they [Africans] are earth people that believe they are all part of the earth and not separate. When they dance, they stomp the ground in Australia and Zulus as well. When they come down they do this [demonstrates previous dance move] and so do we. All earth people are stewards, are the earth. When it gets down to it, if you put us together there’s going to be a bonding (Perkins, interview with author, February 10, 2009).

For West Africans and Native Americans, the experience of “music” as intrinsic to tribal life may have allowed the entrance of both cultures into the development of jazz.

Bruce Raeburn, head curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University in New Orleans, cites his own interaction with leading scholar Ron Welburn, and says that Native influence may have translated into the syncopated 4/4 meter of early jazz, dixieland and ragtime, where beats one and three are often accented. He says that the tendency to group everything as “African” results in missing some interesting characteristics of early jazz. In regards to the presence of 4/4 or common time in jazz, Raeburn says:

Almost any text that you can find that talks about Native American music will discuss this meter as a characteristic of traditional music. . . . There's more to it than the trope, but even if you work from that there's a very consistent ground beat. That meter is the only thing that's in early jazz. There's 2/4 and 4/4, which is much different from polyrhythmic African feel (Raeburn, discussion with author, February 10, 2009).

Raeburn's idea that the 4/4 and unsyncopated meter may have influenced the earliest jazz styles is likely, especially if we consider the shared characteristics of African American and Native American music that Greyhawk Perkins sets forth. Although syncopation is much more common in African musics, it is far from absent in Native American music. In her study of powwow texts, Tara Browner says that syncopation is present in many powwow songs, especially those of the Northern style: "Southern War Dance cadences are in even sixteenth-notes. . . . Of the Northern cadences, only the third cadence in each song uses even sixteenths, while the first two in all of the tribal-specific variations contain some kind of syncopation and an assortment of vocables" (Browner 2000, 224).

Could the joint characteristic of a driving rhythmic feel have contributed to Native American and African music sharing? Could similar ceremonies or lifeways catalyzed interaction? What specific elements in Native American music could have fostered an environment of musical sharing, communication, and inclusion? A look at Native American dance and performance practice may provide some insight.

Unification in Sound: Vocables in Native American Music

One characteristic of Native American music that may have been an accessible basis for musical sharing is its use of vocables that often fosters an environment of inclusiveness. Many songs are written in native languages, but in a powwow or other "inter-tribal" space, they are

often sung using vocables. In an interview, Danny Two Eagles, an Apache drummer, illustrated the purpose of the vocable in Native American music:

The basis to everything is a *vocable* [italics added]. That's the creation of . . . vowel sounds that you don't have to be of my Nation to sing my song, because you could come in and do the vocables for it, and it all works out. (Personal Interview with the Author 2007).

Vocables are a core way of providing unification within and across tribal communities. In this sense, they serve several specific social functions. Although many newly created song texts are in English, vocables allow for intertribal communication through song while still connecting the people as a whole community to Tradition, or the Old Ways.

Furthermore, vocables also could have offered a route of communication alternative to that of what Danny Two Eagles calls the “dominant culture.” It carves out a space of “Indianness” or in a sacred space that is void of the language of the oppressors. It is quite possible that this type of song could have included African slaves and promoted a shared musical experience. It is also interesting to note that vocables are used in many tribal cultures, including many African tribes. Additionally, vocables are often present within vocal jazz performances in the form of “scat singing.” The use of syllables in scatting come from attempts to imitate instruments. However, just like in Native American and many African musics, an element of participation, inclusion, and connectivity between singer and band (and often performer and audience) is fostered through the use of vocables.

All in the Stomp Dance: Dance as an Intrinsic Element of Music

Because music is intrinsic in both African and Native American contexts, it is often inseparable from dance in both cultures. One concept that acts as a foundation to Native American culture and identity is the sacred nature of the circle and the relatedness concept. This

circular concept correlates to almost all aspects of Native American life, especially music and dance, which are not thought of as separate entities. They belong together and are related. “The dance space is often conceived in terms of circles, with the dancers moving either clockwise or counterclockwise, as determined by their cosmology and worldview” (Heth 1992, 12). Circular dance is not unknown to African Americans. The ring shout, which was first practiced by African slaves, involves participants moving in a counterclockwise circle, shuffling their feet, and praying. According to Samuel Floyd, Jr., “The ring shout was the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them – the values of ancestor worship and contact, communication and teaching through storytelling and trickster expressions, and of various other symbolic devices. Those values were remarkable because, while of ancient African provenance, they were fertile seed for the bloom of new forms” (Stuckey 1987, 16). It is interesting that the factors Stuckey lists as attributes of “ancient African culture” - storytelling, trickster expressions, and symbolic devices - are all fundamental to most Native American ceremonial cultures as well. These ideas, and dance as an intrinsic part of the musical experience could also have been a compatibility factor between Africans and Native Americans.³

In an interview with Eugene Redmond, Native American poet and jazz musician Joy Harjo discusses the possible influence of Africans on traditional music:

I wonder what our music was like before the arrival of European governments . . . and Africans. The movement of our stomp dances is around the fire, counterclockwise. I understand that is the direction of dances in some of the West African tribes who were forced here[.] . . . Georgia was the first state to make a law against fraternization. But when I hear our music, I always think of Africa announcing itself as part of the mix. And it goes the other way. The root of blues,

³ Correlated to the idea of circle as sacred space is the relatedness or connectedness concept, which is seen in many Native America tribes. This is the idea that humanity is all interconnected in an intricate way with other human beings, animals, plants, and Mother Earth herself. To have respect for and acknowledge these relationships is not only the basis of many ceremonies, but also a fundamental of traditional life in many Native American cultures.

rock, and jazz is around that stomp-dance fire, too, and it's never, ever mentioned (Redmond 2004, 29).

Harjo's words suggest that it is difficult to distinguish African and Native American influences in a variety of music performed by both today. This is partially because of the compatibility and oral nature of both cultures, and also due to the lack of any recorded African – Native American musical interactions. The compatibility, then, is a double-edged sword to the researcher, pointing to some elements that are obvious, but making any clear musical differentiation very difficult.⁴ I assert, however, that differentiating details between the two peoples' musics is not necessarily as important as demonstrating the possible mutual influences and rich shared cultural experiences; this sharing was essential in the development of jazz.

Improvisation is an element shared by both cultures and a foundation of jazz. Though less commonly known, improvisation plays an important role in Native American music and dance. The stomp dance, for instance, incorporates a great deal of improvisation. According to Heth, "The Stomp Dance of the Cherokees, Creeks, Yuchis, and other formerly Southeastern United States tribes have infinite variation within a set framework[.] . . . The song/dance leader begins with a standardized introduction, with his chorus echoing him in call-and-response fashion. Then he chooses from among the many songs in his repertoire, stringing them together in a cycle" (Heth 1992, 13). Again, circular imagery comes into play. Everything happens in cycles, in circles especially song and dance. Heth also discusses song in many stomp dance contexts:

Each song and each section in the song vary in length and number of beats from time to time because of inspiration, introduction of words, or individual artistry. Since the dancers, singers, and instrumentalists (women dancers wearing turtle-

⁴ It may be worth nothing that to the untrained ear, distinctions between traditional Native American and traditional African American musics are difficult at best, as illustrated in a research project conducted by Stiegler & Stiegler 2004. Participants (all chosen randomly) were asked to categorize a traditional Native American piece and a West African piece. Most casual listeners found the two musics difficult to differentiate. The study is unpublished, but can be available for a view of findings.

shell leg rattles) all dance with and follow the leader, the improvisatory style is exhilarating, not problematic (Heth 1992, 13).

Historian Patrick Mingos cites instances in which slaves participated in Native American stomp dances. “Slaves were welcome at the busk festival and stomp dances and ‘mixed and mingled and danced together with the Indians’” (Mingos 2001, 462). Aside from the stomp dances, many other aspects of American culture and music survive as possible retentions of African American–Native American contact. Examining the heritage of jazz artists past and present could provide insight as to how and why Native America courses through the veins of jazz.

From Parker to Pullen: The Heritage of Some Jazz Greats

Early jazz may also have been influenced by Native Americans “genetically.” Many of jazz history’s legends were part Native American. Ron Welburn writes that “Indians have been active in jazz, blues, and popular music, where they highlight the Red-Black-White color lines” (Welburn 2002). Some artists known to have significant Native American heritage include Edward “Kid” Ory, George Wilson, Warren and Baby Dodds, Pee Wee Russell, Don Cherry, Miles Davis, Jim Pepper, and Don Pullen. Kid Ory was the son of a white Frenchman and a Creole woman of Afro-Spanish and Native American heritage. He was born in La Place, Louisiana, and classified as a Creole of color (National Park Service Jazz Research Team 2006). Charlie Parker was of African-American and Choctaw lineage, and one of his favorite standards to play was Ray Noble’s song “Cherokee,” over which he created the famous composition “Koko,” which is said to have been a nod to his ancestry (Woideck 1996, 3).

Don Cherry, a free jazz trumpeter, was of African-American and Choctaw origins (Steer 1996, 81). In an interview with Ben Sidran, Cherry says: “I mean, in growing up, my parents have American Indian background, so I’ve always been listening to different American Indian

songs and trying to have that feeling in my whole way of life[.] (Sidran 1992, 416). Pee Wee Russell, a Dixieland clarinetist, was of African and Cherokee lineage (Giddins 1998, 31).

George Lewis, a New Orleans jazz clarinetist was part Native American by way of his father, who was half Choctaw (Bethell 1977).

Famous New Orleans jazz musicians Johnny Dodds (clarinetist) and Baby Dodds (drummer) also had Native American and African American heritage. According to Anderson in *Johnny Dodds in New Orleans*, the Dodds brothers' grandparents were not found on the census. "Baby knew only that his mother's family was Indian and that his grandfather sent messages by beating on hollow logs" (Anderson 410). Anderson says that "an Indian heritage was not uncommon among southern blacks. Frankie Duson (or Dusen), Buddy Bolden's trombonist, was mostly Indian . . . and Pops Foster's mother was 'nearly a full-blooded Cherokee'" (Anderson 410).

Later jazz greats also had Native American heritage. Duke Ellington was part Cherokee. "According to the [Ellington] family, James William Kennedy, Duke Ellington's father, was born a slave on a plantation in King and Queen's County, Virginia, the illegitimate son of the owner and a slave woman. As a young man, James fell in love with a fellow slave, herself of mixed blood, part African and part Cherokee" (Lawrence 2001, 1). Later jazz players also recognized their Native blood. Miles Davis, for instance, was open about his Cherokee heritage. Paul Tingen (2001) writes that Miles once said, "My family got a lot of Indian blood" and attributed his multi-ethnic heritage to his love of all different types of music (29). In an informal conversation with Jon Hendricks, I learned that this vocal jazz legend also has Native American heritage, and is very proud to be one-quarter Cherokee.

Don Pullen, the jazz pianist who co-wrote and recorded *Sacred Common Ground*, a crossover project combining jazz form with a Native American drumming group, had been told of his Native American roots as a child but was never able to document the heritage. According to Giddins, as a result he developed a deep interest in Native American music and culture. *Sacred Common Ground* was the last project he would complete before his death in 1999. It combined Pullen's group, the African Brazilian Connection, with a Kootenai traditional drumming group from Montana, The Chief Cliff Singers. According to Gary Giddins (1998) in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century*:

The long gestating and posthumously released *Sacred Common Ground* . . . suggests another beginning in which the guttural a cappella singing and rhythmic chanting of a northwestern Indian tribe is used as a template for jazz combo arrangements (Giddins 1998, 557).

Was Pullen pointing towards the importance of America's intricate heritage in his last days? He was diagnosed with lymphoma while still in the midst of the project and died before its release one year later. Giddins points out the drastic change that took place in Pullen's style and aesthetics in the latter part of his life. "Perhaps it's a mistake to read too strong a connection between intimations of mortality and the musical alterations that define Pullen's final works. But I can think of no musician of Pullen's stature whose art took so radical a rightward swing" (Ibid., 555).

Giddins goes on to critique the seemingly "disparate" nature of the two genres, but marvels at the ability of the two musics (and Pullen) to find strength in each other.

At no time it seems to me, do the two factions really blend. Nor does the record convince me they are equals. Nevertheless, something remarkable happens. Pullen absorbs their strength and is provoked to the most delicate level of lyricism he ever achieved (Ibid., 557).

Giddins has a point. From a Western perspective, in which talk of Black/European/Creole interactions in Louisiana dominates jazz history, Pullen's project does seem like a union of strange opposites. However, given the history of interaction, cultural and genetic sharing, and cohabitation, it seems no surprise that Pullen finds strength and solace in *Sacred Common Ground*. In his project, he touches on the common ground that exists in many places: between perceived areas of opposites, between the histories of two groups of oppressed people, and in jazz. Perhaps Duke Ellington describes this best when he says of the influences on jazz: "I don't know how such great extremes as now exist can be contained under the one heading" (Giddins 1998, 9).

Many early jazz artists in New Orleans remember being affected by and even involved with the Mardi Gras Indians Tradition that was discussed in Chapter Four. According the New Orleans jazz research team (1993):

Although dance in Congo Square ended before the Civil War, a related musical tradition surfaced in the African-American neighborhoods at least by the 1880s. The Mardi Gras Indians were black "gangs" whose members "masked" as American Indians on Mardi Gras day to honor them. Black Mardi Gras Indians felt a spiritual affinity with Native American Indians. . . . The demonstration included drumming and call-and-response chanting that was strongly reminiscent of West African and Caribbean music. Mardi Gras Indian music was part of the environment of early jazz. Several early jazz figures such as Louis Armstrong and Lee Collins described being affected by Mardi Gras Indian processions as youngsters, and Jelly Roll Morton claimed to have been a "spyboy," or scout, for an Indian gang as a teenager (Stewart, et al 1993).

The contact between Native Americans and African Americans that was present in New Orleans, along with the African-Native American heritage of many of the first artists, may have had a substantial influence on the development of jazz. Unfortunately, because of segregation laws and racism, people of mixed heritage were often forced by American society to identify solely with their black heritage; thus, so much of traditional Native culture was lost as a fragmented

memory (Welburn 2002). This fragmented memory and the negotiation of identity can readily be seen in compositions. Pieces based on Native American subjects were common in early jazz and in other popular music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Perhaps the most famous example of a jazz standard with a Native American subject is Ray Noble's 1938 jazz standard "Cherokee," which features a romanticized exoticization of Native Americans in both the title, lyrics, and the use of stereotypically Native American musical tropes such as the use of the pentatonic scale throughout the entire form and 4/4 time signature and a stereotypically "unswung" feel with rhythmic emphasis lying on beat one. Noble's use of tropes extends to the text as well. Lyrically, "Cherokee" illustrates many of the stereotypes associated with Native Americans in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵ Noble's composition seems to be a nod to a disappearing way of life and to waning elements of Native culture through the conquest of Native women:

Sweet Indian maiden, since first I met you,
 I can't forget you, Cherokee sweetheart.
 Child of the prairie, your love keeps calling,
 My heart enthralling, Cherokee.
 Dreams of summertime, of lovertime gone by,
 Throng my memory so tenderly, and sigh.
 My sweet Indian maiden, one day I'll hold you
 In my arms fold you, Cherokee (Noble 1938).

Even the original illustration accompanying the sheet music accentuates the concept of "red" and the stereotypes of the exotic, yet stoic feminine character.

⁵ It is worth noting that Ray Noble was of European ancestry, and no record exists of him being part Native American.

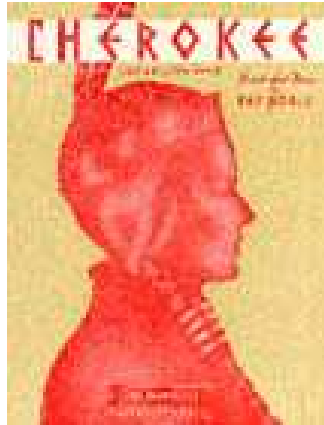


Figure 5: A picture of the cover of Ray Noble's sheet music for Cherokee. Artist unknown (1938). Image accessed on the World Wide Web. <http://www.jazzstandards.com/images/cherokee.jpg>

A few other songs that elicit the use of Native American subjects and titles include but are not limited to "On the Alamo," "Christopher Columbus," Pee Wee Russell's "Muskogee Blues," and the crossover jazz standard "Witchi Tai To," written by Jim Pepper who had both Creek and Kaw heritage. Unlike the aforementioned standards, this song represented a legitimate crossover between Native American traditional music and jazz, and was based on a sacred peyote chant.

According to Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, free jazz bassist William Parker's album *Peach Orchard* was a way to memorialize the loss and kinship with the Navajo. Parker's liner notes illustrate:

The Peach Orchard, draws its inspiration from events that took place on the Navajo land in what is now called New Mexico. The great Navajo chief Manuelito and his people were fighting against being pushed out of their homelands by the United States Army. Out of all the things the Navajo cultivated they loved their peach orchards the most. In the end of this struggle they like all Native Americans lost everything, including their cherished peach orchard which was destroyed. In reading about this I immediately felt a very deep sadness. I can only imagine the sadness they must have felt. It was the beginning of the end. In this composition you can hear the massive blanketing of American by Europe; you can also hear the voice not only of Manuelito, but of Nana, Geronimo, Wovoka, Sitting Bull, Kicking Bird, Kicking Bear, and all of the others. . . . The main force in playing this music is having the ability to feel the pain of all who

suffer. To feel as though it were happening to us; not resting until it ceases to be (Fischlin & Heble 2004, 6).

Fischlin and Heble write that this album was both a call to recognize oppression of “people of color” and to acknowledge the solidarity that took place between African Americans and Native Americans.

Parker, an African-American playing in an ensemble integrated across both racial and gender boundaries, envisions the music of “The Peach Orchard,” radically dissonant and improvisatory as it is, as a way of memorializing the loss of the Navajo, even as it presents its own recuperative historiography in a gesture of solidarity of kinship with that loss. . . . The synergistic reordering of historical time as mysterious past and present takes place (Fischlin & Heble 2004, 6).

The Native American presence in jazz is obscure, yet rooted deep. With over two centuries of contact between African Americans and Native Americans, it is not surprising that jazz would feel the Native American presence in the heritage of some of its greatest contributors, in rhythmic elements of early jazz, and in musical and lyrical tropes of Native American-inspired compositions. Rather than a linear influence, the Native American presence is an elusive and interconnected web of contact and cultural sharing. One could apply what William Parker says in his liner notes of *The Peach Orchard* to jazz history: “In this music I hear the history, the mystery and the now” (Fischlin & Heble 2004, 6).

CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION

African-Native American contact and cohabitation has been documented by historians as possibly spanning well over a century. Contact occurred in several intimate and sometimes complicated ways. Contact seems to have come through a shared slavery experience shortly after the first ship of Africans arrived in the New World. Other instances of contact occurred when Native American tribes harbored and sometimes adopted runaway slaves. Contact, however, did not end when the last shot of the Civil War was fired. Many African-Americans had the desire to maintain contact with and sometimes live among the Native Americans. Some African Americans (both Freedmen and former slaves) moved into Indian Territory in an effort come home to what Miles and Holland refer to as a “second Africa” (2004). As a result, many African Americans were assimilated into tribal life or started African American – Native American communities of their own.

Following the Native American removal and Emancipation, many Native Americans and African Americans migrated to cities, such as New Orleans, which is often referred to (and debated) as the “Cradle of Jazz.” Often times, as Louis Armstrong noted, Native Americans and African Americans lived in the same neighborhoods (2006). Further, according to Greyhawk Perkins, cultural and musical sharing resulted from this close contact (interview with the author, February 10, 2009). In fact, many of the most famous jazz contributors had both African and Native American heritage, including such artists as Edward “Kid” Ory, George Wilson, Warren and Baby Dodds, Duke Ellington, Pee Wee Russell, Charlie Parker, Don Cherry, Miles Davis, Jim Pepper, and Don Pullen, to name a few.

Native American cultural remnants can still be seen today, especially in New Orleans. The New Orleans Jazz Festival, one of the most visited jazz festivals in the world, boasts a

folklife village with a Native American stage. Mardi Gras, one of the biggest cultural celebrations in New Orleans, is full of multicultural references. The Mardi Gras Indian tradition, a practice which began in the 1880s, combines Native American-inspired costuming, the Caribbean practice of masking, and African and Native American inspired drum beats and parade dances. Some scholars believe that it was in this “Second Line” parade practice that much of early jazz began to form (Smith 1993). Although this practice is controversial and far from what many consider an “authentic” Native representation, it seems to be (at least in part) an effort to remember the shared experience with Native Americans. Many of the participants have both African and Native American heritage (1993).

Jazz, it seems, is a rich tapestry woven of so many cultural strands and colors that it is hard to decide where the threads begin or end. Jim Merod suggests that jazz is not only a reflection of culture, but serves as an archive of North American culture:

Culture, in sum, is less an engagement of intellectual or ideological differences than it is the set of energies (texts, practices, monuments, and so on) given room to exist. . . . We might then set up a theory of jazz as an art of deeply learned attention – an art of hearing. In doing so, we recognize that no jazz musician can execute skill without a relaxed and caring attention to comrades, to the jazz past and its lessons, and to the performing self attuned to its inner musical dialogue. . . . I say this because in jazz, we find more than an American tradition or a black tradition, or a vernacular practice sometimes miscast. . . . It comes from Ralph Ellison: “Each true jazz moment,” he tells us, “springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest. . . . represents (like a successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity, and as link in the chain or tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it (1995, 5).

I do not assert that either culture “loses” any piece of its rich identity. However, I do believe that more than glances were passed between these tribal people from opposite sides of the earth; perhaps it was a melody, a drumstick, a ceremony, a song, a rhythm, or even just an idea. Where there is contact, when people live together, they often make music together,

especially if it is an intrinsic part of their respective cultures. I believe that in many ways, this exchange has been a part of making America, and specifically jazz, what they are today. In this vein, Joy Harjo emphasizes rhythm as central to both Jazz and Native American music:

One day, the saxophone will be a Muskogee (Creek) traditional instrument. . . . So all of that's my sense of music and poetry. And at the root of that is rhythm. And rhythm is at the root of form and sense in this early world, maybe in all worlds. It holds physical body together, literally. In fact, rhythm holds the whole world together. Rhythms and vibration hold it together (Redmond 2004, 29).

Ashlin Parker, a rising twenty-six year-old New Orleans trumpet player with Cherokee and African American heritage confirms the importance of rhythm in the very definition of jazz:

Stiegler: So what is jazz to you? Is it heritage? Does it belong to everyone or a certain group?

Parker: Jazz? It's life. . . . It's swing, technically speaking. It's swing. But if you ask me how to define it, it's just music. . . . Life is a song. Life is music. It's just different directions, different stories. . . . Jazz is just one of those songs. It's all just different grooves, different ways (Parker, interview with author, February 9, 2009).

Perhaps this is partially where the African-Native American culture sharing experience stems; a deep pain of two peoples, braided together indefinitely. It is quite possible that the music, the rhythms, and the things they had in common helped them to survive slavery and oppression and emerge as two rich cultures that would hold on to what they had in any way they could. And, what they embraced to survive, including music, could have arisen from their shared histories and interaction.

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