

# **Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone**

**Sound Motion, Blues Spirit,  
and African Memory**

**Melanie E. Bratcher**



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Preface

# Personal Journey

The personal journey I am being drawn through presents itself as a helix of memories about a magnolia-adorned maternal grandmother and about songs that made me cry, laugh, feel, and analyze. I find myself actively seeking a career(s) in jazz/blues performance and academia/teaching. I am drawn on by destiny within these two realms. All great teachers do what they teach.

My first encounter with singing took place in Vicksburg, Mississippi, when I was five years old. As I remember it, Grandma and I were visiting family there when one Sunday she and several other elder women ushered me into a church. Promptly upon entrance, I was seated diagonally behind the pulpit with the other children in the children's choir. All of the children sat together there. We had to sing, and I did not know the songs or what else was expected of me. Amazingly, the melodies overtook me as I hummed along. The words never really came, but the sound of the music and the movements of the other children and the congregation lulled me away from my fear of being in front of the congregation, charged with the responsibility to sing. That is really all I remember about that experience in terms of my participation. But something metaphysical resides in that memory space now.

There was the feeling of opening my mouth and letting out sounds, unintelligible words to me then, but sounds that went along with the words and sounds everyone else was making. Though I knew only Grandma, I felt at home in the church. And I loved the feeling of singing, making music with my voice—in a way, rendering life. I felt vital and included and powerful. I never sang the words, but musicality had begun for me. The metaphysical memory now is the warmth that comes to me when I conjure up that scene. It is as if I were simultaneously in the choir singing and also in

the congregation looking at me singing. That is how I see the scene now because that is how I saw the scene then.

It is a picture of little brown-skinned children clumped together on little round, wooden stools. That picture is a portion of the collage of my life. In my mind I can see still and moving frames, with colors and sounds and gesticulations. Everyone is moving similarly, colorfully adorned human rainbows, sounding out in calls and responses. Our mouths are open and fill the air with energy. It is a picture of beauty. I still feel that energy when I sing today. Singing is not all that I remember of that visit to Vicksburg, but it is my primary memory. It is a memory of the sound of sound and the movement of movement and the feeling of feeling. Yes, it is metaphysical.

When I was six or seven years old, while in parochial school, I auditioned for the Villa Theresa Shamrock choir. I was determined to be a Shamrock because they sang so nicely. Well, I sang everyday, seemingly all day. Whatever was playing, even if it was only in my head, I would sing along. Then the devastation came. Sister Veronica, the only African American nun at Villa Theresa, told me that I could not sing and that I should not try. I had a very deep, low-toned, and heavy voice. I didn't sing as a Shamrock, but I still sang along to the music that played. I sang when I was with Grandma, too. She liked it. Something in me was quieted, and something in me was inspired. I became determined to show Sister Veronica that I could sing—if not then, then at some point in my life.

Eventually, I changed schools. In the fifth grade I began playing a saxophone, or sax, even though my mouth posture was innately suited for playing the trumpet, according to Mr. Scott, the band teacher. I was, however, determined to play the saxophone. It was the instrument that sounded the most like my voice as far as I could tell. Besides, it was really a nice instrument due to its curvilinear shape and sensual sound texture. It felt more like “me” than did the trumpet.

I went on through the subsequent school years as the first-chair saxophone player and eventually became a jazz band saxophone soloist. The smooth, sassy, and wretched sax sounds were like the variations of my voice—feminine, yet deep, low-toned, and heavy. My sax made raspy sounds, like I usually did when I sang high notes and really low ones. I played daily for almost five years. The better I became at manipulating the sounds on my horn, the better I became at manipulating musical sounds from my mouth. Now, I had real words to put with music. They were English words, but the sounds still seemed liked those indistinguishable word-sounds I produced when I was five years old and in Vicksburg. Eventually, as I matured, I became conscious of my developing musical

abilities. However, I was too vain to lug around my saxophone. So I began to once again depend solely on my voice to sing along with the music that played.

I sang the songs played on the radio. I adapted the styling of any voice I heard. In fact, listening to the radio was simply a constant exercise in mimicking the sound textures, vocal movements, and tonal dances of those voices in the music. I began to feel the different places from which the sounds came, and I learned to control those places. Gradually, the imitation exercises became more challenging to me. I was no longer content with just sound imitation. I sought ways to replicate the feelings in the sounds that could communicate the emotions of the words. I began to understand where I had to go within me musically to get the right sound out. I call it the “sound-place memory.” There was power in the knowledge of my sound-place memory. I could make myself and other people feel vibrations. In fact, the sound-place memory seemed like the memory of vibrations in certain parts of my head, nose, throat, and chest.

Singing to my sister and her musician boyfriend yielded me a critical forum. They would tell me whether or not I communicated an emotion sound well. If I sang well, they would tell me because they felt it. If they did not feel it, then I had not communicated the emotion sound well. I began to sing love songs to the boys who courted me just to lull them into liking me more. It worked. Singing on the phone to boys became the next venue for my sing-alongs—I was still singing along to the music that played. Unfortunately, Sister Veronica’s words still lingered in my mind and I could not sing to groups of people. This was the pattern during high school. I sang to a select few, but mostly to myself. Nonetheless, I was always singing.

I enrolled in Langston University in 1989, and in the spring of 1990, I entered the Miss Black Langston University pageant. The select few to whom I had sung for the previous four years encouraged me to let my phobia go and share my voice with larger groups. The pageant was the venue for my first public debut. “Talent” was given the most weight in determining the winner of the pageant, and I scored the highest talent rating out of fourteen contestants, nine of whom (myself included) sang. If someone had asked me then, I would have told him or her that the other coeds all sang better than I. In the end, I realized that was the point. It was about me singing the best I could, and I did. I won that pageant by communicating the emotion sounds in an old jazz ballad entitled “Imagination.”

Somehow that song picked me, and though it was a love song of romance remembered, its title presaged my ability as a performing singer. If I could imagine an emotion, I could sing it, whatever it was. My fearlessness at five, my sound quality awareness at ten, and my sound placement/

emotion sound control at fourteen all culminated on the stage when I was eighteen years old. I was a singer. Little did I know that my emotions' reservoir would expand and the sounds and control thereof would become utterly important in my day-to-day life. I still sang along to the music that played. I could imagine my world through sounds. I knew how to conjure up sounds, from where to conjure them up in my body and spirit, and how to let them out so that others could understand the words beyond mere connotation and denotation. They could understand the words in vibration and tonality and texture and style. They could live the sounds with me.

I performed with the university jazz band. I took a few operatic voice technique lessons that furthered my control of sound placement and sound projection. The puzzle became more and more complete. The picture had sound. The saxophone voice was controlled and continually refined. I eventually moved back to making sounds in addition to singing words. Still, all the sounds and words were like those I heard and made when I was five in terms of what I felt in my body and spirit. Now I could sound and sing like a saxophone without saying words: scatting.

The control I felt in my singing became the control I felt in my day-to-day living. As my emotion sound memory and conjure control got more directed, so did my life. Control became total control. It all started with controlling sound. I loved it. It made me real and my imagination real and my understanding of reality real. If I could conjure sound, then I could conjure life. If I communicated my conjuring well, then others felt me, or the sounds that came through me. I could figure out what I perceived in the world through sound. Finally, I had proven Sister Veronica wrong. I could sing, and I should pursue singing.

Grandma, Sister Veronica, the saxophone, preadolescent boys, my sister and her musician boyfriend, and Langston University students all became a part of me because of sound; they became a part of me because the sound(s) I made became a part of them. I won several other pageants, largely on the basis of my talent, and this further affirmed my ability to affect people with sound. College ended, and I still sang along to the music being played.

During the last two years of college, I reached a deeper level of my life's helix, becoming more keenly aware of my African heritage. The sound that was a natural part of me connected to the search for understanding or perceiving Africanness and showed me the value of singing as a teaching tool. The circle was certainly becoming complete. I was the official singer at all of the African consciousness meetings and gatherings. The sounds and words took on deeper meaning. The sound places I controlled began to really take me out of myself when I manifested them through the emotion

sounds. I was five and in Vicksburg again, that is, singing and watching myself sing simultaneously. I was the focal point of any gathering at those moments when I opened my mouth and let sounds come out. I was at home whenever and wherever I sang.

After graduating from Langston University, I moved fourteen hundred miles away from Oklahoma and started graduate school at Temple University. African studies became my new academic dwelling, though not quite my home yet. It became a place to further my understanding of power places. Dance became a vehicle through which the idea of muscle memory took root in my life. I understood muscle memory immediately because I could associate it with sound place memory. Control is control. Africanness became clearer, and sound and movement the same, inseparable. Dance movement became the extreme demonstration of sound vibration affecting the body. Through dance, I can recreate the movements of people to whom I sang. It was the movement of the emotion sound that came through places in me, places I could manifest via sound.

Similar to how my dance teacher, Dr. Kariamuw Welsh, taught dance steps with sound, I too began to adapt certain sound clusters as guides for certain dance movements. Sound was always there. The music that played in me constantly took on more samba rhythms and Akan rhythms and Jamaican rhythms. The sounds and words that came out of me resembled those non-English sounds I made at five. The connection between the similarities of all my sounds was more conscious. My control became more grounded in the sounds and consequent movements of brown people, clustered together throughout the world, as colorful as a billion rainbows.

After five years in graduate school, one evening I was persuaded to go out to the premier jazz club in Philadelphia. I heard and saw a performer by the name of Keisa Brown. She really mastered this control thing that I was actualizing in my life. I asked her if she gave voice lessons, and she promptly and roughly said no. Then she asked me if I sang. I said, well, my companions said that yes, I could “sang.” Keisa calmly said, “Okay, we’ll see.” The next thing I knew, I was standing in front of the stage, somewhat fearful. I felt five years old again. She told me she would give me the words, and I was to sing them. I told her that I knew some of “God Bless the Child.” We proceeded.

Suddenly, I was five and seven and ten and fourteen and eighteen years old and in the jazz band and singing at the consciousness rallies, all in one as I sang. That song consumed me, and novice or not, I was moved, as were Keisa, the band members, and several of the audience participants. They all told me so. They said that they “felt me.” All I could remember feeling was the emotion sounds and the places within me from whence they

came. At that moment, I knew Billie Holiday's spirit was in me. I wanted to cry because the vibrations I felt in me had flowed through me and into others.

I have been performing with Keisa and her band ever since. She took me under her wing. The first songs I learned with her were jazz and blues standards. Primarily, I performed lyrics/emotions written by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone. I learned and sang Billie first: "God Bless the Child" and then "Strange Fruit." When I heard Nina for the first time, she sang "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair." I instantly fell in love with her vocality, her use of that African oral tradition. I came to know Bessie because of the Blues venue in which Keisa and I worked.

My assignment was to get blues songs to learn. I went to the record store. Records of Bessie were in abundance, and I gleefully collected them. Through those purchases, I discovered where the emotion sounds of Billie and Nina came from. Simply enough, Bessie had paved the way for them. Their songs sounded similar and had similar themes. They even sang similar words; hence, somehow they had similar emotion sounds.

I dove into those sounds because they came so easily to me. "Control" was no longer the term for power. Sure, I had to go to the sound memory places I knew, but singing along with them was like Vicksburg. I did not know the words upon first listening, but I joined the melody by making sounds as if I knew the words. I was in love with our connection. My imagination was real. The emotion sounds celebrated a reality of some kind of ethos and pathos. The sounds came too easily. Thus, I believe that they had to be from some greater power who had all the emotional reservoir at hands' reach.

Those hands drew me on, and since Bessie, Billie, Nina, and I could all produce those sounds, then those hands had to have drawn us all on. Those hands had to have delivered us through similar realities/imagination, and we gave sound to what the hands gave us. Somehow we all knew the sound memory places to go in order to tax the right emotion sounds enabling us to communicate well. In more ways than I can explain, it is the "somehow" that spurs me to undertake this examination. The mystery of hands that draw me on, that draw us on, is the transcending power I seek to know, even if only in the mode of having that power come through me. It is my imaginary reality or, if you will, my real imagination of this power that brings me power that can be shared and will serve as a technique of my pedagogy.

I believe that this power was/is also a technique of Bessie, Billie, and Nina's pedagogies. Similar to being a great teacher, it is the process of knowing, by virtue of feeling, what has been and is to be examined.

Perhaps knowing the secrets of the music god in ancient Egypt, Bes, who helped pregnant mothers deliver their children with music and singing, will become my certification of ability to access and disseminate information. As an instructor of humanities and African studies, it is knowing the process of my own development, which has been manifested through singing and dancing, that will further enable me to abet my students' self-development processes.





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## Chapter One

# Introduction

For the past eight years, I have been engaged in the study of African culture, primarily African dance, African American music, and African aesthetics. Music can be a cultural form of expression that unifies, even arouses, large numbers of people. This is certainly true for African music as it is manifested in African American songs and sounds. In this study, I explore selected song performances of Bessie Smith (1894–1937), Billie Holiday (1915–1959), and Nina Simone (1933–2003) through the prism of African aesthetics. This study is guided by an intense interest in oral compositions that promote Black consciousness in general, and Black female social consciousness in particular. I look at Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s life experiences in a social and historical context, in order to discern how their music reflects African and African American cultural values. The most prevalent themes and messages in their lyrics address social ills, particularly imprisonment (incarceration), race relations, and love-induced depression. African American music speaks to the unspeakable: ideas that would otherwise be banned from the realm of language (Davis, 1999a).

In this chapter, I explore some functions of traditional African aesthetics and discuss how certain scholars utilize aesthetics in the study of Black music. I highlight specific aesthetic features such as sound quality and stylization that are common in the song performances of Smith, Holiday, and Simone, and show how sound quality and stylization of African singing have remained intact through centuries. Smith, Holiday, and Simone are musical icons because of their unique vocal expressiveness. Their songs function in the capacity of preserving African heritage for Black people and encourage alternative models of behavior and attitude toward Black women. The Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the Black Arts movement are proof of ideological evolutions nurtured through African artistic achievements. Black aesthetics

is consonant with what Welsh Asante (1994) calls a “family aesthetic” that is manifested as part of her Afrocentric and Pan-African aesthetic.

Past evaluations or studies of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone’s song performances have been outside of an African cultural context. Examples of some views of the women’s songs are those of Edward Brooks, Harry Kendall, James Felton, and John S. Williams, expressed as follows.

Bessie Smith became the “Empress of the Blues” based on her strong vocal abilities that were cultivated by “Ma” Rainey on the minstrel circuit in the early 1900s. Music critic Edward Brooks talks about her flawless control on intonation and her “innate sense of swing, a quality not possessed in such abundance by other popular singers of the time . . . she often [phrased notes] across the principal accents to build up an agreeable tension against the main pulse” (1982, p. 5). However, the description falls short of revealing how her sound quality and stylization of sound could have functioned as aesthetic features that communicated values to her listeners.

When discussing jazz, especially nascent jazz, which is essentially the blues, Billie Holiday was often mentioned. For example, newspaper columnist and music critic Harry Kendall describes the sound quality and stylization of sound that “Lady Day” was famous for: “the gritty tone, the natural vibrato, and Lady Day shaping notes and phrases which made her voice sound identically like the fluid, melancholy tenor saxophone of the late Lester Young” (1975). The connection to aesthetic significance is missing. The description is poetic; it alludes to a kind of beauty in her singing; but how do her sound quality and stylization of sound function according to African aesthetics?

When Nina Simone, the “High Priestess of Soul,” performed at the Academy of Music on November 29, 1963, music critic James Felton stated that “whatever she sang, Miss Simone seemed absorbed in a kind of celebrating sorrow” (Felton, 1963). Music critic John S. Wilson commented on her July 3, 1966, performance at the Newport Jazz Festival: “A feeling for the jazz musician’s manner of attack and sense of phrasing was implicit in some part of Miss Simone’s performance. These qualities became dominant in her shouting, growling treatment of a wry blues . . . in the swinging drive she brought to a chant based on a work song pattern” (1966). Simone was the “High Priestess of Soul” because of critiques like these, but there is more that can be extracted from her vocal style.

This study defends African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of music by evaluating selected songs of Smith, Holiday, and Simone according to particular African and Black aesthetic values. I

uncover and utilize symbols, motifs, myths, codes, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African aesthetic ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for analyzing the selected songs.

The twentieth century phenomenon of discipline amalgamation and integration makes it necessary to define what the aesthetics are and how they function for both the African and African American. Numerous writers have expounded on the historical and cultural bond between continental and diasporan Africans. It is not based solely on color, but the bond exists because of a common African heritage that dates back to predynastic Egypt (Ancient Kemet). (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 3)

## AESTHETICS, FUNCTION, AND UTILIZATION

I understand Kariamuwelsh's<sup>1</sup> statement, above, to mean that aesthetics are central to any study of African and African American culture.<sup>2</sup> She defines aesthetics as a branch of philosophy that deals with the science of perception, especially as it relates to beauty or the beautiful in art<sup>3</sup> (Welsh Asante, 1994, pp. 1, 8). Music is an integral aspect of the arts in African culture. "As Africans, we use music as a vehicle for history, love, work, sadness, joy, celebration, philosophy, belief, and ritual. We use music as a primary means of communication" (Richards,<sup>4</sup> 1985, p. 226). In response to Richards's statement, it is appropriate to ask, how does music communicate perspectives and feelings about life experiences? The answer lies in aesthetics because "how" is often a matter of style and perception. Because I am focusing on African American music, it is necessary to define African aesthetics.

Robert Farris Thompson defines the African aesthetic as "a mode of intellectual energy that only exists when in operation, *i.e.* when standards are applied to actual cases and are reasoned" (1974, p. 1). For example, when a standard, such as flexibility, is applied to a dance,<sup>5</sup> an examiner can reason whether or not the dance operates according to that standard. If the dance does operate according to that standard of flexibility, then the dance is functional. It is functional because it demonstrates flexibility. Therefore, the dance can literally communicate to observers that physical flexibility is desirable. It can also communicate to observers that flexibility, or the ability to overcome obstacles, is a necessary skill in day-to-day living. Dance functions as a "mode of intellectual energy" that communicates various values. In traditional<sup>6</sup> Africa, dance and music are intricately linked.

Those who have studied African music (Merriam, 1964, 1982; Brandel, 1973; Nketia, 1974; Bebey, 1975; Chernoff, 1979) tend to concentrate on “traditional” African music practices, styles, traditions, and functions, particularly from West and Central Africa. Firmly noted in these works is the connection between music and dance; they function similarly. Functionality in music and dance is an aesthetic concern.<sup>7</sup>

As an example, ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam argues for the use of aesthetics in the study of African culture:

It is true that many studies in the past have focused upon music or dance structure to the exclusion of other problems, and it is also true that such studies must be of major concern to the student of music and dance. However, in connection with African studies, as well as with studies of other areas, there is a growing conviction among students of the aesthetic aspects of culture that both their technical and broader behavioral studies must assume far wider application than they have tended to do in the past. I am hopeful that the relationships discussed . . . between music and dance on the one hand[,] and other aspects of human behavior on the other, will help . . . to bring a new understanding to those who do not make aesthetic behavior their primary academic concern, and to indicate clearly the vast potential sources of understanding that studies of aesthetic behavior can make to their own disciplines. (Merriam, 1982, p. 133)

In Merriam’s view, the study of aesthetic behavior,<sup>8</sup> including music and dance, provides a common focus amongst the multitude of disciplines that comprise African Studies. His idea correlates to Welsh Asante’s concern that “the twentieth century phenomenon of discipline amalgamation and integration makes it necessary to define what the aesthetics are and how they function for both the African and African American” (1994, p. 3). African American studies, like African studies, is interdisciplinary, and the connection between music and dance in African culture pervades African American culture. Therefore, following Merriam’s argument that aesthetic aspects of culture like music and dance are central to African studies, it is viable to argue that the same is true for African American studies. In either case, the study of aesthetic features in music and dance imparts cultural values, and when an investigator studies African culture, African cultural values must inform the investigation (Asante, 1992).

Arguing similarly, musicologist Samuel Floyd Jr. (1995) proposes that the study of music is fundamental to the study of African American or Black culture. He also states that music and dance must be completely intertwined

in the study of Black culture because they are intrinsically linked. Both music and dance communicate cultural values, and Floyd acknowledges that the use of aesthetics to discern cultural values is becoming more central in his approach to African American music. His aesthetic approach to Black music yielded “tropes,” like the “train trope,” “chariot trope,” and “the trope of all tropes, the Call-Response” trope (1995, pp. 216, 213, 229–230).<sup>9</sup>

Theomusicologists Jon Michael Spencer (1996) and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan (1997) believe that the study of religion and music, or theomusicology, must be infused with the study of music (and dance) in order to create a more expansive approach to Black music and culture. They too see the value of aesthetics; and in their view, the addition of religion in the study of Black music brings the sacred world of Black culture into focus. Any discussion about the spiritual essence of Black forms of communication, including language, speech, music, and dance, is also a discussion of aesthetics (Alkebulan, 2003, p. 33). For example, Kirk-Duggan’s use of the aesthetic in theomusicology brought her to the following conclusion about the function of spirituals and Civil Rights songs:

How these songs move the performer and listening participants is the function of a particular note in a particular phrase in a particular song performed in a particular place. Music moves one through its poignancy, its implied and embodied beauty, in ways that most people do not understand but leave to a notion of divine mystery. Yet hearing voices throughout the world singing ‘We Shall Overcome,’ in a quest for peace and democracy moves one to an aesthetic appreciation of the consummate human spirit. The Spirituals honor that beauty, that aesthetic, as freedom. (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. 106)

Merriam, Floyd, Spencer, and Kirk-Duggan’s arguments support Welsh Asante’s position that African aesthetics are central to the interdisciplinary study of African American culture. The bond between African and African Americans becomes more apparent through aesthetic analyses of art forms. Music and dance are functional<sup>10</sup> in African culture, and they have tended to be functional in African American culture. As the function of African American music has evolved, so has the African aesthetic.

However, before I enter into that discussion, I must clarify how I am using the term “music.” Music includes expression such as drumming, chanting, recitation, and song. For the purpose of this study, I am focusing on song and use the terms “music” and “song” synonymously, unless I indicate otherwise. In this study, song is discerned in two ways: (1) as lyrics



and (2) as performance.<sup>11</sup> Lyrics state, reflect, suggest, or embody a basic attitude toward an experience. They indicate emotion, philosophy, and beliefs. Performance restates and/or counterstates the emotion, philosophy, and beliefs that lyrics indicate (Murray, 1976). Song performance actualizes our emotions, philosophy, and beliefs as rhythms (Baraka, 1998). Through performance, the relationship between song and dance culminates into a vast and dynamic source of knowledge, extending the lyrics into the auditory and gesticulated world (Jones, 1963; Neal, 1972a; Murray, 1976). The songs that sustained the souls of Black folk in America were derived from African song traditions.

## DESCRIPTIONS, SOUND QUALITY, AND STYLIZATION OF SOUND

In traditional Africa, virtually every event in the life<sup>12</sup> of the individual or community was an occasion for song (Nketia, 1974). There were songs for birth, puberty rites, marriage, adulthood rites, death, work, play, war, social gatherings, ceremonial gatherings, agricultural rites, and religious rites, and songs that recounted important historical events like the installation of kings (Nketia, 1974; Bebey, 1975). Songs often tended to be sex differentiated. Women sang at occasions associated with children or adolescent girls, and at funerals, while men primarily sang warrior songs, hunting songs, fisherman and boat songs, and work songs (Southern, 1997). Themes in songs often included abuse of authority, boasting, fear of rejection, friendship, insults, revenge, social control, social responsibility, strife, and eventually trouble with the White man (Nketia, 1974; Merriam, 1982). Some aesthetic features in African singing are style of delivery,<sup>13</sup> sound quality, and stylization of sound.

For the purpose of this study, the two prominent aesthetic features in music that I emphasize are sound quality and stylization of sound. Describing sound quality in African singing, ethnomusicologist Francis Bebey states,

The objective of African music is not necessarily to produce sounds agreeable to the ear, but to translate everyday experiences into living sound. . . . African voices adapt themselves to their musical contexts—a mellow tone to welcome a new bride; a husky voice to recount an indiscreet adventure; a satirical inflection for a teasing tone, with laughter bubbling up to compensate for the mockery—they may be soft or harsh as circumstances demand. (Bebey, 1975, p. 115)

Ethnomusicologist A. M. Jones (1949) describes the melody and form, or stylization of African singing, in the following manner:

Broadly speaking, the outline of an African tune is like succession of the teeth of a rip-saw; a steep rise followed by a gentle sloping down of the tune; then another sudden rise—then a gentle sloping down, and so on. The tendency is for the tune to start high and gradually to work downwards in this saw-like manner. . . . There is however a distinct feeling in these tunes of hovering over and around a central note or notes, round which the melody seems to be built or toward which it works. (Jones, 1949, p. 11)<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, the aesthetic features of sound quality and stylization of singing in African songs involved the manipulation of timbre, texture, and tonal shading. A singer would alter timbre to achieve a raspy or percussive sound. Texture was juxtaposed between vocals and instruments. Tonal shading was changed to achieve sharp and flat pitches, and pitch changes could be sung as straight or shaky sounds, and as bends, slides, and slurs. African singers also colored their melodies with moans, shouts, grunts, screams, and hollers. Song stylization often involved call-and-response and repetition as a means for altering rhythm, text, and pitch (Nketia, 1974; Merriam, 1982; Maulsby, 1991). The function of these aesthetic sound qualities was to personalize and personify continuous change and extreme latitude, and participants typically expected vocalists to demonstrate their musical virtuosity (Maulsby, 1991). The values of an African musical event represented an integrity and style that participants willingly sought to incorporate in daily activities (Chernoff, 1979, pp. 155–156).

The basic aesthetic function of African singing remained intact;<sup>15</sup> however, the social context in which hundreds of thousands of Africans would find themselves changed dramatically in the early 1600s. The songs of cooperation like boat songs and work songs that Africans employed in daily life were readapted in the New World.<sup>16</sup> Those songs were to be the keepers of the aesthetic during the sea voyages that marked the beginning of the *Maafa*<sup>17</sup> (“Disaster, or great misfortune”; Richards, 1985, p. 214) that is commonly known as the transatlantic slave trade.

Cultural and linguistic differences created a chasm between Blacks and Whites (Herskovits, 1941). However, language barriers amongst the New World Africans were overcome through the common language and practices of music and dance (Stuckey, 1987). African song traditions, as they were manifested in Black songs, were often used for mobilization and incitement. The songs expressed soul—a force of strength, power, and an intense effort and will to survive (Richards, 1985, p. 224). During the seventeenth century, African Americans maintained their native African worldview, which according to Richards (1985) is “the way in which a people make sense

of their surroundings, of life, and of the universe” (p. 209). In the African worldview, God, the deities and ancestors, humans, and animate and inanimate objects were (and are) forms of interdependent spirit or life (Mbiti, 1970). In the eyes of early African Americans, the removal of the drums by fearful Whites was an attempt to cut off the Africans from their source of spirit, from their worldview, but Africans throughout the colonies found various ways, such as patting Juba (i.e., rhythmically complex song and dance choreographies, including hand clapping, foot shuffling and stomping, and often knee and chest patting) and playing the banjo, fiddle, bones, triangle, and tambourine, to preserve the percussive element so dear to their lives (Epstein, 1977; Southern, 1997).

Enslaved Africans adapted and evolved their music traditions in response to various situations; particularly harsh circumstances (Maultsby, 1991, p. 185). Retention of African oral traditions<sup>18</sup> provided enslaved Africans solace in the face of tremendous hardships. Life became dichotomous: “being human and being treated as animals” was the result of the “evil of slavery” (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. 17). However, the African aesthetic dimension of song and dance culminated into African American work songs about fieldwork; domestic chores; corn, cane, and cotton harvesting; and street cries and field hollers. In order to understand the ways that Africans attained unity in America, one must study the circle, that is, the ring in which they danced. (Stuckey, 1987, p. 12). The ring shout<sup>19</sup> preserved the enslaved Africans’ traditional worldview, but the Anglican Church needed to convert Africans to Christianity.<sup>20</sup> What brutality of the economically motivated slave trade<sup>21</sup> had not stripped away from the Africans, Christian missionaries were sure to try and erase. However, Africans adapted the musical anthems of Christianity, and the “Negro” spirituals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were born.

The spirituals, which would inspire the form and content of the Civil Rights songs of the 1950s and 1960s, were a unique blend of African vocal genius and “functional sense that planted the dramatic in word” and song (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. 103). Largely fostered in the ring shout and camp meetings, Black folk spirituals maintained much of the stylization of sound that marked work songs, and for the enslaved Africans, the transition from so-called secular songs like work songs and social songs to sacred songs was simply a matter of lyrics. Singing, in the slave community, still functioned as it had in the past, in terms of African aesthetic characteristics such as leader-chorus antiphony, speech-song, chant-song, call-and-response, and repetition of refrains. The holy and the profane were becoming part of some enslaved Africans’ view of the world. However, these “New world” Africans accepted Christianity mostly on a superficial level. Their interpre-

tation of Christian beliefs and ceremonies was put through a sieve and liturgies were re-created as African rituals (Maultsby, 1991, p. 197).

In 1865, communal solidarity amongst the newly freed Africans was temporarily disrupted. They were free to search for family members, but discriminatory legislation<sup>22</sup> and practices restricted their employment possibilities, and the viability of social, political, and economic opportunities was less than promising. Despite this disruption, the “liberal ornamentation, soaring rhythmic movements and sharp syncopation” of the folk spirituals began to animate the new songs of sorrow that would formally be called the blues<sup>23</sup> (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. 105). Sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois asserted in 1903 (see Du Bois, 1994) that the spirituals function dialectically; sorrow songs were undergirded with the hopes of jubilee, jubilee songs were sung to overcome sorrow, and both communicated the union of sacred and secular spheres. The same is true of the blues:

Whatever they sing is of a religious character, and in both cases [performances of secular and sacred music] they have a leader . . . who starts a line, the rest answering antiphonally as a sort of chorus. They always keep exquisite time and tune, and no words seem too hard for them to adapt to their tunes. . . . Their voices have a peculiar quality, and their intonations and delicate variations cannot be reproduced on paper. (Wentworth Leigh, 1921, p. 156)

Ironically, for churchgoers, blues was the “Devil’s music,” even though “holy-rollers” typically participated in the “Saturday Night Function” (Murray, 1976). Blacks who sought to rid themselves of “black folk” ways and “slave vernacular” disassociated themselves from the blues (Spencer, 1996; Reed, 2003).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the blues were becoming more popular because the church placed a great deal of emphasis on heavenly rewards instead of on gratification in the here and now (Reed, 2003). The nascent blues focused on suffering as well as on release and pleasure.<sup>24</sup> Spirituals, gospel, and the blues songs communicated values for living; each had its own holy and profane dimensions in the social lives of Black folks.<sup>25</sup> Blues music and its progeny, jazz and rhythm and blues (soul), spoke to the collective will, to spiritual and physical needs, similar to the way traditional African music speaks to and communicates a collective will (Baraka, 1998; Floyd, 1999; Reed, 2003).

In the twentieth century, the spiritual continuum of African worldview continued to permeate Black music. Recorded music allowed listeners to continuously respond and react to the soul in Black music at their will.

According to Jones (1963), Black people are the Blues people, and our lyrics and music performances portray our lives.

Many respond to what they wish to think is being said rather than the statement the composer wrote, but even so, the chances are that most of their goose pimples and all of their finger snapping and foot patting are produced by the sound far more often than by the meaning of the words . . . the essential message is usually conveyed by the music whether vocal or instrumental. (Murray, 1976, 76, 82)

Sound effects in the transmission of soul through African and African American music highlight the fact that musical transcription cannot capture the consistent use of vocal/instrumental elisions, slurs, breaks, riffs, jumps, and swinging—the percussive incantation—of African American music (Floyd, 1995; Baraka, 1998). Concentrated description and evaluation are needed to understand the relationship between sound, motion, and spirit in Black music. However, “what is at issue is the primordial cultural conditioning of the people for whom blues music was created in the first place. They are the dance-beat-oriented people. They refine all [sound, bodily, mental, and spiritual] movement in the direction of dance-beat elegance” (Murray, 1976, p. 189). Even though the Blues lyrics descended from the field hollers and sorrow songs of the spirituals, which typically state and counter experiences of hard luck and failed love, the Blues performance was and is a dramatic ritual that mocks those images with vocal and instrumental effects or stylization of sound including scoops, bent notes, blue notes, falsetto, shouting, whining, moaning, speaking, or growling (Murray, 1976; Southern, 1997).

Nascent jazz recapitulated many of the themes in the blues; however, there was more emphasis on up-tempo, polyphonic textures or instrumentals. The improvisational techniques (sound effects) that were customarily associated with jazz mirrored the dynamic strides of Black people in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Jazz performance is/was the epitome of a Blues aesthetic mode of performance as ritual, and it is believed that those rituals cleansed the spirits and minds of Black people (Murray, 1976; Jackson, 2000).

Soul music, or rhythm 'n' blues (R & B), in the 1950s and 1960s redefined the blues lyric by borrowing content from both the sorrow songs and jubilees. Soul music performance emphasized concerns about injustice, racial pride, black militancy, and protest in a more intensified, explosive manner; it was the rebirth of gospel performance from the sanctified churches of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Soul performance was the

Saturday night function and the Sunday morning service all rolled into one. The more sound effects, call-and-response, and yelling, the better, more beautiful the experience because the African American ethos is/was sure to be released and renewed (Southern, 1997; Reed, 2003).

For Blues people, this African, Blues tradition continued to offer relief, sanctity, ecstasy, and entertainment (Murray, 1976, p. 148). The Blues made life bearable, but also the Blues made life meaningful. The swing principle of rhythm was and is essential because “the performer is the stylizer, the humanizer of chaos; the performance is the ritual, ceremony, and art; the dance-beat motion improvisation of experience in the blues idiom is survival technique, aesthetic equipment for living, and a central element is the dynamics of African American lifestyle” (Murray, 1970, p. 58). Resilience, dance-beat elegance, flexibility, and (s)heroism are the prime motives of African aesthetic motion-sensibilities in African American music (Small, 1999).

There is a need for research that deals with perception of beauty, good, and the function of “dance-beat elegance” or sound effects in African American music from an African-centered perspective. Consequently, a scholarly void exists in music history because of the limited presence of literature in which researchers focus on African aesthetics as a baseline discipline for the study of African American music. A few exceptions, with regard to aesthetics, are Albert Murray’s *Stomping the Blues* (1976), Samuel Floyd’s *The Power of Black Music* (1995), and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan’s *Exorcising Evil* (1997). However, their analyses are not African-centered.

There is sparse research that focuses on music authored by Bessie Smith (Empress of the Blues), Billie Holiday (Lady Day), and Nina Simone (the High Priestess of Soul). Two exceptions in terms of Black female aesthetics are Angela Davis’s (1999a) analysis of Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday; and Farah Griffin’s (2001) examination of Billie Holiday. However, their analyses are not centered in African aesthetics.

I have analyzed aesthetically the selected song performances of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone to show how the African aesthetic features of sound quality and stylization reveal African cultural values and motion sensibilities.

Specifically, in this study I will explore and discuss three dominant areas. I determine whether or not commonalities exist between Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone’s life experiences. I also ascertain whether or not thematic commonalities exist in song lyrics authored by Smith, Holiday, and Simone. Finally, I apply the Nzuri theory/model, an African dance-based theory/model, to recordings of Smith, Holiday, and

Simone's selected song performances and thereby explore applicability of Nzuri to song performances.

Additionally, this study provides new ways of understanding the value of sound quality and stylization for artists and critics of artistry. It expounds upon the African aesthetic and expands the Nzuri theory/model by showing how songs communicate cultural and social constructs. Further, this study provides a method for analyzing song-texts. It contributes to the understanding and appreciation of aesthetic analysis of music, particularly through an Afrocentric examination of African-derived music. Additionally, the scope of terminologies used in describing African-derived music is increased. A process is presented that has the potential to help ground African/Afrocentric artists, both current and future, in the idea of functional art and responsible art.

Keep in mind that my study is limited to songs composed and recorded by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone. This study does not cover the entirety of their lives in great depth. Instead, it focuses on common and therefore prevalent issues in their lives. Nor does this study consist of interviews with any of the subjects' descendants, contemporaries, critics, or scholars. The texts, including the selected songs that are reviewed, utilize English-based texts only. This study does not examine or emphasize at any depth the sexual orientation of these women. Rather, it follows an Africana womanist position that in some Afrocentric research, discussions about same-sex orientation are tangential to the focus on African culture (Hudson-Weems, 1995). Additionally, the analyses of the selected song performances are not based on Western music culture or its musicological assumptions, including music notation systems, though findings (theoretical and descriptive) may be deemed comparable in some instances.

## Chapter Two

# Catching the Blues Spirit

### AFROCENTRICITY AND PARADIGMATIC ISSUES

I evaluated the song performances of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone using an Afrocentric paradigm of aesthetic analysis that is grounded in African culture. According to Molefi Asante (1998), “Afrocentricity” means “placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” (p. 2). This conception provided a cultural framework for the cultural/artistic continuities in Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s songs that could be discussed. In this chapter, I explain an Afrocentric methodological approach by discussing (1) Afrocentric principles and practices; (2) Kariamuwelsh Asante’s (1994) aesthetic conceptualization of an Afrocentric and Pan-African aesthetic—Nzuri; (3) Welsh Asante’s (1985) seven aesthetic senses; (4) data collection; and (5) the two-part method.

### AFROCENTRICITY

Asante (1992a) asserted that Afrocentricity is the dedicated practice of looking at Africans as focal throughout history (p. 6). Accordingly, the main methodological principle in my study is that African culture must be viewed as the foundation for analysis and evaluation of the selected songs written and performed by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone. I applied the four Afrocentric foci—cosmology, epistemology, axiology,<sup>1</sup> and aesthetics—to data collection and throughout the data analysis in order to accomplish Afrocentric centering, which involves the following components:

- 1) Analytic—use [and filtering] of knowledge for cultural transformation/liberating consciousness of African minds; 2) Methodological—operations that involve the Afrocentric framework identifiable by



agency, centeredness, psychic integrity, cultural fidelity; and, 3) Philosophical—relocation to and reorientation in dynamic African action and data as the rationale constant in all Afrocentric work. (Asante, n.d., pp. 1–3)

I uncovered and utilized symbols, motifs, myths, codes, and circles of discussion that reinforced the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for analyzing the selected songs of Smith, Holiday, and Simone. According to the Asante-Modupe (Asante, n.d) construct, the five characteristics of a cultural configuration for an Afrocentric study are as follows:

(1) An intense interest in psychological position as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals and signs; (2) a commitment to finding the subject-place of Africans in any social, political, economic, architectural, literary, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class; (3) a defense of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, education, science, and literature; (4) a celebration of ‘centeredness’ and agency and a commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives about Africans or other people; and (5) a powerful imperative from historical source to revise the collective text of African people. (p. 5)

This study investigates the psychological position of Smith, Holiday, and Simone by looking at their artistic rituals, that is, their musical contemplation, and by looking for Black, Black female, and African symbols and motifs in their songs. The researcher sought to find cultural meaning in the social, political, economic, and spiritual/religious experiences of the women in order to extrapolate their class, culture, and gender issues. The song performances were examined for the presence of African artistic and cultural elements. And, finally, this study includes a glossary of terms relevant for understanding African value systems.

Afrocentricity served as a relevant framework for investigation. Specifically, it guided the researcher’s centered analysis of African American women’s original songs as part of a whole African artistic value system. That cultural whole was viewed in its own terms and then codified with Welsh Asante’s (1994) Nzuri theory of beauty and goodness.

## NZURI

Beauty and goodness, which are synonymous, are valued according to Welsh Asante (1994, p. 9). In the African aesthetic, the two concepts are based on

the idea of functionality, that is, if an artistic product is functional, meaning if it promotes positive, transformative beliefs and practices, then it is valuable and therefore beautiful and good. If a song performance, for example, transmits knowledge that can positively affect a listener in a given society, then it is beautiful and good. Also, if a song performance teaches a listener about her history, power, and/or resilience, whether through lyrics or the sounds that are associated with those lyrics, then it can also be perceived as being beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

Welsh Asante maintains that the opposite of beauty is “ugly,” or ugliness (1994, p. 9). If ugly is the opposite of beauty, then an ugly song performance is one that negatively affects listeners and does not transmit any beauty or goodness. Ugly lyrics and ugly sounds associated with those lyrics, such as the unjustifiable use of profanity or the portrayal of deleterious images in a song performance, are of little value in the African aesthetic. If a song performance is irresponsible, has a negative effect within a given society, and is not functional, then it is ugly. For example, when commercial rap music promotes killing and criminality as values, according to Nzuri, that music is ugly and is of little use.

However, ugly is not synonymous with bad<sup>3</sup> (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 9). Based on the idea that bad is not the same as ugly, when an “unpleasing” or bad sound/word is used to effectively express a life-enhancing idea within the context of a song performance, then the sound/word and song performance become beautiful and good: valuable. Noted ethnomusicologist Francis Bebey (1975) informs us that, in traditional African views, a good singer need not have a mellifluous singing voice—a good singer expresses life in a way that is meaningful and relevant. However, a song performance can be judged as bad, literally meaning ineffective, if it is unexpressive and/or ineptly improvises on a previous song performance. From an Afrocentric perspective, any such song performance is of little or no use and is valueless because it does not perpetuate the artistic or cultural dynamicism.

In order to determine what is beautiful, good, ugly, and/or bad in my subjects’ song performances, I highlight and describe various moments, particularly sound motions, in their song performances by applying the Nzuri model. The Nzuri model, when applied to performances, allows a researcher to examine different yet related components of artistic processes and products.

One can think of the components in Welsh-Asante’s (1994) Nzuri model as different lenses through which an artist’s process and product can be analyzed. The Nzuri model sources are (1) the spirit source, (2) the rhythm source, and (3) the creativity source, each of which can be applied to an artist’s process or musical forethought. By looking through the lenses

of the three sources, the researcher can show how Smith, Holiday, and Simone's ideas, beliefs, and/or experiences become songs.

The Nzuri model incorporates seven aspects: (1) meaning, (2) ethos, (3) motif, (4) mode, (5) function, (6) method/technique, and (7) form.<sup>4</sup> Together, they can be applied to an artist's product or song performance to further describe its value. Using the Nzuri model principles (Ashe, Ehe, Oral, and Nommo Spiritual Mode), I determined how relatively effective each artist's product was in her society. By looking through the lenses that the three principles provide, I searched for beauty, goodness, ugliness, and/or badness in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's selected song performances.

Nzuri is also applicable to a variety of artistic forms, including, but not limited to, dance, music, storytelling, and literature. They all communicate and/or transmit messages through movement, texture, color, and rhythm. However, for the purposes of my study, the connection between music and dance is paramount. Throughout the study, the terms "sound movement," "sound motion," "sound effects," "expressive sounds," and "expressiveness" are synonymous.

According to the distinguished ethnomusicologist Kwabena Nketia, music and dance are inseparable (1974). African (African American) songs and dances constantly undergo modification. However, there is a continuity of rhythmic, textural, and expressive style. The connection between music (song) and dance is evident in most instances. It is the combination of movement, direction, and intensity. It is the emphasis (sound effect) that many singers place on sounds/words that determines their expressiveness.

Lyttelton (1982) concluded that sound effects expose the African connection to African American music. L. Jones (1972) noted that the redistribution of expressions of African impulses abounds in blues, jazz, and soul music, especially vocal music. Ultimately, the sound effects in Smith's Blues, Holiday's Jazz, and Simone's Soul music expose important moments in their song performances.<sup>5</sup> I examined those moments of expressive sound movement to point out their relevance to both the artist's message and the demonstration of African religion/philosophy/sensibility.

Welsh Asante's (1985) seven aesthetic dance senses (polyrhythm, polycentrism, holistic, curvilinear, dimensionality, repetition, and particularly epic memory) were used in this study, in three ways. First, I described the sound movements (effects). Second, I conceptualized how the sound movements are relevant to Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics within their song performances. Third, I emphasized how those sound

movements demonstrate continuity of expressive sensibilities and values in my subjects' song performances.

## DATA COLLECTION

First, the song selection procedure adhered to Asante's (1991) social/behavioral cluster. This cluster focuses on human behavior in relationship to all forms of existence: other humans, living or dead, the cosmos, and self (p. 20). I explored issues in Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone's lives and song lyrics<sup>6</sup> in order to find common life experiences and common song themes. Themes of love, social consciousness, politics, economics, and relationships tend to be common in Black female expressions, according to Hill-Collins (1991).

Second, I utilized African artistic traditions to inform the song contextualization procedure. This procedure was subsumed into Asante's (1991) cultural/aesthetic cluster where the manifestation of values, goodness, and art is sought out in creative, artistic, and inventive facets of human phenomena (p. 19). The conceptualization of Nzuri was applied to the selected songs in order to contextualize and simultaneously describe, examine, and evaluate their artistic process and product.

I used Nzuri theory to identify complementary perception and values. Explicit were two questions: how did Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs affect my perceptive values; and, inversely, how did their songs inform my values and consequently my perceptions? The result of these two questions was an integration of discovery and verification of Smith, Holiday, and Simone's selected songs as part of a Black, Black female, and African cultural continuum.

## TWO-PART METHOD

The method of this study adhered to the rules posed by Leedy (2001) and Neuman (1994) regarding the use of content analysis on forms of human communication, in particular music. Adaptations of Spradley's (1979) domain analysis for the song selection procedure and Weber's (1974 and 1981) ideal type for the song codification procedure informed my study's two-part method. Afrocentricity and Nzuri have been explicated as the principles and practices and aesthetic theory that guided these procedures.

I used content analysis to select and analyze the songs. I followed six steps in each method application. In step 1, I state the source that was used for analysis. In step 2, I state how that source was collected. In step 3, I justify the source within the context of the purpose of the study. In step 4, I

describe the sampling method of the songs. In step 5, I describe how categorical development was derived in part 1 and how theoretical analysis was implemented in part 2. Finally, in step 6, I describe how the songs were tallied or selected in part 1 and how the songs were evaluated within the Nzuri theoretical framework in part 2. In steps 5 and 6, I explain the various substeps used in conducting the two following procedures of content analysis.

### *Part 1: Song Selection Procedure*

The first application of content analysis determined the source for analysis in this study. This determination dictated that songs must be evaluated in the context of their composers' lives, thus creating a domain of life themes and song themes. In this case, more specifically, the composer must have recorded/sung those songs as well. It also eliminated extreme bias in the selection of songs. The purpose of this application was to make a final selection of songs for use in the second application of content analysis. The process flowed in this manner:

1. Stating the source: the exhaustive population of songs written by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone was established. (See Appendix One, "Discography," for their original compositions.)
2. Finding the source: a majority of the population of these songs was available on long-playing record (LP), cassette, and compact disc (CD). I obtained sixty-four out of seventy-six songs on CDs (CD compilations) from academic and public libraries as well as through purchase (see Appendix One). I chose CD compilations, included in Appendix One, based on the following: (1) some CDs and CD compilations included many songs in one, and were therefore cost effective; and (2) other CDs and CD compilations included later versions of my subjects' songs, particularly those of Holiday and Simone. This was important because according to Bebey (1975), matured voices are considered to be more valuable in terms of sound stylization and quality.
3. Justifying the source: Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone's original compositions were the primary source for investigation in this study because part of the purpose of this study was to show commonalities in songs they authored.

4. Sampling method: the total number of songs collected served as my available sample of songs. The total number collected was sixty-four.
5. Category development: the “Analytic Categories of Cultural Data” were derived from the following steps. A “Life Profile Matrix” apparatus was constructed from Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s biographies and autobiographies. The apparatus was a chronological chart of their lives, that is, major “Cultural Data Experiences” (see Appendix Two). Having scrutinized the “Cultural Data or Experiences” in the Life Profile Matrix apparatus, seven major analytic categories of cultural data emerged: imprisonment, love, race, freedom, religion, career, and money (see Appendix Three, “Life Profile Matrix,” column 1).

Within Appendix Three, I provided an overview of the seven analytic categories of cultural data in terms of the “General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators” (see Appendix Three, column 2). I showed my subjects’ “Total Events per Analytic Category” (see Appendix Three, column 6). I showed the “Total Events per Singer” (see Appendix Three, bottom row). I then described each of the seven analytical categories of cultural data by including some “Thematic Qualities of Occurrences” taken from the Life Profile Matrix (see Appendix Four, “Life Profile Matrix: Analytical Categories Thematically Qualified”).

The results of cross-referencing the seven analytic categories of cultural data (see Appendices Three and Four) with the thematic qualities of the total available sample of songs per singer was the basis for my discussion in Chapter Four (see Appendix Five, Tables A5.1 through A5.3). The seven analytic categories of cultural data overlapped and/or intersected with each other in several ways (see “General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators,” column 2 of Appendices Three and Four). Based on these intersections, the discussion in Chapter Four did not follow a “traditional,” linear progression; rather, the discussion was circular.

6. Tallying process: the song selection and tallying process resulted from cross-referencing the seven analytical categories of data with the total available sample of songs, and vice versa (see Appendix Five, Tables A5.1 through A5.3). In order for one of the seven

analytical categories of data to have been taken into consideration as a prevalent theme, it must have appeared in 50 percent<sup>7</sup> of the total available sample of songs per singer (see Appendix Five, Tables A5.1–A5.3, for vertical tallies and calculation functions). In order for a song from the total available sample of songs per singer to have been taken into consideration for selection, it must have demonstrated 50 percent<sup>8</sup> of the seven analytical categories of data (see Appendix Five, Tables A5.1–A5.3, for horizontal tallies). The songs that demonstrated 100 percent of the prevalent analytic categories of data per singer were qualified for selection (see Appendix, Five, Tables A5.1–A5.3, again, for horizontal tallies).

The songs (with original recording dates) that qualified for selection were Bessie Smith’s “Young Woman’s Blues” (1926), “Preachin’ the Blues” (1927), “Poor Man’s Blues” (1928), and “Pickpocket Blues” (1928); Billie Holiday’s “Billie’s Blues” (1936), “Everything Happens for the Best” (1939), “Lady Sings the Blues” (1956), and “Fine and Mellow” (1939); and Nina Simone’s “Four Women” (1965), “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” (1969), and “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (1968). Only the maximum, equal number of songs per singer that received the appropriate vertical and horizontal tallies became the “Selected Songs.” The maximum equal number of songs was three. (See Appendix Six for selected song performances, and Appendix Seven for selected song performance thematic charts.)

Although “Pickpocket Blues” by Smith demonstrated African American socioeconomic issues that were noteworthy and were to some degree replications of (imprisonment and money) issues found in “Poor Man’s Blues,” I disqualified it because her other three songs provided more African Aesthetic evidence. I disqualified “Fine and Mellow” by Holiday because it replicated much of the thematic (love) content found in “Billie’s Blues.” Holiday’s other three songs also provided more African Aesthetic evidence.

### ***Part 2: Song Contextualization Procedure***

The second application of content analysis method was devoted to demonstrating the Afrocentric and Pan-African aesthetic theory—Nzuri. The purpose of this second application was to critically evaluate the selected songs using the concept of an ideal type—in this case, an African aesthetic

code, the Nzuri model. (See Appendix Eight for an explanation of Nzuri model constructs.)

1. Stating the source: the selected songs (original and recorded compositions) of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone.
2. Finding the source: the same as “finding the source” in “Part 1: Song Selection Procedure.”
3. Justifying the source: the selected songs were justified as a result of “Part 1: Song Selection Procedure.” I selected the following recorded performance versions: Bessie Smith’s “Young Woman Blues” (1926), “Preachin’ the Blues” (1927), and “Poor Man’s Blues” (1928); Billie Holiday’s “Billie’s Blues” (1956), “Everything Happens for the Best” (1939), and “Lady Sings the Blues” (1956);<sup>9</sup> and Nina Simone’s “Four Women” (1977), “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” (1969), and “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (1977).<sup>10</sup>
4. Sampling method: I listened to the nine selected songs repeatedly and charted the recurrence of sound stylizations and qualities that impacted me. I noted how those sound effects made certain lyrical phrases and words mesh with the explanations of specific Nzuri model aspects.
5. Category development: The Nzuri model (Welsh Asante, 1994) provided the categories of analysis and evaluation. The Nzuri model was applied to the selected song performances to render aesthetic analysis. (See Appendix Eight for a chart of Nzuri model components.)
6. Evaluation process: I scrutinized the selected song performances according to Nzuri theory by describing, examining, and evaluating lyrics and sound motions within the contexts of the Nzuri model. (See Appendix Nine, Tables A9.1–A9.9, for the results that are discussed in Chapter Five) The following components or contexts—three sources, seven aspects, and three principles—from the Nzuri model were used to analyze my subjects’ songs.

The three sources for describing and examining the creative process of my subjects’ songs were incorporated as follows: (1) I discussed the spirit source in terms of the motivation of the creative process and/or an answer



as to why the song was created; (2) I discussed the rhythm source in terms of how the motivation took place and how the creative product was developed, and I answered how the creation of the song manifested layers, or levels, of my subject's experiences; and (3) I discussed the creativity source in terms of how it enriched the universe and how it enriched the composer of the song and its listeners.

The seven aspects were used to describe and examine my subjects' song performances as follows: (1) the discussion on meaning dealt with the message that each song communicated as well as with the importance of that message; (2) the discussion on ethos provided description of the types of emotions and energy the song showed at various moments and through various sound motions or movements; (3) the discussion on motif explained symbols or symbolic references found in the songs that reflected African American and/or African culture and heritage; (4) the discussion on mode described the moods or attitudes a song and its singer showed and evoked; (5) the discussion on function dealt with classifying each song according to traditional African "roles of song texts"; (6) the discussion on method/technique and form detailed the types of instrumentation, including vocals, and instrumental stylization (sound motions); and (7) the discussion on form was incorporated with the method/technique discussion in order to describe how the style(s) of each song summoned emotive response. I included the structure, shape, and composition of each song. Structure included but was not limited to the tempo and time signature of a song. Shape included the essential form/genre. Composition included texture (or tone variations).

Throughout my discussion of the seven aspects, I integrated various aesthetic and music canons to further explain my subjects' performances. Hence, I expanded the Nzuri model and theory. (See the "African Aesthetics," "African Music," and "African American Music" sections in Chapter Three)

Two of the Nzuri principles were incorporated to evaluate the selected songs (that is, the creative product) in terms of that which was good, beautiful, bad, and/or ugly: (1) I used the Ashe principle to determine and affirm the existence of African American culture/heritage, particularly symbols or symbolic references in the selected songs; and (2) I used the Ehe principle to respond to and affirm the use of creativity, discovery, and renewal, both by and in the creation of each song, particularly as it related to the way that each song moved me.

I subsumed Welsh Asante's (1994) Oral principle and the Nommo Spiritual Mode principle within both the Ashe and Ehe principles. In this study, the Oral principle and Nommo Spiritual Mode did not necessarily expand the literal meaning of "oral" to include all transmissions of artistic

products. The songs were actual oral/aural forms of art that included the idea of energy that varies in forms both spoken and unspoken, and through movement and gesticulation.

The preceding methodology allowed me to explicate the Nzuri theory as an African aesthetic theory that ultimately guided my analysis of the selected songs (performances) by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone. The idea that perception and value were interchangeable was expanded by the ideas that goodness and beauty were synonymous, and that the opposite of good was ugly; furthermore, bad could be of value. This conception was the domain within which I perceived my subjects' songs.

The methodological principles of Afrocentricity—including its paradigmatic issues, the African aesthetic Nzuri model, and the constructs of centeredness, wholism, and agency—were applied to solve the problem and subproblems of this study. By employing Nzuri, I was able to “capture the spirit,” that is, contextualize special moments throughout Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s selected songs and identify value in their creative process and product. Finally, the constructs of centeredness, wholism, and agency enabled me to identify and resolve concerns conferring on (1) appropriating proper cultural context and (2) focusing on African cultural ideals.



## Chapter Three

# Musing African Memory

A universal aesthetic that is applicable to all the arts is valid only within the context of a particular culture. In effect, the cultural dynamics of a people create a specific aesthetic complexion. An aesthetic that reflects the images and symbols of a culture exists in harmony with the cosmology of that society, thus facilitating the highest creative expression and innovation.

Welsh Asante (1993, p. 215)

## AFRICAN TRADITION-ORIENTED CULTURES

Many of the seminal studies of Africanisms in African American culture were conducted by anthropologists (Puckett, 1926/2003; Herskovits, 1941), sociologists (DuBois, 1939; Johnson, 1940), historians (Woodson, 1936), and linguists (Turner, 1945), who argued that early African American socialization was based in African culture. They concluded that African folklore and oral history were the mainstays and sources of the morals, religious beliefs, and social customs that became African American folkways.

Puckett (1926/2003), Woodson (1936), and DuBois (1939) cited basic conditions that led the transmission and substance of folklore in Southern black folk beliefs and folkways. They hypothesized that Southern folkways guided by African spiritual principles are evident in arts, religious beliefs, and burial customs. For example, beliefs in spirits, divination, and good and bad luck are common. These were prominent themes in numerous early twentieth-century Black songs.

Comprehensive analyses of Black cultural similarities are found in the writings of anthropologists (Mintz & Price, 1976; Hurston, 1981; Abrahams & Szwed, 1983; Robinson, 1991), ethnomusicologists (Maultsby,

1991; wa Mukuna, 1997), historians (Levine, 1977; Blassingame, 1979; Stuckey, 1987), African American studies scholars (Asante, 1991; Holloway, 1991), art historians (Thompson, 1991a, 1991b), and linguists (Van Sertima, 1971; Twum-Akwaboah, 1973). These researchers concluded that traditional African cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors were pervasive in New World African communities. They were transmitted through African American oral traditions.

Turner (1945, 1949), Abrahams and Szwed (1983), Twum-Akwaboah (1973), wa Mukuna (1997), Hurston (1981), and Asante (1991) focused on idiom—lexicon, syntax, tonality, and rhythm in African American oral traditions. A student of Herskovits, Turner (1949) examined West African and Central African linguistic retentions in the Gullah lexicon. He reported that some five or six thousand words from the Niger-Congo and Bantu language families survived in the Gullah vocabulary throughout the coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia.

Turner's (1945) smaller compilation of Gullah words and sounds included the word "washwoman," which meant laundress. Blues singers, Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey in particular, used this word in their songs. "Washwoman" songs gave voice to Black domestic workers. Refrains in several songs (Simone's "Images") told of the struggles and low self-esteem of such women. These songs were not an impetus to become washwomen. Turner's 1945 study described African linguistic retentions and also the relevance of socioeconomic issues found in early female Blues.

In addition to studies on lexicon retentions from Africa, studies by linguist Twum-Akwaboah (1973); ethnomusicologist wa Mukuna (1997); folklorist, novelist, and anthropologist Hurston (1981); and scholar of communications and African American studies Asante (1991) researched retentions of African linguistic syntax or word ordering in North America. Each documented African language behaviors and stressed that there was heavy emphasis on action words. Hurston (1981) called these action words "verbal nouns": nouns became verbs. For example, the noun "jook" becomes "jookin"—to party. Asante (1991) used the term "serial verbs" to refer to several verbs that replaced a single verb.

Hurston (1981) noted that American literature was enriched by African usage of "metaphor and simile," "the double descriptive," and "verbal nouns." Although Twum-Akwaboah (1973) came to a similar conclusion, his linguistic analysis was tour de force, riddled with a virtuostic use of linguistic terminology. The idea of action words was important in this study because Black singers have historically placed heavy emphasis on action words. For example, in "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," Simone placed heavy emphasis on the word "Black" and turned the proper noun into a

verbal or action word, as if to say “Black is”—to perform the state of being Black.

Hurston (1981) and Asante (1991) asserted that time usage was vital in African American language and music, while wa Mukuna (1997) concluded that time usage was the vital aspect in rhythmic considerations. Holloway (1989) reported that the Gullah concept of time correlated to traditional African concepts of time. He noted that precise times or dates were irrelevant in ordinary conversations, folklore, and music. Mbiti (1970) and Pennington (1990) reported that many West and East Africans conceptualize time in two dimensions—the long past and the present—which connect the sacred world to the physical world and dictate daily rhythms. Reference to this kind of time concept was particularly evident in Black songs of alienation.

Van Sertima (1971), Mintz and Price (1976), Levine (1977), and Stuckey (1987) examined functions of African American folklore and focused on code switching, the trickster figure, and the sacred world of enslaved Africans. Mintz and Price thoroughly described cultural conditions pertaining to diverse issues such as family, kinship, economics, ethnicity, code switching, bilingualisms, and Black identities. They concluded that African cultural traits have persisted in the African Diaspora.

For example, Mintz and Price (1976) determined that the practice of code switching<sup>1</sup> preserved Black identities in the African Diaspora. This conclusion supports assumptions about African cultural permeation in the African Diaspora. Their findings were important for establishing that African cultural traits are evident in Black songs. As another example, Van Sertima (1971) asserted that African American folklore transmitted ideas of revolution because it included and consequently endorsed the practice of code switching. African folklore, according to Van Sertima, depicts protagonists (represented as animal archetypes) who reverse their oppressive conditions by using a coded language with their antagonists. His findings are consistent with those of other researchers.

Levine (1977) extensively examined the folktales, folk culture, and “religion” of enslaved and free Africans. He too concluded that the animal trickster figure often found in these tales had African antecedents. He further asserted that these folktales fostered the belief in a sacred world. Stuckey (1987) concluded that some enslaved Africans engaged in a sacred circle dance called “ring shout” that encouraged Black Nationalism. Ring shout participants moved counterclockwise, halted at times, and recounted memories of their nonslave lives. They faced southward and revered their ancestors who comprised the spirit world. The connections between

African-oriented folk culture, movement, and memory are important within this study.

Holloway (1991), Thompson (1991), Maultsby (1991), and Robinson (1991) expounded on Africanisms in Black art and music. They concluded that art and music helped maintain African folklore. Holloway (1991) stated that traditional African American culture was derived from Central African (Bantu) culture. That view contradicted Herskovits (1941), who wrote that African American culture evolved from West African culture. According to Holloway, Bantu cultural homogeneity dominated the African Diaspora even though there were greater numbers of enslaved West Africans. It is also reasonable to believe that both West and Central African cultural traits were transmitted to the New World by way of Africans brought to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade.

Thompson (1991b) reported on Kongo-culture artistic retentions in America. Other studies by Thompson (1991a, 1993, 1995, 1999b) focused on Kongo ritual sculpture, bottle trees, dance, “writing” or ideograms, and religious philosophy. Collectively, they comprise the “Afro-American Atlantis.” Specifically, Thompson argued that aspects of Kongo-Angola culture spread throughout early nations. He also asserted that West African religious systems pervaded South America. Thompson concluded that the arts of the Kongo and the Afro-American Atlantis culture spread cosmological consciousness to all parts of the world.

B. J. Robinson (1991) also researched folk belief systems and folklore. She pointed out the use of code switching and protest in a form called the “Juba” song that extols the trickster function. She concluded that African American folklore has healing powers and came from African religious beliefs. Relatedly, Maultsby (1991) wrote about Black music characteristics, functions, and performances. Aspects of West African and Central African religious philosophy in connection with trickster functions in music are pertinent to my research.

While Thompson (1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1995) asserted that a cosmological world consciousness came from the Afro-Atlantic arts, Maultsby and Robinson asserted that an African American social consciousness came from Black music. It is clear that African artistic practices, particularly folklore, the ring shout, and music, transmitted a mass social consciousness, which took shape in various artistic forms of Black protest and Black Nationalism.

The Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the Black Arts movement are proof of ideological evolutions nurtured through African artistic achievements. When countless scholars and artists searched for “Art for Life’s Sake” justification (Neal,

1972a), relevant Black art found refuge in Black aesthetics. Black aesthetics is consonant with what Welsh Asante (1994) calls a “family aesthetic” that is manifested as part of her Afrocentric and Pan-African aesthetic.

## AFRICAN AESTHETICS

Through a review of the works by notable African philosophers (Mbiti, 1970; Jahn, 1990;<sup>2</sup> Gyekye, 1995, 1997; Karp, 1995; Eze, 1997a, 1997b; Makang, 1997), there is little doubt about the presence of an African philosophical continuum in African American songs. Welsh Asante (1994) noted that the presence of this continuum does not imply conscious will on the part of artists. Also, Mbiti (1970), Gyekye (1995), and Karp (1995) document traditional West and East African philosophy influences. J. Jahn (1990), Gyekye (1997), Eze (1997b), and Makang (1997) are less sure about the adaptation of African cultures to New World and postcolonial societies.

Gyekye (1997) and Eze (1997b) noted the need for African philosophical adaptations in terms of modernization but cautioned that such adaptations must avoid assimilation into Western philosophy. Makang (1997) critiqued colonial attempts to construct a static conception of Bantu philosophy. She argued that Africans must not abandon constructive, dynamic, traditional African systems of thought. Most African scholars see the value of perpetuating traditional African philosophies. Mbiti (1970) asserted that African philosophy and the idea of African religion are inseparable, and coalesce into an ontology in which all being (God, spirits, humans, animals and plants, and nonbiological phenomena) is connected.

Jahn (1990) described ontological aspects of Muntu (humanbeingness), Kintu (animate and inanimate things), Hantu (time and space), and Kuntu (modality). They all share the vital force, Ntu. Central to this study is Jahn’s discussion on Nommo, the spoken word that activates Ntu. The idea that the spoken or sung word could bring things to life is a crucial component of African cultures. Gyekye (1997) concluded that oral transmission of philosophy, such as within African cultures, is as valid as Western written transmission, for example. Welsh Asante’s (1994) inclusive conception of the “Oral Principle,” whereby African philosophy or consciousness is transmitted through storytelling and music (Nommo), dance, literature, visual art, and even plastic art, illuminates the expansive nature of oral traditions. This approach validates Jahn’s contention that Bantu philosophy influenced neo-Africans, particularly in terms of the idea or function of Kuntu (modality or attitude/style). African modal retentions in African



American traditions are evident in Blues music, which evolved from folklore traditions.

Jahn (1990) states that the Bantu modality in the Blues brings about a shared audience response to the Blues performer that sometimes shapes overt actions to oppressive conditions. This accedes to Welsh Asante's "function aspect," or operative relationship between song performers and their audience. It could be said that singers vividly expressed not only their own experiences but also those of the larger community of Black people. All of these writers' conceptions are central to the connections I draw between Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances and African American religious/philosophical values.

The Blues phenomena preceded and ran parallel with the Harlem Renaissance (1915–1930). Black artists and leaders of this era produced art and political philosophies that conveyed an African social consciousness. Works by Locke (1995), Hughes (1995), and Schomberg (1995)<sup>3</sup> demonstrate that African Americans had an African heritage that was a wellspring of pride. They concluded that "Negro" artists had a responsibility to produce art that inspired Blacks to connect with their African heritage. This notion was not new (see Garvey and Essien-Udom, 1977; Hurston, 1981; McKay, 1987). Each asserted an aesthetic that was fully immersed in African heritage.

Marcus Garvey (Garvey and Essien-Udom, 1977) asserted that his political and African philosophies were valid reasons for Blacks to move "Back to Africa." McKay (1987) internalized a Black aesthetic that inspired him to celebrate his Blackness with poems, song, dance, and socialization with Blacks. His social Black aesthetic demonstrated irreverence for so-called high culture dictates of socializing. McKay's perspective provides a "Motif aspect" for Black artistic creations. Hurston (1981) also found solace in African American language, socialization, and religious practices. She emphasized the belief that the preacher and sermon style of communication is ideal for perpetuating Black social consciousness. She promoted a Black female aesthetic of freedom. Her literary characters often lived their lives as they saw fit, free from externally imposed patriarchal expectations of females. Garvey, McKay, and Hurston's ideals are useful within the goal of this study.

P. Harrison (1972) provides an intriguing account of the evolution of African folklore and the trickster figure in Black America. He states that African folklore and the evolving forms of the trickster figure, such as Brer Rabbit, Stackolee, and the Signifying Monkey, remind African Americans that they should construct a progressive society within a larger oppressive society. The tricksters to some extent embody Welsh Asante's (1994) "creative flesh of history" in the evolution of myths.

It is interesting to note that Harrison declared the “Blues God” of wit and sarcasm came from African sensibilities of style, rhythm, and theatrics. Thus, he concluded, Black art must continue to serve the “Blues God” mode. And this is done through *Nommo* (the spoken word), whose magical power can release the spirit of Black consciousness, particularly when it is used with the “Blues God” communication style and rhythmic movements. There have been no successful Black social movements without the assistance of Black artists.

Gayle (1972b) and Fuller (1972) argued persuasively that “Black Aesthetic” ideals are necessary for Black social, political, and cultural progress. In fact, Neal (1987, 1989) and Baraka (1987) concluded that supportive Black art is a main ingredient for a successful Black revolution. Each writer—Gayle, Fuller, Neal, and Baraka—stressed that Black art has the responsibility of teaching African and humanitarian consciousness, because without it Black people will move away from the humanity of their African rooted (“epic memory”) experience (see Welsh Asante, 1985).

Gayle (1972a) declared that the Black aesthetic is a therapeutic means to help Black people get away from polluted popular culture of the West (p. xxiii). Therefore, relevant Black art is needed to fulfill two agendas: (1) to show anger toward racial oppression, and (2) for the edification of Black Nationalism. Fuller (1972) argued similarly by asserting that the Black aesthetic is a Black artistic style that reproduced Black ghetto rhythms and colors in order to affirm African heritage. Fuller also declared that the major component in that style is the “cool” mode. To Gayle and Fuller, aspects of Black art are necessarily revolutionary.

Rogers (1972), Stewart (1972), L. Jones (1972), Welburn (1972), and Walton (1972) provide considerable information about the Black aesthetic in African American music. Rogers asserted that the virtuoso technique in Jazz came from African folk roots. This virtuosity was most evident in Black singers who performed in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Their legacies are heard in current-day vocal acrobatics or expressive sound movements.

L. Jones (1972) argued that Gospel, Blues, Jazz, rhythm and blues (R & B), and Soul music, especially vocal music, reproduce culture-specific expressions of African impulses. And they are characterized by the hollers and shouts that are Blues spirit style or the “Blues God” mode, as P. Harrison (1972) called it. Indeed, hollers and shouts are major elements in countless song performances. L. Jones called this “redistributed expressions of African impulses in African American music.” Walton (1972) and Stewart (1972) reported on the differences between Western and African aesthetics of music. Walton posited that strict rationalism in Western aesthetics of

music called for a fixed system of notation that allowed predictability. This music notation dictated that musicians played the precise melodies and time signatures without deviation. Sheet music does not capture the sound movements or sound effects that characterize Blues, Jazz, and Soul music.

Walton (1972) concluded that to judge African and African-derived music according to this Western aesthetic was incorrect and inconclusive. Small (1999) agreed and concluded that African musicians/vocalists rarely relied on notated music, since notation defeated the aim of responding to the progress of an occasion or circumstance. Walton further argued that the art of improvisation came from Africa. Aesthetic ideals in African music include antiphony and polyphony, and both were improvisational by nature. Walton described antiphony as call-and-response between instrument and instrument, instrument and voice, instrument and chorus, solo voice and chorus, and/or vocal solo and instrument. He described polyphony as several musical phrases played simultaneously where the phrases were multirhythmic, multimedodic and multirhythm-multimedodic.

Walton's musical descriptions support Welsh Asante's (1985) "polyrhythm" (several rhythms) and "polycentrism" (several centers of sound) dance senses. Floyd (1999) declared call-and-response the musical trope of tropes and concluded that it descended from the ring shout. Stewart (1972) declared that aesthetics was a reflective occupation that formally dealt with the material and mechanics of artistic creation. He concluded that whereas Western aesthetics focused on material creation, African aesthetics focused on spiritual creation. He assessed that African aesthetics centered on the animation of African philosophy, that is, on the process of creation becoming creation.

Furthermore, Stewart argued that the Black aesthetic is concerned with the process (spirit, creativity, and rhythm sources) through which artistic creation becomes cultural/social consciousness (ashe, ehe, oral, and Nommo spiritual mode principles). Stewart (1972) also described an African poetic ideal in terms of African American musical improvisation; thus, he clarified Rogers's (1972) "virtuoso technique" concept. This poetic ideal, called "kufumbana," was a form of call-and-response, of improvisation: the first poet calls with two lines of verse using sixteen syllables, and the other poet responds with two lines of verse, also using sixteen syllables. Each poet has to call and/or respond using this format in the same timeline or meter and rhyme as the first poet, and each has to include a pause that denoted the rhythmic division in a line of verse. The goal is to trip up each other, or outdo the other, that is, to signify on one another.

Mutere (1995) stated that the most essential ideal in an oral aesthetic is the power of call-and-response as a cycle that signified not only in music

but also through music. Swindell (1994) asserted that African American music must be viewed from that kind of perspective of power. Caponi (1999) is another author who agrees that African American artistic practices transmit and maintain African aesthetic structure. She asserts that African aesthetic structure is central in balancing individual and community needs. Welsh Asante (1994) incorporates the “Meaning aspect” and “Function aspect” in her Nzuri model, which for the purposes of this research are used to encompass Mutere’s (1995) and Swindell’s (1994) belief in the power of the call-and-response cycle, as well as Caponi’s belief about African American artistic transmission of African aesthetic structure.

Floyd’s (1999) conception of the five elements of reference necessary to fully analyze Black music codify Mutere’s (1995), Swindell’s (1994), and Caponi’s (1999) call-and-response conceptualizations: (1) signifying traditions in Black folk music, (2) performer/audience call-and-response, (3) individual/community cultural context, (4) emphasis on development of musician skills, and (5) emphasis on Black music and dance connectedness. These five referential elements comprise the Call-Response principle, which is similar to Welsh Asante’s (1994) Nzuri model for analyzing African artistic products in general. Also, Floyd’s conclusion that Black music should be analyzed in reference to dance corroborates Welsh Asante’s (1985) concept of dance senses: polyrhythm, polycentrism, epic memory, curvilinear, holistic, repetition, and dimensionality. These senses connote style in terms of spirit.

Thompson (1974) constructed ten canons for aesthetically evaluating African sculpture and dance compared to Welsh Asante’s seven aesthetic senses for perceiving African dance. Moreover, Welsh Asante (1993) documented that many of Thompson’s conclusions about West African dance (motion) are also evident in Zimbabwean dance. Welsh Asante is a prominent advocate for the pervasiveness of African (motion) stylization. Thompson examined African sculpture and formed the idea of “ephebism,” or youthful power, that is manifest through swing, vital aliveness, flexibility, and ancestorism or the ability to incarnate destiny. His canons “ephebism” and “ancestorism” are translated into Welsh Asante’s (1985) “epic memory” sense of experience.

Thompson’s “Afrikanische Aufheben,”<sup>4</sup> or simultaneous suspending and preserving of the beat, is similar to Welsh Asante’s “holistic” sense of silence and sound being integral parts of performance. Thompson’s “get-down” quality, or descending direction in melody, sculpture, and dance, is similar to Welsh Asante’s “dimensional” sense of depth and texture. Further, Thompson’s “multiple-meter,” or dancing many drums, is similar to Welsh Asante’s polyrhythm and polycentrism existing simultaneously.

Thompson's "correct entrance and exit," or "killing the song, cutting the dance, and lining the face," is similar to Welsh Asante's "holistic" and "repetition" senses. Finally, Thompson's "vividness cast into equilibrium," or personal and representational balance, is similar to Welsh Asante's (1985) "epic memory" sense and also her (1994) "Meaning" aspect. Thompson's "looking smart or playing patterns with nature and with line," also called "the cool," and his call-and-response, or the "Politics of perfection," are aspects of the call-and-response device. Thompson's canons are substantive for researchers who seek to connect African values with expressive movement. His research correlates my analysis of sound motion in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances.

Neal (1972) devised a Black aesthetic schema comprised of five categories of Black aesthetic evolution and three elements of myth structure. They are found in some of Welsh Asante's (1985) dance senses and (1994) Nzuri theory and model.<sup>5</sup> Neal's five categories of Black aesthetic evolution are race memory (epic memory), the Middle Passage (motif), transmutation and synthesis (ethos and method/technique), Blues God/tone as meaning and memory (ethos and mode), and the Black Arts movement/Black Art aesthetic (meaning, form, and function). The three elements of myth structure that he postulated were mythology (epic myth), neo-mythology (institutional myth), and history as unitary myth (improvisational myth). Neal's schema is important for assessing value in Black music.

Welburn (1972) declared that the melodic rhythms or riffs of James Brown's saxophone section evoked racial (African) memories of rhythmic complexity and melodic textures, which by extension portrayed the essence of American iniquities and African spirituality. The value of Welburn's argument is that it illustrated theoretical contemplation similar to what Neal (1972) meant by race memory, what Thompson (1974) meant by sense of "ancestorism," and what Welsh Asante (1985) meant by "Epic Memory." This vein of African/Black aesthetic theory was essential to the purpose of my study—to show that Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances could be used to teach African artistic sensibilities and cultural values.

Welsh Asante (1994) stated that African aesthetic theories are specific or general. She founded an *Umfundalai* or artistic school of thought that could be used to focus on the essential or the essence in a Pan-African aesthetic theory (1994, p. 9). She argued that both deep and surface structures of African art—dance, music, plastic and visual art, and literature and folklore—were perceptible through her theory. She also asserted that perception led to judgment or valuation of art and that the scope of

values included good, bad, ugly, and beautiful. Therefore, she conceptualized the Nzuri theory and model as a Pan-African aesthetic.

Her conceptualization of Nzuri includes a model with three sources for examining the idea of spirit in creative processes: spirit, rhythm, and creativity; seven aspects for describing and interpreting creative products: meaning, ethos, motif, mode, function, method/technique, and form; and three principles for evaluating the idea of spirit in creative products: ashe, ehe, and oral. Her Pan-African aesthetic facilitates all African artistic blueprints or paradigms.

## AFRICAN MUSIC

When examining African and African-derived music, researchers have determined, described, and explained music forms. This approach is relevant to the study of traditional African music. Ward (1927), Hornbostel (1928), and Herzog (1934, 1945, 1949) reported on tuning, rhythmic organization, music contemplation, and relationships between speech tone and melody in African music. Based on Western musical expectations, they argued that tuning was problematic in African music. Still grappling with the problem of African tone standards (such as microtone usage or numerous gradations of pitch used on a syllable, word, or phrase, causing that syllable, word, or phrase to sound out of tune), eventually researchers focused more on pulse, bar measures, meter, rhythm, and call-and-response.

Yet another problem arose. The asymmetrical nature of African musical phrasing—several time signatures played simultaneously, or poly-rhythms—prompted reevaluation of Western standards of musical notation, but none took thorough action on that reevaluation. Jones (1959) was representative of this methodological struggle. I avoid the quantitative trappings of Western musical notation.

The works of several writers (Tracey, 1948, 1954; Merriam, 1963; Nettl, 1966, 1975; Wachsmann, 1966, 1970; Ames & King, 1971) leaned more toward positivistic accuracy in the notation of African music and caused further methodological problems in terms of strict participant-observation rules. Their research, however, impacted the growth of knowledge about characteristics of African music. Several writers (Kyagambiddwa, 1955; Merriam, 1964; Brandel, 1973; Bebey, 1975) attempted to correct those methodological issues in their books by adding more commentary on the functions of African music and musician contemplation of musical process and product. However, these studies were mainly Western aesthetic discourses and spoke mostly in terms of

the materials used in creative process and product—the external musical instruments and consequent music scores created from “participant observations.”

Blacking (1965, 1967, 1970) and Kauffman (1969) questioned the Western ethnomusicological methods, techniques, and styles of discourse, and presented carefully pondered works adding pieces of evaluative commentary in their writings on African music, particularly children’s songs. Wachsmann (1982), Nettle (1983), and Nketia and DjeDje (1984) further questioned the Western nature of discourse about African music and argued for ethnomusicology to accept methodologies that employed context sensitivity. They asserted that context sensitivity must include musicians’ perspectives in order to enable them to better understand what they should be examining in the music.

Works by Agawu (1992a, 1992b), Kisliuk (1998), and Scherzinger (2001) also pushed for context sensitivity in analyzing African music. But, more importantly, they argued for the inclusion of subjectivity in analyses. To include their own understanding of musicians’ rules, they postulated, would result in more appropriate evaluations of African music.

There are several notable works that contribute to the general descriptive flow of African music (Blacking, 1967; Waterman, 1969; Nketia, 1974, 1986; Bebey, 1975; Berliner, 1978; Chernoff, 1979; Merriam, 1982; Kubik, 1986, 1994; Agawu, 1992a, 2001; Kebede, 1995; Saakana, 1995; Stone, 1995; Nesbitt, 2001; Nwezi, Anyahuru, & Ohiauraumunna, 2001; Scherzinger, 2001; Fryer, 2003). They each concluded that characteristics of African music fell within the following domains: musician training, transcendence/magic, social/ceremonial function, meaning, speech and song, song-texts, instrumentation, and musical product. They typically described musical product in terms of melody, melorhythm, tone (pentatonic scale), pitch, timbre, texture, harmony or unison, call-and-response, tempo/pulse, and especially rhythm.

Brandel (1973), Nketia (1974), Bebey (1975), and Merriam (1982) wrote about those music domains in West and Central Africa because Herskovits (1941) established that those cultures were the bases of African American culture. Brandel described Central African musicians and their contemplations in terms of the ritual and ceremonial functions of their music. She asserted that those musicians seriously contemplated the transcendent/magical powers of the music they created. Brandel and Nketia started noteworthy discussions about the role of song-texts in continental African music. While Brandel pondered the topic, somewhat confining her brief conclusions to the realm of the mystical and metaphysical, Nketia concluded that songs functioned as texts that communicated musicians’

reflections on both personal and community experiences. Furthermore, the sacred world of spirits was part of the community.

Kebede (1995) described an ancient Ethiopian music description/notation system. He illustrated various kinds of sound movements that were used for expressing connectedness between the physical and sacred worlds. Kebede's (1995) Ethiopian, Ge'ez language-based music (sound movement) terms included the following: yizet, deret, Kinat, Ciret, difat, KurT, ruT, rikrik, hidet, and serez (see Glossary for definitions). Those sound movements correspond to many of Welsh Asante's (1985) dance senses. Kebede's terms are central to my description of African-oriented sound movement in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's performances.<sup>6</sup>

Nketia (1974) and Merriam (1982) placed instruments in one of four categories: aerophones (flutes, reed horns, as well as tube and belled horns), chordophones (lutes, zithers, harps, and "fiddles"—with vibrating strings), membranophones (drums), and shaken, scrapped, plucked, and struck types of idiophones (rattles and beaded gourds, bells, xylophones, mbira, or hand piano). Bebey (1975) reported similarly and added that the human voice was the most widely used instrument. Bebey also reported that instruments from the other four categories came into existence in order to mimic sounds and tone textures produced by the human voice.

Fryer (2003) and Scherzinger (2001) noted that the texture or quality of African music was a combination of rasp or scrappiness with airy flute, blaring trumpet-like tones, and deep, bass drum tones that maintained string instrument-like fluidity. Fryer concluded that the texture of West and Central African music was common for at least two thousand years. Scherzinger stated that similar music texture existed from Zimbabwe to both West and East Africa. These works confirmed that the texture of music throughout West, Central, and Southern Africa was common.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC

Southern (1997) wrote the authoritative work on the history of "Black" music. She described personalities, genres, and instrumentation from colonial America to the 1980s. This book is important for two reasons: (1) her discussion on the African heritage of African American musical instruments, particularly the fiddle, banjo, and drum, supports discussions of vocal tone and melorhythm; and (2) her treatise on traditions and trends in the Black entertainment industry sheds light on the musical training and careers of Black singers.

D. Harrison (2000) reported on female Blues artists. She said that blues queens of the 1920s, particularly Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Sippie



Wallace, Edith Wilson, Victoria Spivey, and Alberta Hunter, led the fight for Black women's rights with their music. She concluded that these "Black pearls" emerged from Southern backgrounds, rich with religious and folk music traditions. Harrison also argued that those women both preserved African heritage for Black people and encouraged alternative models of behavior and attitude toward Black women. Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs function in this capacity.

Davis (1999a) wrote about Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday. She examined social protests, lesbian relationships, love relationships, and revolutionary ideology in their music. Davis made extensive use of their lyrics, which demonstrated vernacular troping of blues songs from the 1920s to the 1950s. Largely focused on the political aesthetics of the Blues, Davis observed that the most prevalent themes and messages in Rainey, Smith, and Holiday's lyrics addressed social ills, particularly race relations and love-induced depression. She maintained that African American music spoke the unspeakable: ideas that would otherwise be banned from the realm of language. Davis concluded that Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday promoted Black consciousness in general and Black female social consciousness in particular through their music.

Friedwald (1990) described a wide range of singers, beginning with the Bessie Smith era—the 1920s. He compared Smith and Holiday's singing styles and concluded that their styles similarly demonstrated defiant attitudes. Antelyes (1994) called Bessie Smith the "Red Hot Mama" of the 1920s. Even though Bessie Smith was a music icon, she was vulnerable to the changing trends of the music industry. In any case, her music demonstrated strength, conviction, and Black female self-esteem.

LeRoi Jones (1963), who is now known as Amiri Baraka, concluded that rhythmic and timbre or tone variations specific to African music were inherent in African American music. He argued that African American music was African music, and furthermore he set this African music against the backdrop of American cultural and economic history. He articulated the belief that the Blues and Jazz singers were effective signifiers of the times.

Wilson (1999) corrected ethnomusicological characterizations of off-harmony in African tone (tuning) unison. He called this music phenomenon the "Heterogeneous Sound Ideal." Jones (1972) and Wilson's arguments about the ideal of having multiple tone standards validated my analysis and evaluation of vocal tone and instrumental tone or polycentrism of sound in songs by Smith, Holiday, and Simone.

Floyd (1995) wrote about African American music history and aesthetics. He concluded that the religious beliefs of African Americans were intermingled with the trickster figure in folklore and African music. He

identified tropes in Blues and Jazz—styles that conveyed the idea of deliverance from hard times and bad experiences—as functions of signifying and the trickster. His idea of trope, particularly the train trope, the chariot trope, and the “sometimes” trope, substantiated descriptions and interpretations of messages about “deliverance” that came from both the style and content of Black songs. Findings in this study follow suit.

Miller (1995), Dinerstein (1999), and Murray (1999) reported on the Blues and Lester Young’s style. Murray (1970) also reported on style or ethos and form in the Blues. He declared that the Blues style came from an “idiomatic orientation” in terms of riff style, a musical form of call-and-response signifying that replicated the amen corner in Black churches and the ring shout; break style, similar to the pause in Kufumbana; syncopation, or accentuation of off-beats or weak beats; and tonal coloration, as in scattling, drum talk, and rhythmic melodies. Dinerstein reported on Lester Young’s cool style. He concluded that Lester Young’s music epitomized a relaxed intensity. Miller argued that the saxophone played one of the most important roles in sustaining African musical concepts of sound quality or texture, technique or improvisational microtone play, and delivery style. Dinerstein’s discussion supported Thompson’s (1974) looking smart canon.

Floyd (1989) and Malone (1999) reported on the connectedness of Black music and dance. They argued that basic characteristics of dance/Jazz dance among New World peoples of African descent remained dynamically constant. They asserted that the dances included improvisation, the shuffle, the call-and-response pattern, and the counterclockwise circle dance. They argued that the dances and the music maintained a stoicism, sense of humor, and irony that spoke directly to the inequities of social injustice. Connections between dance and sound movements are important to my research.

Green (1963), Stearns (1967), Schuller (1969), Friedwald (1990), and Antelyes (1994) critiqued Blues and Jazz genres and commented on Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s careers and music styles. However, their texts were male-dominated. Stearns argued that there was a heavy West African influence on Jazz, the Kongo Square ring shout, and the evolution of African American music from the work song to the swing era. He wrote about Smith’s career and musical style and Holiday’s early recording career. Green argued that Holiday’s life and music resonated nonconformity, and that she communicated her life through her music.

Schuller (1969) agreed with Stearns (1967) on the African origin of rhythm, form, harmony, melody, timbre, and improvisation in early jazz. His analysis of Bessie Smith’s vocal abilities includes a discussion of her

big, deep sound. Lyttelton (1982) noted Holiday's instinct for phrasing and constructions, emotional honesty, and richness. He compared the voices of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, and offered insight about the sound and style of Jazz "Giants."

Maultsby (1985) reported on African American music from the 1700s through the 1960s. She focused on West African retentions of musical concepts. Maultsby argued that social function, community function of musicians, music-making principles, call-and-response, melody and vocal features, as well as instrumentation maintained their African roots and evolved into soul music. Soul music was an extension of the Black Power movement, and this explains why much of Simone's music was classified in that genre. Furthermore, Maultsby (1991) illustrated the evolution of Black music in chart form. Van Deburg (1992) agreed with Maultsby's assumptions that Soul music helped Blacks to return to their African heritage for ideals, values, and inspiration. Finally, ya Salaam (1995) reported several dimensions of Soul music. He argued that all good black music, or GBM, was soul music, and GBM taught social consciousness, which gives credence to discussions on Simone's soul music, Smith's blues, and Holiday's bluesy jazz—the subjects of the next section.

## SMITH, HOLIDAY, AND SIMONE

I reviewed biographical literature on Smith, Holiday, and Simone. Biographical literature supports my discussion in Chapter Four of the commonalities in their lives. In some cases, the biographical information revealed their own words about their creative processes. Also included are archival newspaper clippings about each woman, and music critiques and music reviews that dealt with each of the singer's recordings and performances.

### *Bessie Smith (1894–1937)*

Albertson (1972) wrote the most definitive biography of Bessie Smith. He detailed her life based on interviews he conducted with members of her family (primarily her fictive "niece," Ruby; adopted son, Jack; and sisters Tinnie and Viola). He included information gathered from newspapers, recording technicians, and record company archives. He included some of Smith's performance advertisements, bills, milestone photos, and record company account ledgers, and he described how she was marketed as well as the inequity with which she was dealt.

Richter (1975), Brooks (1982), Feinstein (1985), and Kay (1997) also wrote about Bessie Smith. Richter's songbook included charts that described thirty of her recordings. However, he relied on Albertson for biographical

information and song compilations. He also interviewed blues/jazz critic Gunther Schuller to get his perception of her singing style. Richter briefly discussed the stereotypical manner in which record companies marketed Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Mamie Smith, Alberta Hunter, and Ethel Waters.

Brooks (1982) analyzed Smith's recording sessions, and he compiled a chronological discography of more than 150 of her recordings. He meticulously listed her record titles and record industry catalogues therein extrapolating prevalent themes in "race records." Although he analyzed her voice compass (tonality), tempo, essential form (e.g., twelve bar or otherwise), use of the pentatonic scale, and accompaniment according to Western standards of musical notation, his analysis augmented my thick, qualitative description of Smith's voice.

Kay (1997) wrote about Smith's early life, performance tutelage, rise to fame, tragic marriage, and death. Feinstein (1985) captured Smith's life in a brief chronology, and she also included a very brief three-part discography dedicated to early twentieth-century female blueswomen, namely, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Ethel Waters, showing common songs and/or themes. McCorkle (1997) focused on Smith's contemporaries, whereas Hirshey and Bozza (1997) focused on her relationship with Ma Rainey. Those works ferreted out some of Smith's predecessors and contemporaries.

Mayhew's (1997) dissertation analyzed how Bessie Smith, Mae West, and Nella Larsen portrayed women's sexuality in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Mayhew concluded that Smith's portrayal of a blues queen produced a positive construction of women's sexuality. Further, Mayhew argued that Smith represented Black women in ways other than the common "mammy" figure and the "oversexed" prostitutes. Relatedly, Smith's use of the blues queen persona represented a role reversal position that was ultimately empowering for women, within both African American popular cultures and White popular cultures. Mayhew argued that Smith's spiritual sensuality and sensibility enabled her to create a discursive space of freedom, from which she approached her music. Smith's tonal manipulations framed in stylized musical time and space portrayed the lives of Black females in America through particular forms, patterns, shapes, visions, symbols, motifs, and cadences.

Selby (1955), Mott (1961), Terrell (1970), Rankin (1974), Gayle (1975), and "Bessie Smith Heirs Sue" (1976) reported on Bessie Smith's life, heirs, impact, and music in newspapers. Rankin described her as being a powerful performer who impacted artists such as Billie Holiday and Janis Joplin. Wilson noted that in order to preserve the purity of her works, compilations of her music were transferred to LPs without

including stereo effects. Several of the authors were shocked that it took thirty-three years for a headstone to be placed on Smith's grave. Citing malfeasance, Bessie Smith's son filed a lawsuit against CBS Inc. and Columbia Records Inc. to recover royalty payments he claimed were owed to Smith's estate. Various tidbits gleaned from the literature paint a portrait of this complex woman. Mayhew (1997) and Kay (1997) wrote about her lesbian sexuality. Carruth (1993) marveled at how well she could adapt a previously male-performed song into a female-performed song.

Throughout recent years, there have been numerous reviews of Smith's recordings.<sup>7</sup> Musicologist Hayden Carruth (1993) proclaims that Smith's style of singing was powerful. He attributed that power to her use of microtones (very minute tonal or pitch fluctuations) and her use of raspy sounds to the effectiveness of her singing. However, he did not offer any description of how the microtones move, where they move to, or what the significance of particular microtones might be in relation to the power in Smith's song performances. Music critic Humphrey Lyttelton (1982) stated that Smith used her capacity of "phrasing and melodic variation to impart to a song more emotional weight than the original words and melody could possibly sustain" (p. 203). The power of Smith, and later Holiday and Simone, was connected to the use of expressive sound effects (growls, rasp, shakes, smears, hollers, etc.).

### ***Billie Holiday (1915–1959)***

Whalen (1999) investigated Holiday's singing style and argued "that the key to understanding Holiday's style lies not in comparison with Western European models, but in understanding her sociocultural background as well as the particulars of her unique personality" (p. 3). However, Whalen contradicted herself because she applied Western vocal culture standards in her examination of Holiday's style. Furthermore, Whalen failed to examine Holiday's style based on African music standards, which according to Stuckey (1987) were an aspect of her sociocultural background.

Whalen (1999) researched Holiday's family history; her early life in Baltimore, Maryland; and her musical approach, performances, and recordings. It is a matter of public record that Holiday's singing style was shaped by religious—namely, Catholic—music, public school music, and recorded blues music. Whalen identified five main "usages" or characteristics of Holiday's singing style: (1) repetitive tone technique; (2) sustaining pitch to the next sung syllable or vocable; (3) pitch bending; (4) interval patterns, or the inclusion of three or more notes applied to a

word and its syllables, wherein she began and ended on the same note; and (5) alternating tones combined to produce softly rounded vocal lines (1999, p. 261). Each of these “usages” is important to my focus on sound motion.

Through numerous interviews and genealogical research, Whalen (1999) accurately discussed Holiday’s parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, both maternal and paternal. The collected data clarified misinformation about dates in Billie’s life and thus contradicted other biographies (Holiday & Dufty, 1952; Chilton, 1975; O’Meally, 1991; Clarke, 1994; Nicholson, 1995). On balance, she placed heavy emphasis on Holiday’s Irish ancestry and Catholic background as influences on her singing style. Her African heritage received little attention in Whalen’s terms of her singing style. Even when attributing the majority of Holiday’s singing style to Gregorian chants and Catholic music forms, Whalen missed an important point: Kebede (1995) cited a direct link between Gregorian chants and Fellasha, or ancient Ethiopian Hebrew, chants.

Whalen noted that Holiday utilized microtones: numerous gradations of pitch used on a syllable, word, or phrase, causing that syllable, word, or phrase to sound out of tune (1999, p. 239). She further noted that microtone usage exceeded Western standards, which prefer usage of semitones (several tones). Whalen then attributed Holiday’s microtone usage to a lack of formal vocal training (p. 240). Additionally, Whalen briefly mentioned Holiday’s mature/aged voice, whereas Bebey (1975) stated that there is high regard for an aged voice in African culture, thus validating my usage of Holiday’s later recordings that captured her matured style.

Other biographical literature on Holiday includes Chilton (1975), O’Meally (1991), Clarke (1994), Nicholson (1995), and Holiday and Dufty (1956). Holiday and Dufty (1956) was written with the goal of being sold to Hollywood; therefore, Chilton (1975) and Whalen (1999) deemed it questionable and noted that it was largely pieced together from news journal and magazine interviews by journalist William Dufty. Chilton (1975) wrote, in detail, about aspects of Holiday’s twenty-five-year (1933–1959) career. He included extensive narrative accounts of her recording sessions and analyzed her style per song. Chilton used simple language that complemented Millar’s (1979) complicated discography of Holiday’s songs. O’Meally (1991) literally portrayed Holiday in almost two hundred ways in his photographic essay of her. He included commentary on her vocal and lyrical styling, but provided no documentation for the commentary.

Clarke (1994) reported on Holiday, borrowing heavily from Linda Kuehl's interviews with Holiday's close associates that were conducted in 1970–1973. Chilton intertwined information from the previous biographies with the extensive Kuehl interviews. He documented the rise and fall of this “jazz” icon and scrutinized the 1950s decade of her life. He included some previously unpublished photographs and an extensive index.

Nicholson (1995) chronologically portrayed Holiday's recordings and was clinical in his treatment of her life. He wrote a discography of her recording years with Columbia (now Sony/CBS), Decca (now GRP, MCA), and Verve (now part of Polygram). It was cumbersome, and it excludes compact disc titles. Nicholson incorporated an analysis of Holiday's live recordings between 1948 and 1959; however, his analysis is largely technical. He included a list of eighteen songs composed and co-composed by Holiday. The list provides important publishing information.

Griffin (2001) reported on Holiday's life and songs. She concluded that Holiday's life should not be looked at in terms of sorrow and pain. Furthermore, Griffin is emphatic that Holiday's songs are powerful and instructive. Margolick (2000) critiqued the words and music of the anti-lynching song “Strange Fruit,” which Holiday originally performed in 1939. He analyzed the impact of her performances of the song at New York's Café Society and includes a discography of the different recordings of “Strange Fruit.”

Huang and Huang (1995) conducted a musicological study of Holiday's style, specifically her timing. They categorized it according to an eighteenth-century Western classical music structure called “tempo rubato,” or syncopation within polymelorrhythm. They argued Holiday's use of tempo rubato demonstrated a defunct European classical song style. They asserted that her style is an example from which classical music scholars and practitioners could study tempo rubato.

Bauer's (1993) musicological study compared Billie Holiday and Betty Carter's rendition of the song “I Didn't Know What Time It Was,” written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenzo Hart. He demonstrated two varying styles of Jazz singing but relied solely on Western musical terminologies, which made the analysis myopic. His technical description of Holiday's vocal improvisation was supported by Daubney's (2002) discussion of her as a torch singer. However, these do not include any of Holiday's original compositions. Insignificant to my study were works by Zaluda (1991), Hilgart (1998), Kafka (1996), and Davis (2000), who provided little more than personal commentary on Holiday's life and music.

More insightful was Baraka (1998), who observed that Holiday's songs were pure spirit.

Webb (1973) and "They Still Sing" (1973) conducted interviews with Leonard Feather to ascertain his relationship with Billie Holiday and her contribution to Jazz. Feather was highly complimentary. Polier (1957) reported on what he defined as the first television program on which Jazz was played for pure pleasure. The performers included Billie Holiday and Count Basie. Hentoff (1972) shared his discussion with legendary record producer, musician, and music critic John Hammond regarding the instrument-like (trumpet) sound of Holiday's voice. Numerous newspaper articles were of no import to this study.<sup>8</sup> Several record reviews were insignificant in this study.<sup>9</sup> There are several other studies that corroborate the great significance of Holiday as a singer and writer.<sup>10</sup> They described Holiday's original songs "Billie's Blues/I Love My Man," "Everything Happens for the Best," and "Lady Sings the Blues" as provocative, enjoyable, enriching, emotional, sensitive, and earthy.

### *Nina Simone (1933–2003)*

Simone and Cleary (1993) chronicled Nina Simone's life up to 1991. With vivid imagery and hard facts, she described the thrust behind many of her songs and the terrors she suffered and escaped, as well as the joys in her life. She recalled the politeness that characterized her North Carolina hometown, her religious upbringing, and her classical piano training. She related those experiences to her subsequent encounters and communities. Simone included a discography of original album releases, which significantly aided my collection of data for this study. Also included were fifteen pictures of Simone and members of her family, showing her as a teenager, a mother, and an African woman visiting her homeland.

She began her autobiography by tracing her lineage back to her paternal grandfather, who was black-skinned and had "those Indian eyes." She concluded her book with a portrayal of her marching in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life. The 1965 founder of Simone's British fan club, D. Nathan (1999), also documented events in her life. He wrote liner notes for many of Simone's albums and had several interactions with her. Nathan and Simone and Cleary (1993) recorded her life in much the same fashion.<sup>11</sup>

Herbert (2000) described Simone through an African-centered analysis of rhythm and blues music from 1968 to 1972. He discussed the Black Power movement and its connection to James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, Nina Simone, Gil Scott-Heron, and the Last Poets' lyrics. Herbert wrote specifically about two of Simone's original compositions: "To



Be Young, Gifted and Black” and “Revolution (Part II).” He analyzed Simone’s songs by comparing her lyrical themes with themes in historical speeches from the Black Power movement.

Tsuruta (1999) also examined Black Power influence in Simone’s music. Tsuruta claimed that Simone’s songs often centered on the dilemma of love relationships gone wrong. She suggested that Simone’s lyrics were often seen as tough and harsh; however, to Black women, her lyrics were always sweet. Tsuruta believed that Simone’s lyrics fortified Black women and kept them focused on living quality lives in the face of rampant societal disorganization. While Tsuruta showed the impact of Simone’s songs on Black women, Herbert (2000) showed the impact of her songs on Black people. Both works validate the importance of Simone’s songs.

Brookhouser (1955, 1960), Hughes (1962), Felton (1963), Schreiber (1963), Wilson (1966), Naedele (1966), Calwell (1966), Ryan (1968), and Dembart (1969) reported on Simone’s performances in newspapers. Brookhouser commented on her piano style. He followed her career and reported the success of “I Loves You Porgy.” Schreiber commented on Simone’s appearance at Carnegie Hall. Hughes related the uniqueness of her voice and style. Felton described her performance at the Academy of Music. Wilson and Naedele recounted how Nina Simone drew her audience to her at concerts, including the Newport Jazz Festival and the Barn Arts Center. Calwell noted that some radio stations refused to play the song “Four Women.” A highlight in Simone’s career was her tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Philadelphia, according to Ryan.

Sporadic newspaper accounts added to Simone’s mystique (Reiff, 1969; Naedele, 1973a, 1973b; Rockwell, 1974; “Rushed to Hospital,” 1978; Damsker, 1979; Lloyd, 1980). Reiff reported that Vladimir Skoloff, who tutored Simone privately, claimed that racism was not the reason she was not admitted to the Curtis Institute. Lloyd (1980) and Nazarro (1971) reported that Simone often called attention to the oppression that she had experienced. Naedele claimed that she failed to honor her contract with Black Expo, and did not appear as scheduled.

Rockwell (1974) reported that Simone punctuated her performance at the Newport Jazz Festival with accusatory attacks against White people. “Rushed to Hospital” (1978) stated that Nina Simone became ill while in London, England. Damsker (1979) reported that Nina Simone had commented, “The job of any artist is to somehow reflect his time.” Simone was aware of her artistic/aesthetic imperative. Lloyd (1980) stated that Simone was bitter over the fact that there was little demand for what she called African-rooted classical music. There is little doubt that Simone sang revolutionary music.

Several writers declared Simone's "Four Women," "Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)," and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" to be, among many adjectives, remarkable, scorchingly intense, galvanizing, distinctive, astonishing, splendid, and eclectic.<sup>12</sup> Nina Simone died on April 21, 2003. A one-page tribute in the *New Internationalist* ("Sounds of Dissent," 2003) journal recounted her life and career. Some of the lyrics from three of her songs were included to summarize her revolutionary impact on the world: "Mississippi Goddam," "Images," and "Backlash Blues." Simone was quoted as saying that she wanted to be remembered as a revolutionary who served her people with her music.

Although these women may not have been aware of the decidedly African sensibilities of their singing virtuosity, they nonetheless exhibited memories of Africa. Perhaps in some way, the motherland was their muse. Holiday said that she hated "straight singing" (Lyttelton, 1982). It is not documented that Smith and Simone also hated straight singing. All of their song performances lack straight singing, however. There is a void in research that links sound effects (emphasis of various sounds/words) with emotional weight or the overall importance of the three women's song performances. The ways that they dipped, raised, vibrated, pulsed, and twirled their voices were vital to the messages they communicated. This is a large part of how Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances can be used to illustrate African style sensibilities and cultural values. However, before that point can be demonstrated, I illustrate thematic commonalities in their lives and original song compositions. The next chapter shows how the "words and songs of these three women" depict common themes in their lives.



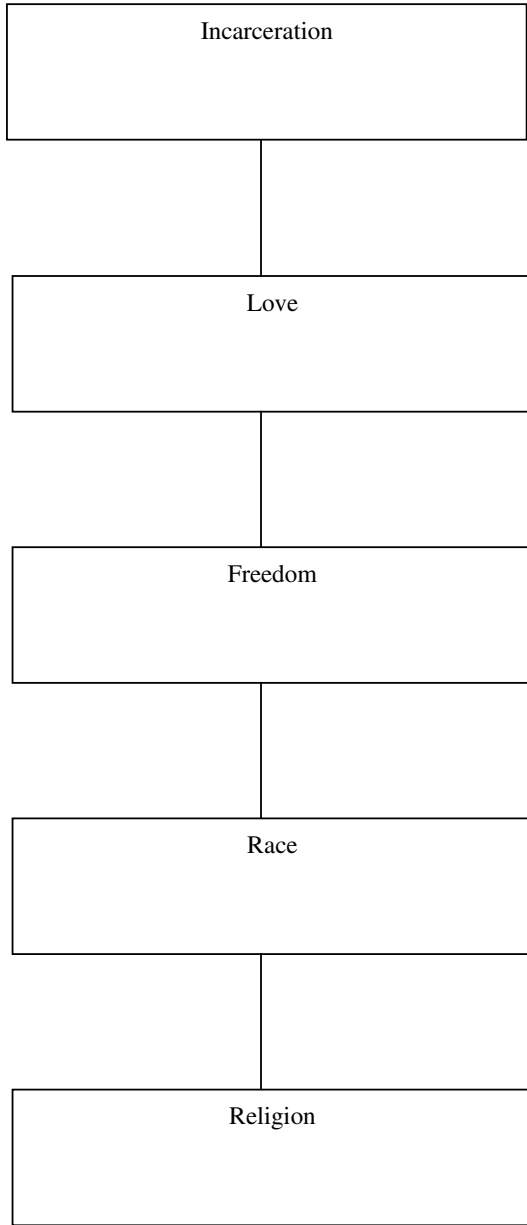
## Chapter Four

# Three Women

This chapter deals with selected thematic commonalities in many of the songs composed by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone.<sup>1</sup> Some of their common life experiences are also discussed.<sup>2</sup> My examination of their lives revealed seven life themes: incarceration, love, race, freedom, religion, career, and money (see Appendix Three, column 1). Each theme has thematic indicators (see Appendices Three and Four, column 2 of both). After cross-referencing thirty-two of Smith's original songs, thirteen of Holiday's original songs, and nineteen of Simone's, five dominant themes were left: incarceration, love, race, freedom, and religion (see Figure 4.1).

I discuss how their lyrics indicate incarceration, love, freedom, race, and religion. The themes that their lyrics reflect are significant because they reveal a plethora of some Black women's issues, particularly racial oppression, and, to an extent, some human issues. The Blues lyric expresses our deepest memories largely because of its primordial qualities. It is remembrance of profound cultural experiences. The abstractions of its pattern reveal racial personality and those revelations carry the energy of our common racial memory (Baraka, 1998, p. 183).

Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics about incarceration, love, race, freedom, and religion are stylistically and characteristically connected to African American memory. The impetus of this collective memory comes from a continuum of Blackness and the Blues. Our African ancestors left a legacy of Blues-orientation so to speak, that ultimately embraces and actualizes a confrontational disposition, especially in the face of hardships. The Blues-orientation provides Black folks the tools to make a way where there is none (Murray, 1976, p. 69). The one theme that all three women share most is incarceration.



**Figure 4.1.** Prevalent Themes: Flow of Discussion in Chapter Four

## INCARCERATION

Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics describe four types of incarceration—physical imprisonment, social restriction, psychological bondage, and emotional burden (see Figure 4.2). This theme represents the various immobilizing circumstances that Smith, Holiday, and Simone faced. Their lyrics give insight into the African American ethos and their ability to withstand hardship.

One of Simone's "Four Women," named "Peaches," speaks the following:

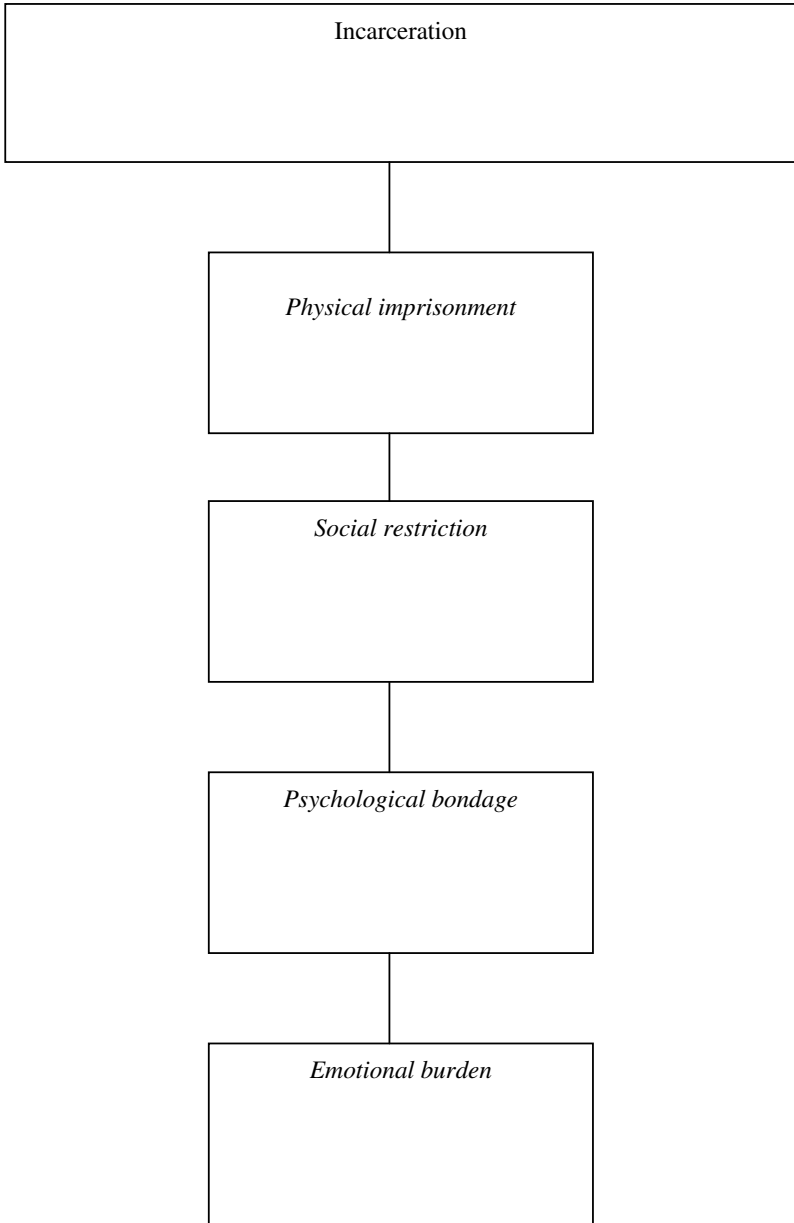
My skin is brown  
 and my manner is tough  
 I'll kill the first mother I see  
 My life has been rough  
 I'm awfully bitter these days  
 because my parents were slaves  
 What do they call me?  
 My Name Is Peaches!!!  
 (Simone, "Four Women," 1965)

The last verse of Nina Simone's "Four Women" refers to the legacy of enslavement. According to Hill-Collins (1991), Peaches, one of the women, "is an especially powerful figure, because Peaches is angry. . . . These words and the feelings [that the lyrics] invoke demonstrate her growing awareness and self-definition of the situations she encountered. She offered to the listener, not sadness and remorse, but an anger that leads to action" (p. 105).

The legacy of enslavement touches upon many facets of African American history.<sup>3</sup> This legacy relates directly to Peaches' life and demeanor and, by extension, to many Black women who endure "rough," harsh, and violent lives. Black female Blues<sup>4</sup> lyrics deal extensively and emphatically with suffering (Harrison, 2000). In Holiday's "Lady Sings the Blues" (1956), the lyrics speak directly to suffering and consequently to the major theme of incarceration, which I found in the lyrics of each of the three women.

## PHYSICAL IMPRISONMENT AS INCARCERATION

After the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which "formally" declared the end of slavery, in 1865, the Reconstruction era began.



**Figure 4.2.** Incarceration: Flow Of Discussion

However, in 1877 Reconstruction collapsed, and eventually the convict lease system was adopted by White Southerners. This system allowed business owners and farmers to lease state prisoners. The states were paid fees for the work of prisoners (Hine, Hine, & Harold, 2000). This system put Blacks under a social microscope where virtually any activity could be deemed criminal. It became commonplace for Blacks to be capriciously charged with crimes that were punishable by imprisonment. From 1877 until the late 1940s, prison sentences in the South meant serving time on a chain gang (Smallwood, 1998).

Davis (1999a) argued that incarceration was an omnipresent fact of life for a disproportionate number of males and females. Davis observed that Bessie Smith's "Jail House Blues,"<sup>5</sup> a follow-up on Ma Rainey's "Chain Gang Blues," stood out among a large number of blues songs that dealt with incarceration. There is no record of Smith ever being incarcerated, but she did not hesitate to testify about her love for gin (Albertson, 1972). Drinking and selling gin in public during Prohibition (1920–1933) sometimes placed one in contact with criminals. Thus, crimes of vice were in her songs.

In the opening lyrics of "Jail House Blues" (1923), Smith sang, "Lord, this house is gonna get raided, yes sir!" The words "this house is gonna get raided" seem to be less about criminality per se, but about being targeted for jail. In "Pickpocket Blues" (1928), she sang about petty crime: "My best man, my best friend told me to stop peddlin' gin / They even told me to keep my hands out people's pocket where their money was in." However, in "Poor Man's Blues" (1928), she decried poverty and the ethical dilemma that results from it: "Oh, listen to my pleading, can't stand these hard times long. . . . They'll make an honest man do things that you know is wrong." The implication was that poverty was a cause of criminal activity and the effect was imprisonment.

Both Billie Holiday and Nina Simone experienced physical imprisonment. Holiday spent time in jail on many occasions, including once in 1925, at age ten, when she served a nine-month sentence in a reform school; in 1929, at age fourteen, she spent 100 days in jail for prostitution; and in 1947, at age thirty-one, she served a 366-day sentence for drug charges (Nicholson, 1995). In 1978, Simone spent one "horrifying night," as she described it, in jail because of a White jailer who took it upon himself to lock her up for income tax evasion even after the judge had made a deal with her that involved no jail time (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Smith's (1923) "Jail House Blues" tells about a Black woman's experience of loneliness in jail, and, through extrapolation, it provides a glimpse of Holiday and Simone's feelings about their jail experiences:



Thirty days in jail with my back turned to the wall, turned to the wall  
 Thirty days in jail with my back turned to the wall  
 Look here, Mr. Jail Keeper, put another gal in my stall  
 I don't mind bein' in jail, but I got to stay there so long, so long  
 I don't mind bein' in jail, but I got to stay there so long, so long  
 When every friend I had is done shook hands and gone.

The lyrics convey a feeling of indignation at the loss of love and friends. For Blacks who committed crimes of vice like bootlegging, pickpocketing, illegal drug use, and prostitution, and even white-collar crimes like tax evasion, imprisonment left them feeling lonely, like they had no friends, no roots.

In “Mississippi Goddam” (1963), Simone lamented that physical imprisonment was punishment for Black protests against racism. For young African Americans who practiced civil disobedience during the Civil Rights movement, she wrote the words “school children sittin’ in jail” (1963). These lyrics indicate an intersection of incarceration and race themes. The “crime” in Simone’s song was protest, and protest was a cause for physical imprisonment.

Smith and Simone wrote about physical imprisonment for nonviolent or petty crimes. Simone and Holiday actually experienced imprisonment for nonviolent crimes, and Holiday’s jail experiences were the direct result of being impoverished as a child and misdirected as an adult. Smith and Simone’s lyrics are good—that is, functional—because their statements point to the connection between vice and petty crimes and physical imprisonment in the Black community, from a Black woman’s perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Their poetry is also good, that is, it is meaningful to the Black community, particularly when cast in the context of the current prison-industrial complex. The analogy of prison and slavery is powerful (Davis, 1999b). Meaning is derived from Smith’s (1923) lyrics “When every friend I had is done shook hands and gone” because the incarcerated Black woman feels like her family and friends have forgotten about her. They have amnesia. This sort of amnesia, according to Davis (1999b), is especially rampant among Blacks because they fear being associated with “criminals” and “criminality.” Furthermore, Davis says that Blacks fear being associated with “criminality” because that label incites the fear of being defined by slavery. Smith and Simone’s lyrics are reminders that Blacks are being incarcerated primarily on the basis of petty crimes—prostitution and illegal drug use. According to Davis, the prison-industrial complex is the new form of slavery.<sup>7</sup> Their lyrics serve as warning that if we forget too easily, we might easily end up there as well—physically imprisoned (Davis, 1999b, p. 71).

Physical imprisonment is one form of incarceration. In jail, one’s freedom to move about is restricted to the confines of jail cells and prison

compounds. However, there is another form of incarceration that affected and affects many Blacks. Some of Smith and Simone's lyrics indicate the next form of incarceration.

## SOCIAL RESTRICTION AS INCARCERATION

In the songs that follow, some of Smith and Simone's lyrics tell a story about Blacks and social restriction. Their words primarily depict Black alienation, second-class citizenship, and "dreams deferred." Their Blues lamentations decry racism.

In "Poor Man's Blues" (1928), Smith described the paradox of American wars for freedom and the fact that Blacks served in those wars abroad only to be continuously alienated at home, in America. Paid with despair, sorrow, and pain, the legacy of Jim Crow laws haunted Black veterans. Smith (1928) sang,

Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today  
 Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today  
 He would do anything you ask him in the name of the U.S.A.  
 Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you  
 Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you  
 If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man, what would you do?

The ironic lyrics are indicative of dilemmas faced by Black veterans, even today.<sup>8</sup>

In "Backlash Blues" (1966–1967), Simone wailed to White government officials, "[You] send my son to Vietnam." She embraced Smith's socially conscious sentiment that the American government thought nothing of sending Blacks into wars that were supposed to bring freedom, but they returned home to incarceration or social restriction in the form of second-class citizenship. Simone's (1964) "Old Jim Crow" told listeners about the circular nature of pain that racist segregation fosters in the Black community:

Old Jim Crow  
 What's wrong with you  
 It ain't your name  
 It's the things you do. . . .  
 Old Jim Crow  
 You know it's true  
 When you hurt my brother  
 You hurt me too. . . .

The words bemoan the effects of segregation: when one Black person is restricted, or denied access or rights, many Blacks feel his or her pain as well. In “Mississippi Goddam” (1963), Simone’s lyrics tell about a kind of trickery that was often used to sustain social restriction:

You lied to me all those years  
 You told me to wash and clean my ears  
 And talk real fine just like a lady  
 And you’d stop calling me Sister Sadie.

The protagonist believed that if she “cleaned [her] ears” and “talked real fine just like a [White] lady,” she would gain social privilege. The trick, however, was that no matter how well she assimilated White standards of etiquette, her dreams of social equality would still be deferred.

“Poor Man’s Blues,” “Backlash Blues,” “Old Jim Crow,” and “Mississippi Goddam” impart socially conscious sentiments about social restriction that African Americans endured repeatedly in the twentieth century. In so doing, their words bring about a shared audience response that could shape overt actions against oppressive conditions. According to Murray (1976), art that imparts this kind of elegance or beauty is functional. Therefore, their lyrics are good in the conceptualization of Nzuri.

Smith, Holiday, and Simone each experienced racism. In 1927, Smith encountered overt racism in North Carolina, when the Ku Klux Klan attempted to destroy the tent in which she was performing (Albertson, 1972). Although in 1933, Holiday broke the recording industry’s segregated recording practices by sitting in with a White band to record, she nonetheless encountered Jim Crow practices with Artie Shaw’s band when she was replaced by a White lead singer while touring in the South. Holiday endured numerous racially motivated incidents before she quit Shaw’s band (Chilton, 1975). Simone’s earliest recollection of Jim Crow happened in 1939, when she was six years old. According to her (Simone & Cleary, 1993), because of racism, she was denied a scholarship to the Curtis Institute of Music.

In “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” (1969), Simone invokes the image of a feeling amongst Blacks who are literally being kept down: “The only way that we can stand in fact / Is when you get your foot off our back.” In “Blackbird” (1963), she sings about her feelings of being caged up. Simone’s “Blackbird”<sup>9</sup> conjures up the impression of feeling incarcerated—restricted:

So why you wanna fly Blackbird, you ain’t ever gonna fly  
 You ain’t got no one to hold you, you ain’t got no one to care  
 If you’d only understand dear, nobody wants you anywhere

So why you wanna fly Blackbird, you ain't ever gonna fly.

The Blackbird seems to be a metaphor for Black people. The voice in the song could be interpreted as an external voice of a racist person or as an internal voice, which most likely resulted from internalization of racist affliction. Simone's lyrics speak to Blacks who have struggled with feeling caged up, and who feel that equality and liberty in America will never be realized.

The Blackbird wanted to fly, but a voice kept telling her that "nobody wants you anywhere / So why you wanna fly Blackbird, you ain't ever gonna fly." Recreating her own social restriction, she continued to trick herself into a perpetual state of psychological bondage.<sup>10</sup> Centuries of racial segregation not only negatively affected Blacks in terms of access to public accommodations, certain community resources, and fundamental American privileges, but also affected them psychologically. Incarceration in the form of social restriction can lead to psychological bondage, according to Smith and Simone.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL BONDAGE AS INCARCERATION

Simone's lyrics describe psychological bondage in terms of low self-image, an erotic-based self-image, and a confused outlook on life. Smith's lyrics describe a discouraged outlook on life, and rootlessness. Their descriptions of psychological bondage are intricately linked to racism. Black women were rendered invisible by White America by consistent and persistent alienation. We were defined solely as domestic workers, sexual trinkets, tragic half-breeds, mammy figures, and angry Black women (Hill-Collins, 1991).

According to Hill-Collins (1991), "African-American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to externally defined standards of beauty—standards applied to us by white men, white women, Black men, and, most painfully, one another" (p. 80). Simone clearly described many Black females' low self-image in "Images" (1964) by casting low self-image in the context of domestic labor:

She does not know her beauty  
 She thinks her brown body has no glory  
 If she could dance naked under palm trees  
 And see her image in the river,  
 She would know.  
 But there are no palm trees on the street,  
 And dishwater gives back no images.<sup>11</sup>

Simone dealt with Black women and social class oppression, pointing out the potential inferiority complex that results from being relegated to “second-class” positions such as domestic laborers.

Simone also dealt with stereotypical Black female images. She said that one of the reasons she wrote “Four Women” was to address the fact that “Black women didn’t know what the hell they wanted because they were defined by things they didn’t control, and until they had the confidence to define themselves, they’d be stuck in the same mess forever” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 117). The Jezebel figure also plays a role in her music. In “Four Women,” Simone dealt with this dilemma of the exotic/erotic Black female—Jezebel:

My skin is tan  
 My hair’s alright, it’s fine  
 My hips invite you  
 And my lips are like wine  
 Whose little girl am I?  
 Anyone who’s got money to buy  
 What do they call me?  
 My name is Sweet Thing.

This portrayal relayed the objectification of Black women as oversexed animals and prostitutes. Those stereotypes perpetuate the “breeder” label that White enslavers slapped on Black women. In contemporary times, this stereotype is also applied by some Blacks to Black women who date White men (Hill-Collins, 1991). For example, Griffin (2001) conjectured that Holiday may have wanted to protect her Black mother’s image. In Holiday’s 1956 autobiography (Holiday & Dufty, 1956), she portrays her mother as a married sixteen year old. Contrary to that portrait, her mother was thirteen and unwed when she gave birth to Billie (Nicholson, 1995). Holiday had to deal with racial issues in the Black community when she dated Benny Goodman in 1933 (Nicholson, 1995). Simone was taunted in a December 9, 1961, *Philadelphia Tribune* article; the headline read, “Nina Simone Gives Up on White Mate, Marries Negro Cop.”

Simone also sang about Black women having confused self-images about being the product of rape. Rape in any form is horrendous. When it is combined with issues of devaluation due to race, this particular kind of rape has overtones of subordination in a society that is obsessed with race, class, and gender oppression (Hill-Collins, 1991; Hine & Wittenstein, 1994). Simone sang,

My skin is yellow  
 My hair is long  
 Between two worlds  
 I do belong  
 My father was rich and white  
 He forced my mother late one night  
 What do they call me?  
 My name is Saffronia.

Saffronia does not fit neatly into the White world, nor does she fit neatly into the Black world. Simone hints at the tragic Mulatto syndrome, portions of which Nella Larsen poignantly depicted in her novels *Quicksand* (1928/2002b) and *Passing* (1929/2002a). McDowell (1996) stated, “It is well known that during slavery the white slave master constructed an image of black female sexuality which shifted responsibility for his own sexual passions onto his female slaves” (p. xii). The predicaments that Black women face, like the women in Simone’s “Images” and “Four Women,” are indeed the legacies of enslavement, particularly the negative effects that race, gender, and class oppression had and still have on Black women.<sup>12</sup> Black women become metaphorical ghosts; no one sees us—our pain or our humanity.

In contrast to the notion of lascivious Black women, there were also the “Aunt Sarah” or “Aunt Jemima” figures—asexual, slow, nurturing mammy types (Hill-Collins, 1991; Kern-Foxworth, 1994).<sup>13</sup> At the other extreme were “rough” and crude Black women who were not worthy of being called “ladies” because of their demeanors, for example “Peaches.” Simone addressed the ruse of gender inequality that America played on Black women in terms of beauty that consequently conjured up images of the mammy and “anything-but-a-lady”<sup>14</sup> types.

All of the externally inflicted self-hatred that results from racism and racist stereotypes inevitably causes confusion, because “dishwater gives back no images” resonates as the inability to see oneself clearly. Simone had the opportunity to travel the world and did so in an effort to escape racism. She lived in France, Switzerland, Liberia, and England (Simone & Cleary, 1993). In “Fodder in Her Wings” (1987), she referenced her attempts to escape the mistreatment of Blacks in America:

A bird fell to earth  
 Reincarnated from her birth  
 She had fodder in her wings  
 She had dust inside her brains  
 She flittered here and there

U.S., Switzerland, France, everywhere  
 With fodder in her wings  
 And dust inside her brains.

However, she could not break out of her own psychological bondage. The “fodder in her wings” and “dust inside her brains” perpetuated a confused outlook on life.

Simone is the lone voice in this self-image-based vein of the Blues lyric continuum. The Black Power era in which she created much of her music allowed her and even prompted her to deal with the kinds of self-images that indicate psychological bondage in a way that Smith and Holiday missed, avoided, or were not compelled to highlight. That Simone is the only one of the three women to compose Blues-Soul lyrics describing Black female issues of internal/external alienation and self-image is telling. Although Smith encountered racism as a direct denial of her physical beauty, she did not write about her attitude toward that experience. Perhaps she was able to overlook such impudence.

Simone’s lyrics describe variations of psychological bondage that some Black women have found to be a limitation of their condition as human beings. The descriptions of Black female physical features, hence dispositional attributes, that Simone portrays are the kind of symbolism in music (art) that corresponds to the dynamic ideals that move us to moral and ethical perfection (Murray, 1970). Therefore, Simone’s compositions culminate as a source of identity, of reaffirmation. In this way, Simone’s songs are beautiful, even though the circumstances that fostered the content of those songs were not. Beauty can sometimes emerge from that which is ugly (Welsh Asante, 1994; Murray, 1970).

Smith also describes psychological bondage in terms of a discouraged outlook on life. In “Long Old Road” (1931), Smith sang, “[Y]ou can’t trust nobody, you might as well be alone.” In “Wasted Life Blues” (1929), Smith sang about a woman who had no one:

No father to guide me, no mother to care  
 Must bear my troubles all alone  
 Not even a brother to help me share  
 This burden I must bear alone.

She was a motherless<sup>15</sup> and fatherless child. In the second verse of “Wasted Life Blues” (1929), she described the psychological bondage that causes her to foresee a potential bad ending in life:

I've lived a life but nothin' I've gained  
 Each day I'm full of sorrow and pain  
 No one seems to care enough for poor me  
 To give me a word of sympathy  
 Oh, me! Oh, my! Wonder what will my end be?  
 Oh, me! Oh my! Wonder what will become of poor me?

Nobody cares for her, not her mother or her father. The absence of a known familial network<sup>16</sup> puts one at odds with a world that is built on connections. Rootlessness is a bad situation, according to Smith. Thoughts of rootlessness are a form of psychological bondage because one who feels alone in the world is left to wonder “what will my end be?”

Smith and Simone's lyrics, collectively, demonstrate a common expression of psychological bondage. The lyrics point to the effects of slavery. As a result of enslavement, many Blacks lost connection with their families, felt dislocated, and after emancipation spent years trying to locate their loved ones (Gutman, 1976). Many Black women, as a result of being or feeling alone, enter into unhealthy love relationships with men, often to fill the void of love that they wished their fathers had given them (Franklin, 2000; hooks, 2001). Smith, Holiday, and Simone describe unhealthy relationships between Black women and Black men, and they also indicate the causes and effects of those relationships.

## EMOTIONAL BURDEN AS INCARCERATION

According to Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone, tainted love relationships<sup>17</sup> with “mistreatin' men”<sup>18</sup> are the cause of their emotional burdens—such as insanity, depression, and heartache—and in some cases, emotional burden can also cause one to abuse substances. They describe mistreatin' men in terms of abuse, infidelity, and manipulation. Holiday's songs “I Love My Man” (1944), “Billie's Blues” (1936), “Long Gone Blues” (1939), and “Fine and Mellow” (1939) depict a mistreatin' man in general terms. For example, in “I Love My Man” (1944) and a 1956 version of “Billie's Blues,” Holiday sang,

My man wouldn't give me no breakfast  
 Wouldn't give me no dinner  
 Squawked about my supper  
 Then he put me outdoors.<sup>19</sup>



Her man mistreated her by depriving her of food, and when she cooked him dinner, he insulted her effort and kicked her out of the house.

Smith also describes a mistreatin' man and abuse in "Dirty No-Gooder's Blues" (1929):

Did you ever fall in love with a man that was no good?  
 Did you ever fall in love with a man that was no good?  
 No matter what you did for him, he never understood  
 The meanest things he could say would thrill you through and through  
 The meanest things he could say would thrill you through and through  
 And there wasn't nothin' too dirty for that man to do.

This woman's emotional burden is insanity—she is in love with a man who abuses her verbally, emotionally, and physically. Cycles of physical abuse in Black male–Black female relationships are tied to patterns of abuse by Whites on Blacks throughout enslavement, as well as to postenslavement socioeconomic factors (Guillaume & Nevins, 2002). Since Black men were often rendered powerless to White people during and after enslavement, and were physically and mentally beaten frequently, they often took out their frustrations on Black women in the form of physical abuse (Franklin, 2000).<sup>20</sup>

Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone<sup>21</sup> experienced physical abuse at the hands of men with whom they were romantically involved. Between 1923 and 1929, Smith often had physical fights with her husband, Jack Gee. When he caught her cheating, he typically overpowered her, but there were times when she physically overpowered him (Albertson, 1972). The year before Smith finally ended her turbulent relationship with Jack Gee, she wrote the song "It Won't Be You" (1928). Here, Smith conjured up an image of a woman set on retribution. The song acknowledged the possibility of physical abuse in a new love relationship, but also indicated that if she had to suffer more physical abuse, at least it will not occur in her current tainted love relationship:

No matter how cruel he may be, it won't be you  
 If he beats me and breaks my heart, it won't be you  
 He may love me and treat me kind  
 Love me so hard I'll lose my mind  
 I'm satisfied to know it won't be you.

In both "I Love My Man" and "Long Gone Blues,"<sup>22</sup> the phrase "I've been your slave, ever since I've been your babe/way/faith" is repeated.

In this regard, Holiday's songs are similar to Smith's "It Won't Be You." However, although Smith declares that she may be subjected to physical abuse as long as it was in another relationship, Holiday declared, in "I Love My Man," "but before I see you go, I see you in your grave" (1939). The woman in Holiday's song preferred to stay with her current mistreatin' man. The lyrics indicate that maintaining a love relationship with a mistreatin' man will drive you insane. Abuse, and the willingness to put up with it, is a heavy emotional burden.<sup>23</sup>

Smith, Holiday, and Simone also described a mistreatin' man as one who cheats on his woman, abandons her, and/or takes her money. Additionally, he plays on her vulnerabilities because she may relay that she will remain dutiful to him despite his mistreatin' ways. Songs by Smith, Holiday, and Simone that describe mistreatin' men demonstrate various intersections between psychological imprisonment, love, race, religion, and money. For example, Smith's "Lonesome Desert Blues" (1925), Holiday's "Everything Happens for the Best" (1939) and "Don't Explain" in (1945), and Simone's "Blues for Mama" (1966–1967) deal with cheating men.

Bessie Smith and Jack Gee fought frequently, and both cheated on each other (Albertson, 1972). Two years into their marriage, Smith recorded "Lonesome Desert Blues," and she spoke about her cheating man who causes her to suffer emotionally. Smith sang, "That man of mine is triflin,' and he don't mean me right / He's got another sweetie, he stays out late at night / That is why I've got those lonesome desert blues / I'm so nervous, I'm shakin' in my shoes, I'm burnin' up / I've got those lonesome desert blues" (1925). Smith's mistreatin' man causes her to be so nervous that she trembles. The kind of emotional burden relayed in Smith's song—shaking, burning, and nervousness—corresponds to what D. Harrison (2000) calls representations of "bad nerves and anxiety."

Toward the end of 1944, Holiday and Joseph Guy began a relationship based largely on drug addiction, but it was not until 1945 that she supposedly divorced James Monroe (Nicholson, 1995). It is likely that when she recorded "Don't Explain" in 1945, she was speaking about James Monroe. Ironically, she was also cheating, which may explain why she bears a cool attitude about her partner's cheating. However, Holiday's lyrics also show that her dutifulness enabled her man to cheat. Incarceration in the sense of blind, dutiful love is an emotional burden—the willingness to accept infidelity.

After only six years of marriage, Simone and her husband Andy Stroud reached an impasse, which was predicated by a hectic work schedule and caring for their four-year-old daughter, Lisa Celeste. Their stalemate intensified between 1963 and 1966 while she was composing and recording

some of her most political music (Simone & Cleary, 1993). In “Blues for Mama” (1966–1967), Simone talks about her cheating man, “They say he’s left you all alone, to weather this old storm / He’s got another woman now hangin’ on his arm.”

As the mistreatin’ man is out cheating, the woman feels abandoned. Smith’s “In the House Blues” (1931) portrays the reaction to cheating-based abandonment: “walkin’ to my window, and lookin’ out my door / Wishin’ that my man would come home once more. . . . Can’t eat, can’t sleep, so weak I can’t walk the floor.” According to Smith, abandonment<sup>24</sup> makes a woman doubly blue, and a weak insomniac.

However, Bessie Smith’s “Blue Blue(s)” (1931), asks women,

Listen to my story and everything’ll come out true  
 when your man is gone, your rent is all due  
 he’s not coming back, you know he’s all through  
 . . .  
 here is one thing’ll make you blue blue  
 when you ain’t got a daddy to tell your troubles to.

However, Smith’s “He’s Gone Blues” (1925), which relates her early turbulent experiences with Jack Gee, best defines the emotional burden of insanity that comes from dealing with a mistreatin’ man and abandonment:

I never had a man in my whole life  
 To treat me this-a-way  
 I work hard both the night and day  
 I even let him draw my pay  
 He packed his grip and left on Christmas Day  
 Oh well, I guess he’s gone  
 Any fair-minded woman liable to go insane  
 When the best man she had has gone astray  
 Since my man has gone, he’s gone away to roam  
 All I can say, he’s gone, gone, gone.

In “Blues for Mama” (1966–1967), Simone’s lyrics, “Hey lordy mama, I heard you wasn’t feelin’ good / They’re spreadin’ dirty rumors all around the neighborhood / They say you’re mean and evil and don’t know what to do / That’s the reason that he’s gone and left you black and blue,” hint at Stroud’s gradual abandonment of her. Simone’s (1966–1967) song demonstrates intersections between emotional burden, love, and religion.

Smith's songs (1925) and (1931) demonstrate intersections between psychological imprisonment, love, and money.

Part of Smith's "He's Gone Blues" deals with mistreatin' men who take money from women. She describes them as "Pinchbacks." Smith understood the "Pinchback" manipulations of a mistreatin' man firsthand. In 1926, Smith was appeasing Jack Gee once more. She moved her family to Philadelphia to be near her work in New York, but Gee was not happy about this, so to appease him she bought him a new Cadillac (Albertson, 1972). Smith repeatedly appeased Jack Gee. According to Albertson (1992), on one occasion in November 1927, she spent the "month paying off Jack's debts and making arrangements to send him back to Hot Springs, [Arkansas,] for recuperation" (p. 36). Even though Gee's niece Ruby tried to tell Smith that he was "putting on an act," Bessie would not believe her because "I guess maybe she wanted him out of the way, too" (Albertson, 1992, p. 36). In "Hot Springs Blues" (1927), Smith referenced those trips and, by extension, her experiences with Gee's "crippled" acts:

If you ever get crippled, let me tell you what to do  
 Lord, if you ever get crippled, let me tell you what to do  
 Take a trip to Hot Springs, and let 'em wait on you.

Smith's "Pinchbacks Take 'Em Away" (1924) and "Golden Rule Blues" (1925) also deal with the *money* theme in the context of *love* relationships. According to Davis (1999a), "Pinchbacks, Take 'Em Away" functions as an advice song that "arm[s] women with the power to resist men who attempt to use sexual attractiveness to exploit" Black women (p. 59). For example, in "Pinchbacks, Take 'Em Away" (1924), Smith begins the song by warning women about "sweet" men who "play cute" and promise "what nice things" they will do:

If a sweet man enter your front gate, turn out your lights and lock your door  
 Get a workin' man when you marry, and let these pinchbacks be  
 Child, it takes money to run a business, and with me I know you girls will agree.

However, in "Golden Rule Blues" (1925), she offers advice to men. This song indicates *love* and *money* themes, and also deals with abandonment:

Looked for you at home, you never can be found  
 Looked for you at home, you never can be found

That's the reason why you can't carry my key around  
 Pretty papa, you must learn the rule  
 Pretty papa, you must learn the rule  
 Go to work every morning like all the other men do  
 Bring me your pay after you work every day  
 Bring me your pay after you work every day  
 That's the only way you can make your pretty mama stay.

The advice that Smith gave to and about mistreatin' men in both "Golden Rule Blues" and "Pinchback Blues" coalesced in "Lost Your Head Blues" (1926) when she sang,

I was with you baby, when you didn't have a dime (repeat)  
 Now that you got plenty money, you have throwed your good gal  
 down  
 . . .  
 When you get a good gal, you better treat her nice  
 When you were lonesome, I tried to treat you kind  
 When you were lonesome, I tried to treat you kind  
 But since you've got money, it's done changed your mind  
 . . .  
 Days are lonesome, nights are long  
 Days are lonesome, nights are long  
 I'm a good old gal, but I've just been treated wrong.

For those women who did not heed Smith's advice, she describes the emotional burdens—heartache and depression—that come from dealing with a mistreatin' man in general. In "Foolish Man Blues" (1927), Smith sang, "Lord, I used to love that man, he always made my poor heart ache"; and in "Thinking Blues" (1928), she sang, "Got the blues so bad 'til that man of mine I want to see."

In "Stormy Blues" (1954), Holiday described depression as "I been down so long," and she added to that description in "Lady Sings the Blues" (1956). In "Blues for Mama" (1966–1967), Simone described heartache as feeling like a bruise looks when she sings "and [he] left you black and blue."

Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs demonstrate their familiarity with insanity, depression, and heartache. Hill-Collins (1991) claimed that human ties such as tainted love relationships can be confining and oppressive, and can cause incarceration in the form of emotional burden. Much of their lyrics about emotional burden are lamentations. However, human

ties that are based on healthy notions of love can be empowering (hooks, 2001). Thus, Smith, Holiday, and Simone also wrote in the Blues tradition of jubilee, especially about love.

## LOVE

Three kinds of love are indicated in the following discussion. Holiday wrote about the bliss of romantic love. Some lyrics of Smith and Simone described love in terms of sexual pleasure—"lovin''," "stingaree," and "touch." Meanwhile, Simone focused on the bliss of "real," universal, and motherly love. Love, therefore, is a feeling and an action, according to these three women.

Davis (1999a) claims that Holiday's renditions of popular love songs politicized the typical Tin Pan Alley-type concept of romantic love. Davis also stated that Holiday stylized other composers' lyrics in such a way that she gave "privileged insights to black people about the dominant culture [and its notions of love]" (1999a, p. 171). However, Holiday also made use of romantic notions of love in her compositions. For example, in "Our Love Is Different" (1939), she portrayed romantic love and the feeling of bliss in the following way:

Our love is different dear  
It's like a mighty symphony  
I can feel its silver harmony,  
oh so tenderly, day by day.

A similar notion of romantic love and the sound of bliss also exists in Holiday's "Somebody's on My Mind"<sup>25</sup> (1949):

Somebody's on my mind  
Like an old sweet song, the lasting time  
Somebody's on my mind  
So I'm walking on clouds on a silver line.

Davis believes that such notions of love lack value in the Black community because they are "overdetermined by ideologies of [White] male dominance" (1999a, p. 117).<sup>26</sup> In "Tell Me More and More" (1940), Holiday sang about the initial blissfulness of love:

Tell me more and more and then some  
The way that you feel and then

When you've told that old sweet story  
 And you're through, start right in again.<sup>27</sup>

However, she also recalls that blissfulness often turns into the blues:

I've made that old mistake  
 Know that awful ache  
 Of a heart that's been double-crossed.

That song most likely describes how Holiday felt when she and James Monroe first fell in love in December 1939. Ironically, she and Monroe began abusing heroin, and their relationship ended in 1942 (Nicholson, 1995).

The idea of good sex<sup>28</sup> invokes yet another idea of blissful love. Smith and Simone most clearly demonstrate this connection. Smith, along with Ma Rainey, began the female tradition of representing love and sex as concrete aspects of daily life in the Black community (Davis, 1999a). For example, in "Baby Doll" (1926), Smith portrays love and sex as "lovin'" that enabled her to relax:

I wanna be somebody's baby doll so I can get my lovin' all the time  
 I wanna be somebody's baby doll to ease my mind.

Another representation of love and sex exists in "It Makes My Love Come Down" (1929). Smith sang about cuddling and also alluded to the idea that cuddling should take place with a steady partner, hence a loving relationship:

Cuddle close, turn out the light  
 Do just what you did last night  
 . . .  
 Likes my coffee, likes my tea  
 Daffy about my stingaree  
 It makes my love come down, I wanna be around  
 Oh, sweet papa, it makes my love come down.

Meanwhile, in "Do I Move You" (1967), Simone depicted a confident woman who demanded that her loving, sexual touch be appreciated by her lover:

When I touch you do you quiver  
 From your head down to your liver

If you like it let me know it  
 Don't be psychic or you'll blow it  
 The answer better be (Yes, yes)  
 That pleases me.

Her music also demonstrates the idea of blissful love. However, I perceive that the substance of Simone's love songs offered a view of blissful love that was different from the notion of romance. For example, in "Real Real" (1966–1967), she sings,

I say real real  
 Our love is real to me  
 . . .  
 Tell your papa and your mama  
 One day soon we're gonna  
 Have a great weddin' day  
 It's so real to me.

The quest for love and partnership, family,<sup>29</sup> and community appears to be the basis for bliss in Simone's lyrics. The year that she recorded "Real Real" corresponds to a time in Simone's life when she was experiencing the failure of her marriage to Andy Stroud (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Perhaps the song recounted the hopes and intimacy that she and Stroud had at the start of their relationship. Simone sang about being committed: "when you love a man enough, you're bound to disagree / 'Cause ain't nobody perfect, 'cause ain't nobody free" (1966–1967). This helps us to clarify Simone and Stroud's impasse, but Simone was committed to their love.

Furthermore, Simone's portrayal of blissful love in "If You Knew/Let It Be Me" (1963)<sup>30</sup> explicitly exhibited what Obenga (1996) contends is an ancient African conceptual understanding of love. According to Obenga, the ancient Africans believed that to love a person means to care about a person's spirit and soul. Simone's word choices capture notions of "real" love:

Your love is all I'm living for  
 I love all things about you  
 Your heart your soul my love.

The song is relevant in Simone's life in terms of the love she felt for her one-year-old daughter (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Where lyrical expressions about love require going beyond the realm of male-female relationships,



Simone was at her best. She captured some of what it means to love universally, through time and space. For example, in “Compassion” (1968), she sang,

Because I have loved so deeply  
Because I have loved so long.

The words invoke a sense of depth and breadth to the idea of love. Part of the breadth in Simone’s expression of universal love is rendered in terms of the human kind. In “Come Ye” (1966), she sang,

I say come ye, ye who would have love  
It’s time to take a stand  
Don’t mind abuse it must be paid  
For the love of your fellow man.

She also expressed universal love in a deeper, more focused sense. In “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (1968), the idea of motherly love is espoused. Simone’s positive relationship with Lorraine Hansberry motivated the sentiment to and about Black youth. She inspired hope with the following words:

To be young, gifted and black,  
Oh what a lovely, precious dream  
To be young, gifted and black  
Open your heart to what I mean.

These lyrics communicate the power of love: the love of a mother for her children.

Essentially, Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s lyrics primarily converge with and sometimes contradict hooks’s (2001) Black “Love Ethic.” According to hooks (2001), this ethic dictates that love is a combination of care, knowledge, responsibility, respect, trust, and commitment. Hooks’s idea of love is based on action. But not all lyrics in this analysis reflect the optimism found in hooks’s love ethic. Holiday’s compositions “Our Love Is Different,” “Somebody’s on My Mind,” and “Tell Me More and More” contradict the Black love ethic that hooks espouses, in that Holiday’s lyrics do not promote a particularly realistic view of healthy heterosexual relationships.<sup>31</sup> It is okay to feel romantic bliss; however, there is a more substantial ethic of “real” love.

Smith's song "It Makes My Love Come Down" and Simone's song "Do I Move You" are somewhat indicative of the "respect" element in a Black love ethic. The two songs are precursors to the lust and power dynamics that are prevalent in the cynicism many Blacks feel toward "love" relationships today (hooks, 2001); in the words of Tina Turner, "What's Love Got to Do with It?" However, given both Smith's and Simone's adult eras, the "respect" element was somewhat crucial for Black women as a request for and affirmation of self-love. To compliment a lover, or be complimented by a lover, about sexual love demonstrated a level of respect. And for a woman, such as the protagonist in Simone's song, to demand that respect is an indication of self-love.

Simone's compositions "Real Real," "If You Knew/Let It Be Me," and "Compassion" converge with the "care," "knowledge," "responsibility," "respect," "trust," and "commitment" elements of a love ethic in Black heterosexual relationships. Simone writes about marriage and loving "so long" and "so deeply," that is, about commitment; and all love relationships flourish when there is constancy. She speaks of loving someone's soul and all things about him—this reveals a caring, respectful, responsible disposition, the commitment to continuously learning about and nurturing the spirit of her partner.

In "Come Ye" and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," Simone describes all of the elements of a Black love ethic, and her words carry what hooks (2001, p. 17) calls the "transformative power of love that is the foundation of all meaningful social change." Ultimately, the last two songs demonstrate a will to nurture the spiritual and political growth of Black people.<sup>32</sup> The lyrics promote Black self-love. The beauty of their songs about varied forms of love rests in their sequential conceptions about the functions of love in twentieth-century Black female experiences.

"Black [love] lifestyle celebrates [an] orientation to elastic individuality and its aesthetic receptivity and its unique blend of warmth, sensitivity, nonsense, vitality and elegance" (Murray, 1970, p. 65). Love has always been an expression and experience of community (Jackson, 2000). As Blacks continue to search for and discover a positive love ethic, the counteraction of poverty, exclusion, and injustice will grow stronger.

In the larger context of African American struggles for freedom, the following discussion represents "precisely what the [B]lues tradition has evolved to condition Blacks to regard as normal procedure" (Murray, 1970, p. 59). African Americans have continued to fight for freedom—the freedom to choose their own lifestyle. Depictions of love and the will

to seek sexual pleasure<sup>33</sup> take on more substantive form in relation to Black female sexuality when we cast it in the context of freedom.

## FREEDOM

“Freedom” is Nina Simone’s most prevalent theme, Holiday’s third most prevalent, and Smith’s fourth. Holiday demonstrated the intersections of freedom and love. Smith dealt primarily with sexual choice(s). Simone seemed obsessed with ideological freedom as it is related to race and sexual choice(s). According to their lyrics, there are two types of freedom: sexual and ideological. Sexual choice(s) includes the ability to take many lovers and vocalize one’s sexual abilities. Ideological freedom involves the ability to be self-reliant, own one’s thoughts, be confrontational, and pose ultimatums.

During the early 1900s, Black women were often susceptible to abandonment by their male partners (Harrison, 2000; Quarles, 1996), which led to a more relaxed attitude about sex among some Blacks. Amongst Black working class people, there was a more *laissez-faire* attitude toward sex. This disposition was often conveyed through Blues-oriented erotica (Harrison, 2000, p. 99). Davis (1999a) states that blueswomen’s portrayals of Black female sexuality correlated directly with newfound freedom—the freedom to choose one’s sexual partners. This freedom to choose one’s own sexual partners, Davis claims, is one of the most important distinctions between the condition of slavery and the postemancipation status of Blacks.

## SEXUAL CHOICE(S)

Male blues singers captured the essence of freedom—sexual and otherwise—in the persona of the traveling man (Floyd, 1995). Female blues singers, like Ma Rainey, Sippie Wallace, Mamie Smith, Victoria Spivey, Edith Wilson, Alberta Hunter, and Bessie Smith, communicated female responses to men who opted to leave (Kay, 1997; Harrison, 2000). For example, in “Young Woman’s Blues” (1926), Smith declared that she could get hers (love) just as easily as any man can:

I’m a young woman and ain’t done runnin’ round

I’m a young woman and ain’t done runnin’ round

...

And I’m a good woman and I can get plenty men.

Smith also uses euphemisms for sex, in accordance to the figurative, sexual language of the 1920s. In “Preachin’ the Blues” (1927), she invokes the idea of sex by invoking the name of one of the early jazzmen, Jelly Roll Morton, whose racy lyrics helped start the use of certain sexual terminology. Smith writes, “Just want to teach you how to save your good jellyroll.” Smith described the essence of sexual freedom in “Pickpocket Blues” (1928):

Any time you’d see me, I was good time bound  
With this one, that one, most all in town.

Beyond the idea of sex as a good time, as Smith depicted it, Simone portrayed sex in terms of prostitution. For some women, living in hard economic times, sex was their means of survival; nonetheless, they were “free” to engage in the sex trade. For example in “Four Women” (1965), Simone sang,

My hips invite you  
And my lips are like wine  
Whose little girl am I?  
Anyone, who has money to buy.

D. Harrison (2000) contends that some female Blues singers portrayed Black women’s sexuality as a form of confidence that came from sexual ability. Sexual ability was often analogized with cars—limousines and sports cars. Varying degrees of sexual freedom are evident in the lyrics of Holiday’s “Billie’s Blues” (1939): “Some tell me baby, you’re built for speed.”

Black women of the early 1900s who indulged in sexual freedoms, whether as entertainment or employment, found themselves at odds with such groups as the National Association of Colored Women, which sought to relieve the masses of regular women from sexual harassment they encountered in their daily, workaday lives (Giddings, 2001). However, sexual freedom<sup>34</sup> was one of the only forms of freedom that Black women had, but it was used, at the same time, as a basis of stereotyping.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, this contradiction puts Black women in a sexual and racial catch-22.<sup>36</sup> As long as they did not ask too much, Black women were now in a position to choose their own partners (Gutman, 1976). This included the impetus to be totally self-reliant, as well as confrontational, given that many women could expect only so much support or nurturance from any relationship (hooks, 2001).

## IDEOLOGICAL FREEDOM

Vocalization and self-reliance are also forms of freedom. For example, Holiday extolled the idea of self-reliance/self-sufficiency in “God Bless the Child” (1956):

Rich relations give  
 Crust of bread and such  
 You can help yourself  
 But don't take too much  
 Mama may have, papa may have  
 But God bless the child  
 That's got his own.<sup>37</sup>

Self-sufficiency in this regard becomes an ideological tool for coping with bad times. An ironic portrayal of ideological freedom is found in Holiday's “Stormy Blues” (1954), in which she writes, “I've been down so long, that down don't worry me.”

Although Holiday expressed a depressed state of mind, she takes a kind of freedom in owning that emotion and demonstrated a will to keep on going, in spite of depressing odds. Ideological freedom, then, is at the least a survival tactic that shows strength of conviction and an ability to pose an ultimatum in some of Smith and Holiday's songs. Culturally speaking, Smith showed a sort of ideological freedom as it related to convictions about love relationships. In “My Man Blues” (1925), she references sharing a man:<sup>38</sup>

I guess we got to have him on a cooperation plan  
 I guess we got to have him on a cooperation plan.

In “Hard Time Blues” (1926), Smith represented a brand of ideological freedom that is evident in a woman's self-worth: “Lord, I'm a good woman, I can get a man any place I go.” Yet another, less explicitly stated form of self-worth is evident in Holiday's “Now or Never” (1950):

You give me no consideration at all  
 It's now baby or never 'cause you wasted so much time  
 Now baby or never and you must make up your mind  
 Now baby or never and it ain't no fault of mine  
 It's got to be yes or no

Either you stay or go  
 You can't leave me on the shelf  
 You gotta commit yourself.

Holiday's song shows strength of conviction. Ideological freedom is portrayed as a woman's ability to pose an ultimatum to a man whose actions are unsatisfactory.<sup>39</sup>

While Holiday rendered an ultimatum to her lover in "Now or Never," Simone argued her ideological freedom in terms of a racial platform and thus gave an ultimatum to society. First, in "Backlash Blues," she asked a confrontational question that exposed and simultaneously contradicted racist thinking: "You give me second-class houses and send me to second-class schools / Do you think that all colored folks are second-class fools?" Second, she exercised her ideological freedom by demanding that the U.S. government bend its racist rules, or else—"Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)" (1969):

Yeah, your constitution, well, my friend  
 It's gonna have to bend.

Simone's ideological freedom was heavily based on the Black Power<sup>40</sup> concept of the late 1960s (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Further, in the song "Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)," she states that in communicating her ideology, she was labeled a preacher of hate:

Some folks are gonna get the notion, I know  
 They say I'm preachin' hate.  
 If I have to swim the ocean, well, I would  
 Just to communicate  
 It's not as simple as, just talkin' jive,  
 The daily struggle just to stay alive  
 Singin' 'bout revolution, because  
 I'm talkin' 'bout a change  
 More than just air pollution  
 Well, you know  
 You've gotta clean your brain<sup>41</sup>  
 . . .  
 Do take your stand  
 (take a stand, ah, well alright)  
 It will all end  
 (It will end)

...

Stay alive  
(stay alive).

Ideological freedom as a communication of consciousness is exhibited in Simone's "You Took My Teeth" (1985). She expressed her conspiracy theory about the assassination of a Black leader:

You took my teeth  
You took my brains  
You tried to drive me insane  
And now you're tryin' to take my eyes  
But it's finished now  
Because I'm so wise  
That is why Bob Marley died  
That is why Bob Marley died  
That is why Bob Marley died.

"Certainly the struggle for political and social liberty is nothing if not a quest for freedom to choose one's own way or style of life. Moreover, it should be equally as obvious that there can be no such thing as human dignity and nobility without a consummate, definitive style, pattern, or archetypal image" (Murray, 1970, p. 56). Simone's lyrics, in particular, promote racial freedom through rhetoric. She is the only one of the three women to perpetuate the Black female archetype who (re)states the need for political change by directly challenging (preaching against) the U.S. government.<sup>42</sup>

Holiday and Smith's lyrics about freedom and love explain the kind of sarcastic self-sufficiency that Black women, Black people, have perfected. We are free to make bad choices in love, and when it goes bad, we are, at the least, satisfied that the choice was ours to make.<sup>43</sup> Smith's expressions of sexual freedom and Simone's expressions of ideological freedom are connected to the concept of race.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Smith, Holiday, and Simone encountered racism. Their songs exude African American self-consciousness about sexual choice and racially motivated responses to oppression and segregation, as well as African American responses to the issue of race in the form of protest music. The tradition of conveying racial identity and protest in African American music is historically pervasive (Levine, 1977; Stuckey, 1987).

## RACE

The race theme ranked second in Simone's prevalent themes. Much of what she sang about race dealt with protest. Within the body of Smith's work the race theme ranked fifth, and she also demonstrated protest through the use of what Brooks (1982) referred to as "complaint." Smith described race in terms of color, essentially defining it in terms of cultural or social identity. Simone defined race as both a cultural and political identity.

## SKIN COLOR

Many African American songs challenge the color preferences of White Americans. Bessie Smith, among numerous Blues singers, showed that in Black society, there was preference for darker tones of skin<sup>44</sup> (Levine, 1977). In "My Man Blues" (1925), Bessie Smith and Clara Smith argued over a man. They finally concluded that they could share him on a "cooperation plan." One of Smith's arguments shows the preference for Black skin:

I been buyin' his clothes for five years,  
For that is my Black sheik.<sup>45</sup>

In "Baby Doll" (1926), the context that Smith used is reminiscent of more negative portrayals of Black skin. However, she claimed that her preference was still for black skin: "He can be Black, he can be ugly." Lyrics in Smith's "Spider Man Blues" (1928) further evidenced her preference: "That Black man of mine sure has his spider ways."

One of the most widespread preferences seems to be brown skin. According to Levine (1977),

Choice of the lightest skinned possibility (excluding white, which never seemed to be a preferred choice) was not the most common, however. Quite frequently both yellow and black were specifically rejected in favor of brown, which proved to be without exception the most favored color in every collection of twentieth-century black song. . . . A number of quite distinct shades were recognized: deep black, ashy black, pale black, dead black, chocolate-brown, coffee, sealskin brown, deep brown, dark brown, reddish brown, deep yella brown, chocolate, high-brown, low-brown, velvet brown, bronze, gingerbread, fair light brown, tan, olive, copper, pink, banana, cream, brightskin, high yaller, lemon. (p. 286)



For example, in “Young Woman’s Blues” (1926), Smith announced the ultimate preference for brown skin:

I ain’t no high yella, I’m a deep killa’ brown  
 . . .  
 I’m gon’ drink good moonshine and run these browns down.

She claims the “brown” color for herself, but her reference to “running those browns down” was identity related; it was an indication of cultural and social identity: African American or, as the times dictated, “Negro.” Smith vocalized the trend in skin preference in “Pickpocket Blues” (1928): “I don’t stop runnin’ around with all my good lookin’ browns.” It was also evident in “Hard Time Blues” (1926), when she stated, “I’m going to see another brown.” Here, skin color speaks to black identity as cultural and social identity.<sup>46</sup>

Nina Simone got closer to the core of the real issue. In her representations of skin color, she recollected the plights that seemed to accompany the varying skin shades of Black folks. What is most important, however, is that she maintained the tradition of recognizing the distinct shades of Black people’s skin. Such recognition illuminates the cultural and political identity that comprises Blackness. Simone distinguished colors in an effort to unify, not separate. For example, in “Four Women” (1965), she demarcated the various skin tones<sup>47</sup> with sounds that indicated variation in plight:

My skin is black  
 . . .  
 My skin is yellow  
 . . .  
 My skin is tan  
 . . .  
 My skin is brown

However, the goal of overcoming racial oppression was essentially the same for all four women. We see this clearly in Simone’s “Backlash Blues” (1966–1967):

And it’s full of folks like me  
 Who are black, yellow, beige and brown.

Smith’s statements were in line with the New Negro movement of the early 1900s. The movement was very specifically concerned with Black identity

and Black heritage (Murray, 1970, p. 171). Simone's statements speak to blackness as both cultural and political identity.<sup>48</sup> Racial oppression, social repression, and economic deprivation are the battlegrounds of which Simone speaks in many of her songs. However, Smith's songs do not necessarily address politicized themes in the way that Simone's songs do.<sup>49</sup>

## PROTEST

Stuckey (1987) duly notes that Black Nationalism had its roots in the culture of enslaved Africans. Complaints about oppression are found throughout the oral traditions of African Americans, regardless of the era. Wherever disaster and misery exist, very often related to race, for Blacks there is often a song or a poem that recounts it. For example, when Smith encountered flood victims in a little town outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, they pleaded with her to sing the blues about the flooding. In response to this plea, Smith's "Backwater Blues" (1927), recounted the flood that left thousands of poor Black people homeless:<sup>50</sup>

When it rains five days and the skies turn dark as night  
 When it rains five days and the skies turn dark as night  
 . . .  
 Backwater blues done caused me to pack my things and go  
 Backwater blues done caused me to pack my things and go  
 'Cause my house fell down and I can't live there no mo.'

The song stands as a complaint or protest song because it indirectly referenced the racist practices that forced poor people, especially Blacks, to live in flood zones. Smith's "Poor Man's Blues" gained popularity as a testimony about Black people's blues, and it was subsequently referred to as "Black Man's Blues." In the song, Smith blames wealthy White people for the oppressive conditions that caused Blacks to suffer. She concluded "Poor Man's Blues" with the following refrain:

Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you (repeat)  
 If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man, what would you do?

Smith's lyrics spark a rise in the direct and very urgent concern with abstract economic theory and general politicalization of all issues concerning race.

Nina Simone stated that even though she was often in the company of such activists as Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Stokely Carmichael, her racial protest activism evolved slowly (Simone

& Cleary, 1993). Evidence of her turnabout is seen in “Old Jim Crow” (1964), where she directly stated that racist segregation must end:

Old Jim Crow  
 Where you been baby  
 Down Mississippi and back again  
 Old Jim Crow don’t you know  
 It’s all over now.

There is further evidence of her growing commitment to the Black protest movement in “Mississippi Goddam” (1963):

Don’t tell me  
 I tell you  
 Me and my people just about due  
 . . .  
 Oh but this whole country is full of lies  
 You’re all gonna die and die like flies  
 I don’t trust you any more  
 . . .  
 You don’t have to live next to me  
 Just give me my equality.

Simone’s statements about race or identity were all but replaced by Blackness as an economic and political identity—or condition, plight, or blight.

Interestingly, Bessie Smith’s “Dixie Flyer Blues” (1925) was similar to Simone’s idea about living with or near Whites. In contrast to the prevailing South-to-North migration of Blacks in the early 1900s, Smith declared that she preferred to live in the South with her people:

Goin’ to Dixieland, it’s the grandest place on earth  
 . . .  
 Wouldn’t stay up North to save nobody’s doggone soul  
 . . .  
 Goin’ to my mammy way down in Dixieland.

Perhaps one of the most direct and profound protest demands for equality lies in Simone’s “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2),” where she stated,

The only way that we can stand in fact  
 Is when you get your foot off our back.

Blackness—a political identity—fueled the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Kirk-Duggan (1997) argues that political identity and cultural identity were united in the song circles of Black protesters. Congregational singing was a tool of empowerment. Many of those songs were recreations of the spirituals from long ago (Spencer, 1990). Praise and protest went hand in hand.

## RELIGION

The early socialization of Smith, Holiday, and Simone occurred in the South below the Mason-Dixon line. Bessie Smith was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and was raised in a Baptist household. Billie Holiday was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but was raised in the segregated sections of Baltimore, Maryland. Part of her childhood socialization and musical training was connected to Baptist revival meetings. Nina Simone was born and raised primarily in Tryon, North Carolina. Most, if not all, of her cultural and musical socialization occurred in Methodist and Holiness church environments. Smith, Holiday, and Simone's early socializations include heavy church religious indoctrination as well as Southern folk beliefs.

The religion<sup>51</sup> theme was the most prevalent in Simone's songs. Religion ranks fifth in Holiday's songs. This theme was third in Smith's songs, even though it does not meet the criteria for prevalence.<sup>52</sup> Levine (1977) demonstrates that the infusion of African folk beliefs and Christianity is pervasive in African American religious practices. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss religion in terms of African retentions or folkways. This theme must necessarily revolve around Christianity, and according to Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics, religion involves the transmission of folklore; belief in bad luck, good luck, conjure, and sacred medicine; biblical reference to God and the Devil; and religious exclamations.

With regard to folkways, both Levine (1977) and Stuckey (1987) argued that Black culture is rooted in African culture. They offer evidence of links between African folklore and moral lessons and African American folklore and moral lessons. The animal figures that Smith incorporated in two of her songs resemble African animal tricksters. The animal figures usually represented the ancestors; hence, they represented humans. For example, in "Rocking Chair Blues," Smith included a rabbit and a tadpole. In Black folklore, Brer Rabbit is usually portrayed as the trickster—the one to outwit or outrun a dupe—but it is not uncommon for the trickster to be tricked. This was the case in "Rocking Chair Blues" (1924), where "the blues" dupes the rabbit:

I'm gonna ask Mr. Tadpole did the blues ever stop by here  
 Blues jumped a rabbit, runnin' for a solid mile (repeat)  
 The rabbit turned over and cried like a natural child.

Similarly, "Spider Man Blues" (1928) includes an animal figure that bears striking resemblance to the West African animal figure "Anansi spider." The function of animal tricksters lies in their use of guile, cunning, and wit to outsmart more powerful beings. In "Spider Man Blues," Smith declared that her lover manages to entangle her: "That black man of mine sure has his spider ways [repeat]."

In Billie Holiday's "Everything Happens for the Best," she referred to both the practice of oral culture and reverence for the wisdom of one's elders. While oral cultures exist throughout the world, as does reverence for elders, it is important to include Holiday's lyrics as they give insight on how stories of animal trickster figures are transmitted. Typically, it is the elders who pass on the folkloric traditions,<sup>53</sup> and in "Everything Happens for the Best" (1939) Holiday bears witness to this phenomenon:

Since the world began  
 The old folks say  
 Everything happens for the best.

When some Black Americans see a black cat, they may recall a grandparent's voice: "Don't let a black cat cross your path; it is bad luck." Levine (1977) wrote, "The universe was not silent; it spoke to those who knew how to listen. . . . Signs were not merely phenomena to be accepted passively; they were often calls to action" (p. 66). Many Blacks believe that if a black cat crosses your path, it is a sign of bad luck unless you spit on the spot where your paths meet. Simone repeated this folk belief and consequent paranoia in "Mississippi Goddam" (1963):

Black cat cross my path  
 I think every day's gonna be my last.

There is ample evidence about the belief in and practice of conjure. In efforts to escape enslavement, many Africans sought out conjurers to work magic and help free them (Levine, 1977). Some of the names for conjurers include "witch doctor," "gypsy," "medicine woman," and "roots healer." Conjurers were called upon to foresee someone's fortune, and usually they were commissioned to remove any bad luck.<sup>54</sup> In "Please Help Me Get Him Off My Mind" (1928), Smith called up a conjurer to solve her problems:

I've come to see you, gypsy, beggin' on my bended knee  
 I've come to see you, gypsy, beggin' on my bended knee  
 . . .  
 Oh, how I'm sufferin', gypsy, nobody but the good Lord knows.

Likewise, in "Baby Doll" (1926), Smith talked about the kind of charms or devices that conjurers use:

It must be somethin' they call the Cuban doll  
 It weren't your mama's angel child  
 . . .  
 Lord, I went to the gypsy to get my fortune told  
 She said, "You in hard luck, Bessie, doggone your bad luck soul."

The "Cuban doll" is related to the Voodoo doll.<sup>55</sup> Levine (1977) stated, "It is important to understand that, in the cultures from which the slaves came, phenomena and activities that we might be tempted to dismiss as 'superstitious' were legitimate and important modes of comprehending and operating within a universe perceived of in sacred terms" (p. 56). Holiday was very superstitious (Clarke, 1994), as were Smith (Albertson, 1972) and Simone (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Levine concluded that it is impossible and irresponsible to separate folk traditions and beliefs from religion. Perhaps the distinctiveness in transition from the spirituals to gospel lies in the change of focus from the Old Testament beliefs to the New Testament beliefs. The New Testament teaches attitudes about the otherworldly love and redemption that only Jesus Christ can bring to his followers.

Levine (1977) asserted that the syncretization of African folk beliefs and biblical beliefs is the basis for discussing African American transitions from dependence on the Old Testament to dependence on the New Testament. Most enslaved and free Africans made reference to the Bible. In "God Bless the Child" (1956), Holiday drew on that heritage when she claimed that the "good book" is a source of knowledge:

Them that's got shall get  
 Them that's not shall lose  
 So the Bible says and it still is news.

The Bible was also referenced in Smith's "Thinking Blues" (1928): "The good book says you've got to reap what you sow."

Levine (1977) also argued that Africans adapted the Old Testament prophets into folklore heroes who accomplished great feats of magic on

earth. For example, a reference to the biblical figure Mohamed—who moved mountains—is evident in a line in Simone’s “I Sing Just to Know That I’m Alive” (1985): “Well the mountains they will move.”

There are references to the power of Jesus, the Lord, throughout several of Smith’s songs.

Bessie did, after all, grow up in a religious household. All who heard her in person agree that her vocal delivery and coordinated movements evoked the fervor of a Southern Baptist prayer meeting, “She was real close to God, very religious,” . . .”She always mentioned the Lord’s name. That’s why her blues seemed almost like hymns.” (Albertson, 1972, p. 130)

In “Young Woman’s Blues” (1926), Smith speaks to the “Lord”:<sup>56</sup> “See that long lonesome road, Lord, you know it’s gotta end.” In “Rockin’ Chair Blues” (1924), she not only referenced God but also set the scene as if it were in a church:

He plays the blues to his congregation

. . .

Lord, I wonder where my lovin’ man has gone.

In “Foolish Man Blues” (1927), Smith calls on God to tell about her misfortune with a man:

Lord, men sure are deceitful, they getting worse every day.

Finally, in “Hot Springs Blues”(1927), she made the reference twice:<sup>57</sup>

Lord, if you ever get crippled, let me tell you what to do

. . . .

Lord, they’ll put you in the water and do the bathhouse rag.

The word “Lord” is often altered into other words such as “Lawd” and “Lawdy” (Harrison, 2000). Yet another variation is represented in Simone’s “Blues for Mama” (1966–1967): “Hey Lordy mama.” The exclamatory calls to the Lord often come in response to disasters or disastrous conditions.

In “Come Ye” (1966), Simone sang about the current oppressive state of Black people and declared, “It’s time to learn how to pray.” Simone fostered a cultural syncretism: the African American folk belief that the devil<sup>58</sup> can be invoked to alter human circumstance. In “Old Jim Crow” (1964) she remonstrates,

Old Jim Crow  
 You've been around too long  
 Gotta work the devil  
 'Til you're dead and gone.

In “Nobody’s Fault but Mine” (1968), Simone evoked an ethos particular to the Christian tradition. Simone spoke a belief in Christian condemnation, which indicates the turnabout from communal ethos to individualized religious doctrine:

I had a mother who could pray (repeat)  
 If I die and my soul be lost  
 Nobody’s fault but mine.

In African spiritual systems, the only concept that can be said to parallel the idea of condemnation lies in a belief system that is based on communal ethos.<sup>59</sup> The only way that someone’s soul can be condemned or lost is if no member of the community of living human beings calls on and remembers the spirit of a deceased person (Mbiti, 1970; Pennington, 1990).

Both Smith and Simone incorporate “the soul” in their music. They continuously reference the strength of religious and spiritual embodiments. As they sing about soul force, from their souls, they recreate and call on the world of spirit, using the language and belief systems of both Christian and African spiritual doctrine. According to Gardiner (1994), the ancient Egyptian term for “spirit” is “ka” and the term for “soul” is “ba.” In ancient Egypt, the soul was understood as the shadow of the spirit, the reserve manifestation of personality. The soul is the strength of the spirit—the will (Richards, 1985). In “Preachin’ the Blues” (1927), Smith sang about converting people’s souls:

Preach them blues, sing them blues  
 They certainly sound good to me  
 . . .  
 Moan them blues, holler them blues,  
 Let me convert your soul  
 Read on down to chapter ten,  
 Takin’ other women men you are doin’ a sin  
 Sing ’em, sing ’em, sing them blues,  
 Let me convert your soul.

In “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (1977), Simone stressed that youthfulness renders a pureness of the spirit and soul:



When you're young, gifted and Black  
Your soul's intact.

In the innocence and vitality of youth, one's spirit and soul are pure and strong. She seems to be talking about the hope many people feel before being exposed to restriction. She reassures them that they will mature properly given the right direction, and will be able to overcome the evil of racism (Harrison, 1972, p. 105).

Religion can often function to restore order to chaos, and to replenish the spirit, according to Smith and Simone. Their lyrics are beautiful in the sense that they depict the will to bring order to chaos, and combine the holy and the profane; and living according to a higher and deeper set of principles is good in many traditional African and African-derived belief systems (Karade, 1994). Therefore, their words are good in the conceptualization of Nzuri.

In sum, Smith, Holiday, and Simone's life experiences were reflected in their songs. Each woman's encounter with incarceration, love, freedom, race, and religion is indicative of Black women's struggles in a general sense. Their lyrics bear witness to the phenomenon of living as a Black woman.

## Chapter Five

# Sound Motion and Spirit

In the Diaspora there are aesthetics born out of deep structure shaped by surface structure that are also decidedly African. That these aesthetics exist does not necessarily imply conscious will. Certainly, in the African Diaspora the presence of the aesthetic is part of the survivalist tradition that has provided the African in America with strength, continuity and, albeit synthetic, culture.

Welsh Asante (1994, p. 1)

The goal of this study is to analyze the selected song performances of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone through the prism of aesthetics, to show how African aesthetic features of sound quality and style of sound impart various African cultural values and motion sensibilities. I have shown some thematic commonalities and some Black female survivalist values in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics in Chapter Four. However, I have an intense interest in determining how aural performance adds another, decidedly African dimension of value to their lyrics.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I am using Welsh Asante's statement to support my premise that there are values embedded in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances that demonstrate numerous, decidedly African and African-derived aesthetics. In this chapter, I describe, examine, and evaluate the selected song performances of Smith, Holiday, and Simone in accordance with Welsh Asante's (1994) conceptualization of a Pan-African aesthetic, Nzuri.

Welsh Asante (1994) states that Nzuri is a theory that seeks to determine value in art. Based on traditional African standards of taste in art, goodness and beauty are the values one seeks. Moreover, "Nzuri is a theoretical concept that contextualizes the function of beauty, good, and pleasure in society" (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 8). Following the circle of Welsh Asante's (1994) Nzuri model, we see that an art form can be conceptualized

in several contexts (see Figure 5.1). These contexts include three sources: spirit, rhythm, and creativity; seven aspects: meaning, ethos, motif, mode, function, method/technique, and form; and three principles: ashe, ehe, and oral.

### Aesthetic Circle

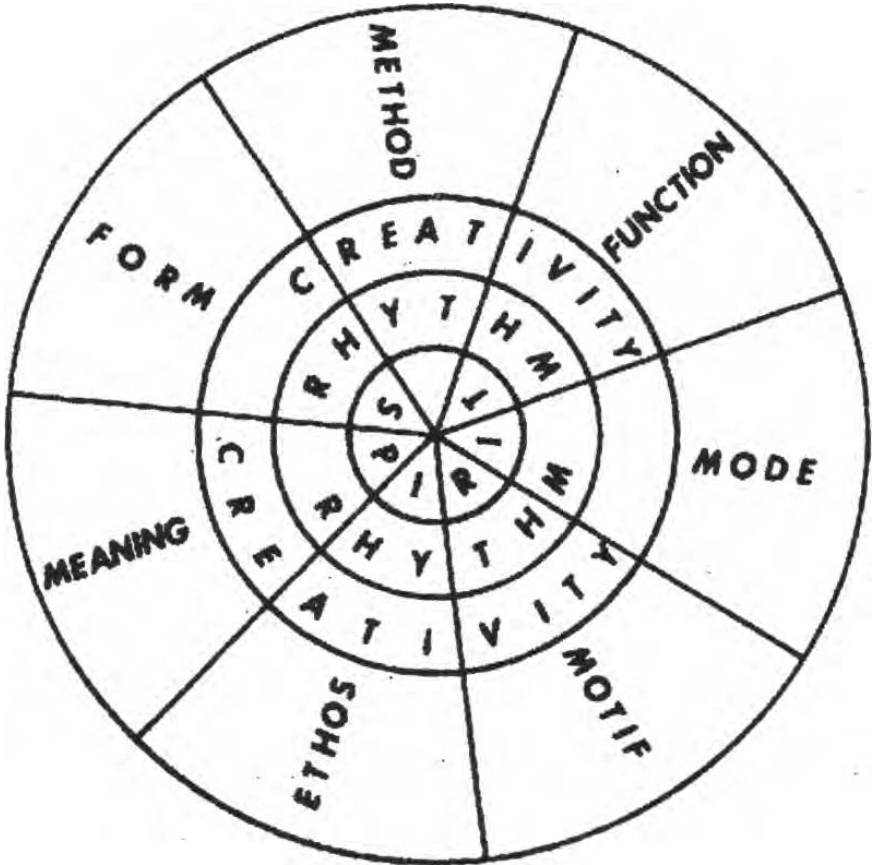


Figure 5.1. The Welsh Asante Nzuri Model

Source: *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*, Edited by Kariamuwelsh-Asante. Copyright ©1993, 1994 by Kariamuwelsh-Asante. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport CT.

Conceptually, the three sources are contexts that consume and consecrate the artistic process—the creation of a song composition.<sup>2</sup> Conceptually, the seven aspects are contexts within which various situations in the artistic product—song performance—are situated. As I discuss the aspects of each song performance, description and examination of various sound effects are emphasized. Conceptually, the three principles are contexts that affirm and respond to the artistic process and product. I use the *ashe* and *ehe* principles to affirm and respond to (evaluate) the song performances. All evaluations begin with either “*Ashe!*” or “*Ehe!*”<sup>3</sup>

Each song performance is discussed in the following manner: I (1) describe how the song composition came to be created, (2) describe and examine the lyrical phrases and sound effects<sup>4</sup> according to the aspects (meaning, ethos, motif, mode, function, method/technique, or form), (3) evaluate lyrical phrases and sound effects within some of the aspects, and (4) summarize the value of each song performance. The selected song performances that I describe, examine, and evaluate are Bessie Smith’s “*Young Woman’s Blues*,” “*Preachin’ the Blues*,” and “*Poor Man’s Blues*”; Billie Holiday’s “*Billie’s Blues*,” “*Everything Happens for the Best*,” and “*Lady Sings the Blues*”; and Nina Simone’s “*Four Women*,” “*Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)*,” and “*To Be Young, Gifted and Black*.”

The description and examination of sound effects are central to the evaluation of each song performance. In terms of sound effects or sound motion, consider L. Jones’s (1972) idea that blues, jazz, and soul music, especially vocal music, are redistributed expressions of African impulses. Also consider the idea that sound effects expose the African connection to African American music (Lyttelton, 1982). Those redistributed sound expressions and sound effects are surface structures. They are born out of African motion and connected to deep structures of cultural value.

Welsh Asante (1994) includes numerous aesthetics from the African Diaspora in her conceptualization of the Pan-African aesthetic of Nzuri. Therefore, in order to describe and examine various sound effects in my subjects’ song performances, I incorporate the African motion-description-language of three complementary aesthetics. Within the Nzuri model’s seven aspects, I describe sound moves or dances using Welsh Asante’s (1985) African aesthetic dance senses.<sup>5</sup>

Welsh Asante’s (1985) seven aesthetic dance senses (polyrhythm, polycentrism, holistic, curvilinear, dimensionality, repetition, and particularly epic memory) are useful in my study. First, they can be used to describe the sound movements (effects). Some of Kebede’s (1995) sound descriptors are also central in my description of Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s sound effects. Second, the aesthetic dance senses can be used to examine how

sound motions add value to Smith, Holiday, and Simone's lyrics. Third, the senses can be used to examine how those sound movements demonstrate decidedly African expressive style and thus values. Some of Thompson's (1974) art (sculpture/dance/music) canons are also included to describe and examine sound effects in their selected song performances.

African American singers are not always aware that their stylization of sound is decidedly African. Also, they may not be aware that those sound effects are connected to African cultural values. However, many African American singers use specific sound motions and sound qualities, such as slurs, guttural tones, bends, drops, moans, shouts, raspiness, and call-and-response to express something deeper than the lyrics alone can convey. Smith, Holiday, and Simone's compositions express traditions of survival—flexibility—and African motion is about flexibility and vitality (Thompson, 1974). However, their performances turn words into sound motion, and there is a source for every sound motion. That source is spirit.

### “YOUNG WOMAN'S BLUES”

I begin by exploring Bessie Smith's creation of the song “Young Woman's Blues.” At the core of Smith's song composition, there lies a process of reflection, thought, feeling, and contemplation. Welsh Asante (1994) defines the spirit source as the “first manifestation of *Ntu*” (p. 11). Recall that “*Ntu*” comes from the Bantu language and means life force, and vital energy (Jahn, 1990). The way I understand the spirit source is that it is a personal experience(s) or life force, and/or the recollection of an experience that precedes and initiates the creation of an art form.

I like Albertson's general overview of Smith's artistic process. He says, “Bessie was a good if not wholly original composer of lyrics. A personal experience or a story often gave her an idea for a new blues. She would make up the words, memorize them, and have someone else, usually her pianist, write the music” (Albertson, 1972, p. 69). Albertson's insight into Smith's creative world corroborates the way in which I apply Welsh Asante's definition of the spirit source. When Smith revisited her own personal experiences or memories, she began the process of thinking about what she wanted to say. Restated, Smith's process of creating the lyrics to “Young Woman's Blues” begins when she calls on her own inner world of ideas, thoughts, and emotions—the spirit of her experiences.

Therefore, I perceive that the spirit source in Smith's “Young Woman's Blues” not only captures some thoughts about her turbulent marriage to Jack Gee but also captures what could perceivably be her recollection of other women's stories about their men who, for whatever reason, decided

to leave. Case in point: in June 1926, Smith fired a gun at Jack Gee for cheating. Thus, Smith found herself waking up all alone (Albertson, 1972).

Now, there is no way to document exactly when she composed the lyrics of “Young Woman’s Blues”; however, it is certain that she recorded the song in New York on October 26, 1926, six months after the shooting incident (Albertson, 1972; Brooks, 1982). In the opening lyrics, Smith’s story about a woman who wakes to find her man has gone was personally true for Smith at that point in her life:

(Instruments moaning)

Woke up this mornin’ when chickens was crowin’ for day (clarinet responds)

Felt on the right side of my pilla,’ my man had gone away (clarinet and coronet respond).

However, the lyrics that follow indicate another part of Smith’s spirit source in the creation of “Young Woman’s Blues.” There is evidence that she composed the next three lines by reflecting on stories that other Black women shared with her.

By his pilla’ he left a note (coronet & clarinet respond—ba dee dah domp)

Readin’ I’m sorry Jane, you got my goat

No time to marry, no time to settle down.

The fact that she and Gee were still married when she composed these lyrics between June and October 1926 also leads me to believe that the words “no time to marry” must have come from stories shared with Smith by other women. It is easy to picture Smith on the Theater Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) circuit swapping stories with her dancers about love, abandonment, and the transition.

Given Smith’s propensity for violence, it is also easy to see why Jack Gee left. Personal and communal elements were present in her initial thoughts about the content of the song. From within her spirit source, Smith fashioned lyrics that appeal to Black women specifically and women in general. The song is especially captivating for those who have been burdened with, or at the very least experienced, a man’s convenient excuse for departing.

As the lyrics unfold, the second layer of Smith’s artistic process comes into view. From the opening lyrics, we see Smith’s process at the point where the man has asserted his freedom. However, it is the chorus of Smith’s song

that shows that rhythms of thought pushed her to the point that she needed to assert her freedom:

I'm a young woman and ain't *done* runnin' 'round  
I'm a young woman and ain't *done* runnin' 'round.

Her assertion is so important in the rhythm of the song that she emphasized it through repetition.<sup>6</sup> Her thoughts recurred so rhythmically that they became very specific words. Those lyrics tell us that through a process of reflection, Smith became extremely confident in her conviction about freedom.

Another contraction and expansion of thought in the rhythm source is evident in the following lyrics:

Some people call me a hobo, some call me a bum  
Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I've done  
I'm as good as any woman in your town  
I ain't no high yella, I'm a deep killer brown.

The rhythmic flow of thoughts is centered on what must have been her encounters with jealous people. She was young, famous, free, and rich. Smith readily traveled the South with her troupe, experiencing a level of freedom that most Black people, let alone Black women, did not (Albertson, 1972). Furthermore, it is evident that her thoughts revolved around indignation toward light-skinned Blacks. This certainly could have been the result of her encounters with White supremacist attitudes about female beauty.<sup>7</sup> Her thoughts came speeding out like a hot bullet, ready to kill the spirit of opposing forces. Through the rhythm source layer of her artistic process, her thoughts became words and those words communicated the value of believing in one's self. There is a third rhythmic pulse in Smith's artistic process. Take, for example, the next two lines of "Young Woman's Blues":

I ain't gonna marry, ain't gon' settle down  
I'm gon' drink good moonshine and run these browns down.

The lyrics are an expansive recurrence of her initial assertion—conviction. She is a young woman who will drink moonshine and take as many lovers as she wants.

Having reflected on personal ideas, experiences, and memories as well as on stories communicated to her by other women, Smith forged lyrics

that demonstrate her discovery of her inner strength and resiliency. This brings me to Welsh Asante's (1994) idea of the creativity source. The creativity source, the third ripple of the artistic process, plays itself out in a number of ways.

First, Smith's thoughts recreate her world—the world of a Black woman—within a specific world, the world of Black women. Second, her ideas become material manifestations of the spirit source and rhythm source. By this, I mean that Smith taps into her spirit and recalls personal and communal experiences; and she allows the rhythms to compound her ideas about her personal conviction. Third, because Smith taps into her spirit and rides the rhythm, she arrives to that place of complete creativity. Her creation—the song—serves and affirms both her and her community. Through self-realization, Smith discovered her strength to survive after being abandoned by Jack Gee.

See that long, lonesome road, Lord, you know it's gotta end  
And I'm a good woman and I can get plenty men.

In fact, she thrived in spite of it (Albertson, 1972). She knew that someone would satisfy her someday, somewhere along life's hard and rocky road.

These last two lines in the song point to the final way by which the creativity source is played out in an artistic process. Consider Welsh Asante's (1994) thought: "Finally, creativity is the metatext for creation itself and through man's and society's creative expressions, clarity and purpose is shed on the Supreme Being's master plan" (p. 13). Ultimately, "Young Woman's Blues" serves and affirms a community—Black women. The spirit, rhythm, and creativity sources of "Young Woman's Blues" culminate to express the dilemma of abandonment, a responsive awakening, an awareness of self-worth, and the development of conviction. Black women can learn to confront pain and loneliness by remembering who they are and that they are worthy and capable of being satisfied.

The kinds of thoughts, memories, and experiences that Smith contemplated in the creation of "Young Woman's Blues" reveal how her artistic process of composing lyrics unfolds. On the one hand, her written composition allows me to view, analyze, and gain insight into her artistic process—how she turned ideas into words (lyrics). On the other hand, her performance of those words requires another context for analysis. This is where I employ Welsh Asante's (1994) Nzuri model aspects to contextualize the description, examination, and evaluation of the artistic product: Smith's performance of the lyrics in "Young Woman's Blues."



First, let us examine the meaning aspect or the “significance of [song performance] expression in relationship to individual and community” (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 11). For example, the aesthetic behavior, or expressiveness that Smith places on the sound of certain words, animates the meaning of the song. I derive meaning from Smith’s rhythm source. When she sang,

I’m a young woman and ain’t *done* runnin’ ’round  
I’m a young woman and ain’t *done* runnin’ ’round.<sup>8</sup>

She is essentially saying that life is too short. Forget that man. I am moving on with my life. Any woman who experienced abandonment by her man surely responds to these lyrics in jubilation.<sup>9</sup>

On the surface, there is a Black female survivalist tradition in the lyrics. Abandonment can cause emotional burden, but life continues. Consequently, the way that Smith sings the word “done” enlivens and empowers the idea that life is short, and in this way, she imbues meaning in the lyrics. She sings “done” in the following way: Smith starts with a low note, drags her voice upward, and lets it fall. The motion is curved: a curvilinear rhythm.

If, in fact, curvilinear qualities in music can round, curve, and carve out images that resemble aspects of African mythology (Welsh Asante, 1985, p. 75), then the fact that I see the image of the upper half of a circle is viable. I associate this image with the upper half of a Bantu cosmogram or Yowa<sup>10</sup> and its corresponding mythology. The cosmogram communicates deep philosophical understanding about the cycle of life, from an African worldview (Thompson, 1984). The upper half of the cosmogram tells a story about the three stages of physical life: birth, adulthood, and transition or death.

Ashe! Smith’s sound motion has the effect of reenacting the stages of physical life. Ehe! An elegant understanding about choice is demonstrated through sound, and the meaning of the song performance is reinforced: either carry the weight of emotional burdens and waste what little time one has in life, or release those emotional burdens and live life to the fullest. Smith drops her voice toward the end of the word, and with this sound motion drop on the word “done,” there is a release of emotional burden. The function of the sound is beautiful, according to Nzuri.

She ends the word “done” by pulsating her voice through a series of tight curves, and I am reminded of the way that waves of water<sup>11</sup> might be drawn. The curvilinear sense is further evidenced, and Kebede (1995) describes this kind of tightly curved sound movement as ruT—a throbbing,

warm, “and expressive style with rapid but narrow pitch fluctuations”<sup>12</sup> (p. 28). He explains that the ruT sound motion is important in African singing<sup>13</sup> because it opens communication with the world of spirits and strengthens the fluid connection between humans and God, the deities, the ancestors, the living dead, and the unborn.<sup>14</sup>

In view of the power and fluidity that the curvilinear ruT sound effect embodies, I also envision the lower half of the cosmogram—the spirit world. When a person stands on the cross of the cosmogram and communicates with the ancestors, he or she gains power from the spirit world and becomes fluid in the negotiation of life (Thompson, 1983). That person can master the meaning of life and death and ultimately realize the indestructibility of the soul.

Ashe! The ruT sound effect emphasizes the upward curving slur that Smith places on the word “done.” Ehe, again! Smith’s vocal acrobatics carry the power of the spirits into the physical realm, and the aural demonstration of fluidity reinforces the meaning of “Young Woman’s Blues.” Fluidity is a beautiful attribute according to many African aesthetics (Thompson, 1974); therefore, the sound reenactment of fluidity is good, according to Nzuri.

In “Young Woman’s Blues,” the ethos aspect is expressed as a defiant and rebellious quality. Confidence comes across in the following lyrics:

Some people *call* me a hobo, some *call* me a bum  
 Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I’ve *done*  
 I’m as *good* as any *woman* in your town.

Her manipulation of the words “done,” “good,” and “woman” makes the ethos of the song obvious. In particular, it is the way Smith drags or slurs the word “done” through a down-up-down curvilinear motion that alerts me to the “Blues God” ethos and the range of her ethos or spirit.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Smith has plenty to hide, but as long as no one can prove otherwise, she is a “good woman.” There is a hidden dimension of drama—a profound dimensionality—like Smith is laughing under her breath.

Even though the curvilinear sense is present, the dimensionality sense is overwhelming. Welsh Asante says that the dimensionality sense can account for the blurriness that one hears (1985, p. 77). Smith’s slurring sound brings me to believe that something extra is occurring, like there is a clever presence beyond the lyrical statement. Her vocal expressiveness transmits that spirit of cleverness—she will do as she pleases.

Cleverness is one characteristic valued in the African worldview. For example, the trickster figure is used in African and African American folklore to demonstrate the use of cleverness, cunning, and guile (Van Sertima, 1971). Consider Levine’s (1977) description of the trickster as a “self-contained hero

who violated not the laws or the moral code but the stereotyped roles set aside for black people in a white society” (p. 407). The lyrics tell us that the protagonist, who acted and moved freely, was aware that people were trying to repress her by stereotyping her with titles like “hobo” and “bum.”

Ashe and ehe! Smith’s expressive aural transmission of cleverness is a good vocal act. It demonstrates the motion of a self-contained heroine who cleverly “walked her walk and talked her talk.” Like the sound motion, the protagonist maneuvered up, down, and through stereotyped roles set aside for Black women by Blacks who lacked the confidence to express their ideological or sexual freedom, and by Whites who wanted to maintain the status quo. The sound behavior communicates a valuable human (Black female) behavior, and that is good.

The motif aspect in “Young Woman’s Blues” is indicative of early twentieth-century Black cultural identity. As Levine points out, “[F]requently both yellow and black [skin colors] were specifically rejected in favor of brown skin which proved to be without exception the most favored color in every collection of twentieth-century black song” (1977, p. 286). In “Young Woman’s Blues,” Smith challenged the African American and American caste system of skin color<sup>16</sup> by singing,

I ain’t no high yella, I’m a deep killer brown.

This brown skin motif runs throughout many of Smith’s songs. Smith maintained her admiration of brown skin (Albertson, 1972). Smith consistently challenged oppressive forces. This brings me to the function aspect of the song.

Consider how Angela Davis explains what I perceive to be the function of “Young Woman’s Blues.” Davis (1999a) says that the song “poses more explicit challenges to the male dominance that ideologically inheres in this [matrimonial] institution” (p. 17). The protagonist is plainly not interested in getting married, just yet:

I ain’t gonna marry, ain’t gonna settle down  
I’m gon’ drink good moonshine and run these browns down.

Davis says that the song “exudes a self-confident sense of female independence and unabashed embrace of sexual pleasure” (1999a, p. 17).

While themes of love, freedom, race, and religion are expressed in the song, it is Smith’s expression of freedom that defines the song’s role

or function as a reflective song. Specifically, the song functions as a “go public” or “talking smart” song.<sup>17</sup> By sharing her personal experience, Smith informs, advises, and even inspires Black women to be independent and to embrace sexual pleasure.

In “Young Woman’s Blues,” the method/technique aspect—“the physical means of realizing the song”—is as follows. Bessie Smith is accompanied by her “Blue Boys”—Joe Smith on coronet, Buster Bailey on clarinet, and Fletcher Henderson on piano (Brooks, 1982). The song is played in a slow 4/4 time signature (structural form) with a swinging pulse, provided by Henderson’s piano stride. The song is shaped in the form of the blues popular song (Brooks, 1982).<sup>18</sup>

The overall mode of the song expresses a bold yet cool attitude (Brooks, 1982) that comes from bumpy yet rolling textures, with deep, rich, round vocal and instrumental tones. This textural feel is reminiscent of the hollers and calls that early African Americans used to protest oppressive conditions, and this open raspiness is particularly evident in the way that Smith’s (curvilinear) round tones, (ruT) throbbing motions, and dramatic falloffs emphasize such words as “woman,” “round,” “brown,” “long,” “Lord,” and “plenty.”

Her bold mode becomes particularly beautiful as Joe Smith and Buster Bailey respond to Smith’s call<sup>19</sup> in the first line of refrain.

I’m a young woman and ain’t *done* runnin’ *round*

(Bailey’s clarinet—boo do dee do, duh duh, boo do dee do dlah do duh, duhmmmm

J. Smith’s coronet—\_\_\_\_bwah doe dom, bwa doe doe bwamp bwamp, bwamp, bwah, bwah, bwah, bwah, bwah, bwah, bwuh, bwamp, dum dum)

Their horns emulate charges to battle that reinforce the confidence in Smith’s conviction. In the second line of refrain, the attitude becomes cool:

I’m a young woman and ain’t *done* runnin’ *round* (voice falls off sharply)

(coronet—bwa, bom bom bom, dum bom bwah dah, bwee dom dom domp

clarinet—\_\_\_\_\_dwee doh doh dee doh),

Their swinging horns reenact her “coolness”:<sup>20</sup> the decision has been made, and it is time to move on to the next adventure. Ashe! The performance transmits sounds and energies that dramatize fluidity and conveys the motion of dropping a heavy load—emotional burden—and maneuvering

social restrictions. Ehe! Smith's song performance is beautiful because, functionally speaking, its representation of modal balance mirrors the protagonists' personal balance.

### “PREACHIN’ THE BLUES”

The spirit source of “Preachin’ the Blues” emanated out of Smith's contemplation about her drinking problem. In particular, she recalls drinking with down-and-out folks in a sad—that is, bad—situation (Brooks, 1982).

Down in Atlanta, GA under the viaduct every day  
Drinkin’ corn and hollerin’ hooray, pianos playin’ ‘til the break of day.

Davis (1999a) says that in “Preachin’ the Blues,” “Smith defines the content of the blues as scripture and its presentation as sermon. She playfully, but openly, defies the Christian piety that dismisses the blues as beyond the pale of spiritual discourse. . . . Smith declares that the blues should be preached and that thereby souls can be converted” (pp. 129, 130). Brooks says that Smith's drinking “under the viaduct” is actually a reference to the culture of jook joint-goers. According to Albertson (1972), Smith knew all the joints any place she went. She actively engaged turning jook-goers into churchlike congregations by preaching the blues. Thus Smith further “contests the [church's] marginalization of the blues spirit” (Davis, 1999a, p. 129). The rhythm source is conspicuous as a layer of such contest, particularly when I hear Smith sing,

Preach them blues, sing them blues, they certainly sound good to me  
...  
Moan them blues, holler them blues, let me convert your soul.

According to Brooks (1982), “Preachin’ the Blues” is created “[i]n the form of a mock-sermon in gospel style on how a woman can keep her man, [but] it looses some credibility when the ‘preacher’ admits that she is having some trouble in that area herself” (p. 114). I disagree with Brooks's notion that the when the preacher admits to a problem, that credibility is lost. That is in fact what allows the preacher to be extraordinarily creative. Smith knows what she is preaching. Thus, the creativity source comes from Smith's memories of Black preachers' sermon styles. For example, New Orleans guitarist Danny Barker is quoted as saying, “‘If you had any church background, like people who came from the south, as I did, you would recognize a similarity between what she was doing and what those

preachers and evangelists from there did, and how they moved people. She could bring about a hypnotism” (Albertson, 1992, p. 8). Smith realized that her experiences, words, and style were as important as any preacher’s, so she wrote,

*Moan* them blues, *holler* them blues, let me convert your *soul*  
 ‘Cause just a little spirit of the blues tonight  
 Let me tell you, girls, if your man ain’t treatin’ you right  
 Let me tell you, I don’t mean no wrong.  
 I will learn you something if you listen to this song.

In “Preachin’ the Blues,” meaning is derived from the creativity source wherein Smith’s ideas culminated into a sermon about sexual freedom as a cure for emotional burden. She offers the following advice:

Read on *down* to chapter nine, women must learn to take their time  
 Read on down to chapter ten, takin’ other women men you are doin’  
 a *sin*.

As she imparts her wisdom about the rules of good sex, she literally acts out the sound of the movement when she sings the word “down.” Dragging the word from a higher tone to a lower tone, she effectively guides the listener through her book of wisdom. At this point in the song performance, Welsh Asante’s (1985) dimensionality sense is incited through the high-low slurring motion, or *Ciret* (Kebede, 1995).

However, Smith also tells women to be ethical in their sexual pursuits. Stylizing the word “sin” with a ruT<sup>21</sup> (throbbing) motion, a deeper dimension of the word is emphasized. Consequently, the meaning of Bessie’s sermon signifies “what is good, [and] build[s] on what is right” by telling us to avoid what is bad and ugly (Thompson, 1974, p. 28). Ashe! Smith’s words are functional and thus good, because they impart her wisdom to women—love lost can be love gained, but there is a right and a wrong way to gain a lover. Ehe! Smith’s performance of the *Ciret* and ruT sound motions is good in that these sound effects reenact Welsh Asante’s (1985) epic memory<sup>22</sup> sense and Thompson’s (1974) ancestorism, which reinforce what Smith means to communicate.

The ethos aspect of “Preachin’ the Blues” is evident as Smith “philosophically juxtaposes the spirit of religion and the spirit of the blues, and contests the idea of the incontrovertible separateness of the two spheres” (Davis, 1999a, p. 129). Meanwhile, Albertson (1972) states, “All who heard her in person agree that her vocal delivery and coordinated

movements evoked the fervor of a Southern Baptist prayer meeting, ‘She was real close to God, very religious,’ . . . ‘She always mentioned the Lord’s name. That’s why her blues seemed almost like hymns’” (p. 130). The song is, in and of itself, the epitome of P. Harrison’s (1972) “Blues God” theatrical mode of energy.<sup>23</sup> Take for example the following lyrics:

*Moan* them blues, (stop time or break) *holler* them blues,  
let me convert your *soul*.

Ethos manifests through Smith’s use of break. Smith moans “moan,” stops time, and then hollers “holler” like a Black preacher (Hurston, 1981). The moan sounds like lamentation, and the holler sounds like release. The silence and sound are equally important because the complexity of the whole drama can be more greatly appreciated. Welsh Asante (1985) refers to the complexity of the whole as the holistic sense.

Smith slurs “soul” through a series of curved movements (up-down-up-down) and holds it with a ruT (pulsation) that reverberates through my body. I drop and rise and drop and rise and wobble/shake my upper body from side to side—a sort of shimmy. Ashe! Smith’s onomatopoeia and shimmy-like sound effects convert her listeners’ “souls” by taking them through an aural and gestural dimensional journey to “the presence beyond the visual presence” (Welsh Asante, 1985). Ehe! The conversion is an inward journey through time from then (“zamani”), where we can visit tribulation, to now (“sasa”), where we can overcome those damaging spirits (Mbiti, 1970). That her vocal elocution reinforces and contradicts lamentation is beautiful (Murray, 1976). Emotional burden is converted into spiritual release (Kirk-Duggan, 1997).

The motif in “Preachin’ the Blues” references a joyous, limber dance called the shimmy. Note the following lyrics:

Lord, one old sister by the name of Sister Green  
Jumped up and done a shimmy you ain’t never seen.

The shimmy dance is centered in the shoulder and chest regions of the body. One holds her arms slightly forward and out, then shakes her shoulders alternately, back and forth, up and down, and while she is shaking, she leans or slowly rocks forward and backward from the waist. This movement indicates a sense of joyous freedom, and by extension it alludes to catching the spirit—a phenomenon often witnessed in Black churches and the ring shout dance ritual (Levine, 1977; Stuckey, 1987).

Marvin (1994) says that the character Shug, in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, transforms the life of Celie, the novel’s protagonist, through

a “blues conversion” of the type advocated by Bessie Smith in her song “Preachin’ the Blues.” Shug, like Bessie Smith, forges a strong bond with her audiences and gives voice to the “spirit of the blues” in order to bring relief to less articulate sufferers. (p. 411)

The shimmy, then, is a form of shouting, where one explodes and releases and becomes free (Hurston, 1981). When music brings about reexperience of spirit through movement, like Smith’s shimmy motif, then beauty is present (Baraka, 1998).<sup>24</sup>

The function of “‘Preachin’ the Blues’ has important contemporary implications in that it . . . advises women to take control of their sexuality” (Davis, 1999a, p. 131). This song conveys themes of love, freedom, incarceration (emotional burden), and religion. It informs, advises, and inspires Black women, particularly about relationships, man stealing, and sexual freedom. It also relays Smith’s experiences as a sexually free woman, and thus meets Nketia’s (1974) definition of “reflective song text.” The sexual advice that Smith offers in the following lines marks the moment that characterizes this song’s function:

I will learn you something if you listen to this song  
 I ain’t here to try to save your soul  
 Just want to teach you how to save your good jelly roll.

Smith does save the listener’s soul, partly due to the uniqueness of the method/technique, form, and mode aspects in “Preachin’ the Blues.” The song was recorded in New York on February 17, 1927, at Columbia Records and featured James P. Johnson, the “father of jazz piano,” on piano (Brooks, 1982).<sup>25</sup> The arrangement of “Preachin’ the Blues” had a moderately fast tempo and 4/4 time signature. As a matter of public record, it is a blues song in its basic form and content, but Brooks (1982) calls it a popular song. Furthermore, the song has “typical blues postures of humor and sarcasm” (Davis, 1999a, p. 129).

The mode (manner) in the song’s rocky and even fizzy texture is due to Smith’s low-register tones, and from the blue notes (flattened or out-of-tune-sounding notes) that Henderson plays on the piano. The blue notes culminate into what Davis (1999a) describes as a “lighthearted and unabashedly blasphemous tone” (p. 129). Hence, Smith’s attitude (mode) is cheeky and pert. In the last line of the song, Smith signifies on the fact that preaching the gospel and singing the blues are one and the same. Both can convert a listener’s soul.

Another captivating sound motion occurs in the following line: “Sing ’em, sing ’em, sing them *blues*, let me convert your *soul*.” Here, Smith



emphasizes the word “blues” by singing in a high register. Kebede (1995) classifies high-register vocals by the term “araray,” and he explains that araray expresses “animation, elation, and outbursts of happiness and fulfillment” (p. 29). Ashe! The energetic way she sings the word “blues” is revelatory, and at that moment Smith’s juxtaposition of the blues and religion comes to a climax—a height of sorts.

The slight chuckle in her voice gives way to the cheeky, potentially blasphemous modal tone in her vocalization of the word “soul.” Her slurring of the word “soul” in an up-down-up, dimensional, curving shape gives the impression that she swooped down, then caught and carried someone’s soul upward. Ashe! Smith’s slurring sound motion signifies what Floyd (1995) characterizes as the “chariot trope” in Black music.<sup>26</sup> Emotional burden is lifted through blues sermon.

Ehe! “Preachin’ the Blues” reenacts conversion of the soul and demonstrates how the holy and profane are audibly stylized in Smith’s singing. Ehe! Smith sings about sexual freedom in such a way that one can discover how to (1) literally drop emotional burden, (2) feel the throbbing sensation of ethical perfection through memory, (3) sense the pulsation of shouting and conversion in the shimmy dance, and (4) imagine the chariot as it rolls along connecting heaven and earth.

### “POOR MAN’S BLUES”

On another note, “Poor Man’s Blues” takes African Americans to a place where we long for the chariot. Part of Davis’s (1999a) discussion about “Poor Man’s Blues” speaks to Smith’s spirit source. Davis states that the song is a historical reference “to the post World War I period, when black people found themselves caught up in a web of painful economic circumstances that foreshadowed the Depression” (1999a, pp. 96–97).<sup>27</sup> As such, the song is also known as “Black Man’s Blues.” Davis further states, “The war had been over for ten years, of course, but Wilson’s promise of democracy—if it ever included blacks—had not been fulfilled, and neither the Harding nor the Coolidge administration had made any progress in that direction” (1999a, p. 149). Smith reflected on the destitution that prevailed amongst Black people in these times, and her thoughts became words that condemned rich people:

While you’re livin’ in your mansion, you don’t know what hard times means.

The rhythm source kicks in as Smith reflected on her travels. She recalls witnessing and by extension experiencing the pain and deprivation of poor

Black communities. Smith further recalled growing up poor, singing outside of the Pink Elephant Lounge for nickels (Albertson, 1972). She shared a connection with other Black people who experienced unnecessary want. She also recalled a slump in her career when the T.O.B.A. was trying to recover from its worst box office year in 1927. Meanwhile, Broadway had never had a better year (Albertson, 1972). Poor Blacks couldn't afford necessities, let alone entertainment, and yet rich folks spent more money than ever. She thought to herself,

Poor man's wife starvin,' your wife's livin' like a queen.

At this point in the song, the rhythm source is palpable. Davis (1999a) says that the personal can be conveyed through the social. So, in "Poor Man's Blues," we see that Smith's memories about personal struggles and encounters with the repressed circumstances of Black people, particularly women, deepen her empathy for poor Black folk (Brooks, 1982). The empathy that Smith reflected on, in the rhythm source, boiled over into her source of creativity.

"Poor Man's Blues" is essentially a complaint about oppressive conditions (racially based economic repression). Smith's creativity source came to life as she thought more expansively about the true nature of power relations between the oppressed and the oppressor. Conviction began to bubble and fester. She realized that the strength it takes to be humble is a virtue; but she also realized that the strength it takes to state the facts comes through virtuosity of expression. Her source of creativity came from a place where rage met with empowerment. Her process reached a climax—she was virtually both complainant and redeemer.

Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind  
 Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind  
 . . . .  
 If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man, *what* would you do?

She pointed out the poor-rich disparity throughout the song. However, she also redeemed power to poor people with the last line of song.<sup>28</sup> The meaning of "Poor Man's Blues" is clear when she sings,

Poor man's wife is *starvin'*, your wife's livin' like a queen,  
 . . . .  
 While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times mean.

As an early twentieth-century protest song, the song is meaningful because it decries the gross disparities between the wealthy and the poor, especially poor Blacks in the late 1920s. In the context of the meaning aspect, the most captivating sound motion comes as Smith pulls the word “starvin’” in an upward slur with throbbing, pulsating (ruT) vibration. Kebede (1995) calls upward slurring sound motions “Kinat.”<sup>29</sup>

The surface structure of Smith’s sound motion points to a deep structure in the Black aesthetic. By communicating anger, Smith’s performance fulfills one rule in Gayle’s (1972b) Black aesthetic agenda by demonstrating anger toward racial and economic oppression that enforced social restriction. The “silt mode” of outbursting sound motion is therefore good according to Nzuri, because it represents an ideal in the Black “family aesthetic” (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 3). Smith also sings, “Your wife is living,” with a strident, rough vocal timbre that indicates extreme emotion, like anger (Bebey, 1975).

Moreover, the ethos aspect of “Poor Man’s Blues” is weary and ironic. Smith’s sound stylization is expressive:

*Oh*, listen to my pleading, *can’t* stand these *hard times* long.

*Oh*, listen to my pleading, can’t stand these hard times *long*.

She sings “Oh,” “can’t,” and “hard times” with a graininess (dimensionality) that feels rough and hard. At the end of the chorus, she stylizes the sound of the word “long” using a Kinat (upward slur) and holds it with a (curvilinear) ruT (pulsation). The dimensionality sense exudes a weary energy. The curvilinear sense compounds the dimension of the word “long,” and extends the idea of hard times back in time—beyond anything she could personally experience (Welsh Asante, 1985). Her curved and dimensional sound rhythm reinforces and reenacts the lyrics, further indicating centuries of social restriction of Black people whose weariness lingers through time.

Smith also employs a humorously ironic ethos/spirit as she talks about the blind patriotism of Black men/soldiers:

He would do anything you ask him in the name of the *U.S.A.*

She sings “of the U.S.A.” with detached and accented tones. Kebede (1995) refers to detached and accented tones as “yizet.” The yizet sound motion causes the words to feel choppy. “A” is sung using ruT (throbbing) motion; and in this case, ruT combined with yizet evokes sarcasm. She dramatizes American race disparity through sound effect, and in so doing her vocal maneuvers mock the lamentation of the lyrics. Ashe! Smith’s performance

mocks the lyrics and is beautiful according to Murray's (1970, 1976) idea of elegance in the Blues aesthetic.

One motif in "Poor Man's Blues" is revealed as Smith sings, "Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today." The lyrics make reference to the Black soldier.<sup>30</sup> With the end of each war, promises of a more equitable America failed to come to fruition. The inequity is addressed when Smith demands that second-class citizenship come to an end. The motif of second-class citizenship is apparent as she sings,

Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.  
Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.

Function in "Poor Man's Blues" is apparent when she openly indicts wealthy (White) and Black people whose luxurious living and selfishness harm the masses. She informs listeners with a satirical warning that hard times cause ethical dilemmas; thus, the reflective song-text role is incited:

Can't stand these hard times long  
They'll make an honest man do things that you know is wrong.

Smith points out the inevitability of coming to the crossroads. The experience of having to make the good choices during bad times in life tends to be common in my subjects' songs. Unfortunately, hard times can tempt people to choose the wrong road. "Poor Man's Blues" functions as a historical song-text for two reasons. First, the song manifests (racial) oppression from the past as an oppressive (racial and economic) force in the present. Secondly, the song prosecutes America's economic values and renders a verdict that the disproportionate distribution of wealth is unethical and perpetuates ugliness—crime and incarceration. Even though Black people are, on the one hand, scarred by these ugly American values of greed, and, on the other hand, inspired to acquire wealth, we are told to avoid mimicking the unethical behaviors associated with greed and materialism.

I liken the function of Smith's song to Welsh Asante's (1994) idea about the role of myth and Gyekye's (1997) idea about African philosophy and its relationship with modernization and Westernization. Welsh Asante says that myth can be used to elevate and sustain African Americans in the challenges that lie ahead (p. 8). Gyekye (1997) states that African philosophy (the way Africans see all forms of existence as interdependent) can be adapted to the levels of modernization but should avoid being adapted to Westernization. Therefore, African Americans can acquire wealth in

order to have a home with an indoor bathroom (modernization), but we do not have to buy solid gold toilet stools (Westernization).

Ashe! Smith's song functions as an improvisational myth<sup>31</sup> that imparts values to African Americans in terms of how to negotiate financial wealth and material things within the universe. The things (kintu) that money can buy must not be prioritized over the time and space (hantu) that we share with other people (muntu/Bantu), and money cannot buy a righteous attitude (kuntu) or approach to living. Ironically, this is a lesson better suited for rich people who perpetuate an imbalance in our society—the universe. By warning listeners that poverty can tempt bad acts, Smith is effectively stating that wealth is found in character and integrity; it is a good song according to hooks's (1999) argument that integrity is more valuable than money.<sup>32</sup>

"Poor Man's Blues" was recorded on August 24, 1928, at Columbia Records in New York. Bessie Smith sings, with Joe Williams on trombone; Bob Fuller on clarinet and alto saxophone; Ernest Elliot on clarinet, alto saxophone, and tenor saxophone; and Porter Grainger on piano (Brooks, 1982). Structurally speaking, the form of "Poor Man's Blues" is set to a slow tempo and conforms to the twelve-bar "rural blues" form or the standardized, "classic blues" genre (Brooks, 1982).<sup>33</sup> The instrumental texture in this song is extremely shaky or bumpy, and Smith's voice follows suit as she consistently employs tightly curved throbbing (ruT) vocal motions. She uses small contractions and elongations on many of the syllables in words. She also improvises on many of the same words, particularly "hard times," "pleadin,'" "can't," and "war."

Attitude in "Poor Man's Blues" is played out in the following call-and-response drama:

Please, listen to my pleadin,' 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.

Oh, listen to my pleadin,' 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.

Joe Williams echoes the call on his trombone with a growling sound:

(g-r-ow-ow-ow-owl, bwah bwah!)

Smith's humble attitude is reverberated by the somber mode of Williams's horn. He reiterates her complaint. Her two lines, coupled with Williams's echo, state the complaint three times. This pattern of three-time repetition is indicative of Yoruba-based prayer practices in Christian worship. It is believed that repeating one's prayer three times will ensure that God will hear and answer that prayer (Olajubù, 1997).<sup>34</sup> Both voice and instrument are communicating the same request. The repetition of the complaint indicates righteousness according to the aesthetic of Yoruba command language.

However, in the last line of the song, Smith's attitude becomes taunting as her voice becomes rough:

If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man, *what* would you do?

Joe Williams responds in kind with a rough and snide sounding:

(bwoh bwoh bwoh bwoh bwoh bwoh-oh-oh, bwoh, bwoh bo bomp!)

Smith sings “what” emphatically, like a wail, groan, and outcry in a ring shout,<sup>35</sup> as if to ask, “Why do we suffer so?” She holds the loud boisterous tone for several beats, with a ruT (throbbing) motion, to ensure that her question has been understood.

Ashe! The call-and-response drama between Smith’s voice and Williams’s trombone is beautiful. It demonstrates Thompson’s (1974) “correct entrance and exit or killing the song.” For example, Thompson says that the end gesture of a dance (song) acts as a proverb—a proverbial statement.<sup>36</sup> The song drama plays out similar to the Ashanti gold weight (dance-sculpture) gestural suggestion of proverbial wisdom that he references. One figure in the gold weight “suggests the greeting,” just as Smith asks the question. The other figure “suggests the act of meditative reaction, hand on chin,” just as Williams’s scatting contemplates the question and then brings total realism to the motion of the question. The drama ends when Smith and Williams’s perfected sequence kills the song with a proverbial statement that is likened to the Nigerian proverb “He who is being carried does not realize how far the town is” (Leslau, 1985, p. 50).

Ashe! The Blues, protest song tradition is affirmed. Smith’s expression and expressiveness are personal and communal call-and-response that protests inequity, racism, and oppression. Ehe! Smith’s creativity and virtuosity communicate a dynamic form of protest wherein one discovers a sense of renewal, balance, and awareness in terms of integrity. Through the call-and-response, proverbial wisdom about power relations (“If it wasn’t for the poor man, mister rich man, what would you do?”) the listener is reminded, “It is not the king who is truly powerful, it is held by the one(s) who made the king” (Leslau, 1985, p. 50). Ehe, again! The song performance is beautiful because it siphons through the reality of oppression and offers a rearranged view of power relations from a Black perspective (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. xvi).

### “BILLIE’S BLUES”

I discuss the version of “Billie’s Blues” that was recorded at Carnegie Hall on November 10, 1956.<sup>37</sup> It was originally recorded on July 10, 1936. The spirit source of the song lies in Gourse’s assessment of Holiday’s love life: “Billie migrated to guys who treated her like hell and didn’t want anything

to do with her. So she sang ‘Billie’s Blues’ . . . about traveling without a man again. These were the things she knew best” (1997, p. 143). Holiday says that she had “been singing them same blues” as long as she could remember (Gourse, 1997, p. 8), and when she recalled those “same blues,” the spirit source of “Billie’s Blues”<sup>38</sup> came to her as the following lines:

Lord, I love my man, tell the world I do  
 I love my man, tell the world I do  
 But when he mistreats me  
 Makes me feel so blue.

In “Billie’s Blues,” Holiday’s rhythm source resonated from her innate ability to compose “them same blues.” I like what Leslie Gourse has to say:

Given [Holiday’s so-called vocal] limitations, what she achieved in terms of color, shadings, nuances and articulation, and in terms of the variety of sound and inflection she could summon from such slender resources, may be counted among the wonders of vocal history. She did it by moving, with somnambulistic security, along—or back and forth across—the thin, never precisely definable, line separating, or joining speech and song. This accomplishment, or ambiguity, has always been characteristic of the greatest blues singers. In this respect, Billie Holiday was a child of Bessie Smith, although she rarely sang a traditional blues. (Gourse, 1997, p. 136)

Holiday’s memory of deep and rebellious pain echoed in her mind. The birthing process begins with a spoken *repetition* in the opening lyrics.

Lord, *I love my man*, tell the world I do  
*I love my man*, tell the world I do  
 But when he mistreats me  
 Makes me feel so blue.

The creativity source of “Billie’s Blues” can be summed up in the following statement: “Although the words are all but public domain blues lyrics, telling of her loving her man but being done wrong by him, Billie invests them with a powerful realism” (Nicholson’s, 1995, p. 78). Take, for example, the following lyrics:

Squawked about my supper and put me outdoors

Had the dark clay make black spots on my clothes.

Here Holiday's resilience is evident—she has the ability to share what could be seen as an embarrassing moment. Her resilience is clear in the creativity source of the song. There was no person or thing able to match Billie's perfection as she embodied an unparalleled willingness to fail, to live. Strangely, failure is rarely shown in the light; its realization is mostly bred in the darkness. Billie, however, could conjure up that balance of light and dark and those who really listened to her, felt her inspiration in and under their skin (Baraka, 1998, p. 25). It was and is the power of owning one's own pain.

Meaning in "Billie's Blues" is derived from her message that there is only so much that a Black woman will or has to put up with in the name of love. The song falls in line with the message in Smith's "Young Woman's Blues"; after all, when a woman decides that happiness is her prerogative, she is essentially liberated. Holiday sings,

Now if you put that all together (too-geth-tha)  
Makes me *everything a good man needs*.

By dramatizing "everything a good man needs" using yizet (detached and accented tones), the effect lingers.<sup>39</sup> The free flow in her use of yizet makes the lyrics especially dynamic because the melorhythm<sup>40</sup> that yizet motions create holds the listener's attention. Holiday's use of melorhythm for effect falls in line with Murray's (1999) idea that syncopation, accentuation of weak beats and tones, completes the meaning of any song.

Additionally, the way that Holiday arches her voice on "everything" emphasizes the process of moving toward freedom, sexual and ideological. At this point in the song, beauty is likened to the Black female aesthetic of freedom that Zora Neal Hurston captures in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1990).<sup>41</sup> Nicholson (1995) says that "Billie's Blues" has a worldly wise ethos or quality of spirit that exudes coolness.

But my mother, she give me somethin'  
It's gonna carry me through this *world*,

Holiday sings the word "world" with a raspy intonation and ruT (throbbing) motion, and invokes the kind of beauty that is inherent in Welsh Asante's (1985) epic memory sense because "the image within the structure of the thought provides for the ethos" of perfect reconciliation through memory (p. 80). The ruT sound rhythm intensifies Holiday's memory of the



strength and power that her “mother gave to her.”<sup>42</sup> Holiday’s confident spirit is reflected in her use of the “car” motif:

Some tell me baby, you’re built for speed.

D. Harrison (2000) notes that many female blues singers, including Chippie Hill, Cleo Gibson, and Virginia Liston, compared women to cars as a way of referencing sexual attractiveness and abilities. Holiday’s motif resounds and revitalizes other female Blues lyrics that brag about lovemaking skills.

Such representations of common Black folk reveal the symbolic nature of sexual love investments. Sex is vital in the energizing of most blacks. The able-bodied encounters re-appropriate intuitive/visceral vigor. Moreover, real love objects tend to be put on the back burner since most blacks are preoccupied with survival (Harrison, 1972, p.79). Sexual freedom and love within the context of social restriction are more than games; they are parts of a support system. A second-class citizenship motif is present as Holiday sings,

I’ve been your slave, every since I been yo babe

I’ve been your slave, every since I been yo babe

. . .

I ain’t good lookin,’ and my hair ain’t curls

I ain’t good lookin,’ and my hair ain’t curls.

Griffin (2001) says,

On another level, audiences might hear the song as spoken from a black person or black people to an American society that refuses to allow them entry as full-class citizens. We have been your slaves and concubines, but we will not be treated as if we are not human. If you continue to abuse us, we will take up arms. The . . . stanza lists all the ways that black people have been dispossessed; they are homeless—lacking food, shelter and clothing. Following this, the persona says, we don’t meet white supremacist standards of beauty: my hair is nappy; but as a people we have many attributes and our own codes and standards for judging them. (p. 136)

Ashe! Holiday’s lyrics are good, according to Griffin’s analysis, because they represent an indirect rejection of social restriction (“I’ve been your slave”) and they denounce White standards of beauty, (“I ain’t good lookin,’ and my hair ain’t curls”).

The function of the song “appears to reflect the extent of her emotional horizons on the one hand, [and] on the other the public construction of one

central emotion [that] had become an identifying characteristic of her vocal style” (Nicholson, 1995, p. 151). She raspily sings,

But when he treats me so mean  
Makes me feel so blue.

“Billie’s Blues” is beautiful because it functions as a personal and public construction about the emotional burdens that result from love relationships with mistreatin’ men. Beauty in the song is further evidenced because the protagonist remembers that she has a buoyant and attractive persona, in spite of the bad relationship:

Some men like me talkin’ happy  
Some calls me snappy  
...  
Some tell me baby, you’re built for speed.

The song functions as a reflective song, inspiring both the singer and the community of listeners, particularly Black women, to know and value their attributes. It is in this way that the song is beautiful because it functions “to blow the blues away” (Murray, 1976, p. 83). The November 11, 1956, live recording of “Billie’s Blues”<sup>43</sup> at Carnegie Hall highlights Holiday’s matured voice and famous speech-song style and features Roy Eldridge on trumpet, Coleman Hawkins on tenor sax, Carl Drinkard on piano, Kenny Burrell on guitar, Carson Smith on bass, and Chico Hamilton on drums. The tempo is slow—or (nuis-merged) faster than very slow (Kebede, 1995)—and is played in a 4/4 time signature, giving the song a somber feel.

“Billie’s Blues” fits into Maultsby’s (1991) chart under the non-jazz-descended “Urban Blues” or “Rhythm & Blues” genres. Both genres typically indicate that the content in the song is “secular,” and reflective of romantic power struggles set against the backdrop of poverty where romantic love relationships ease the burden of social restriction. Ironically, bad love relationships are the cause of emotional burden. The song can also be grouped within Maultsby’s (1991) jazz-descended “Bebop” genre that typically indicates an intense focus on freedom as the basis of style, be it musical style or lifestyle.<sup>44</sup>

The brusque texture of Holiday’s voice, particularly when she sings, “slave,” “I’ll see you in yo’ grave,” and “I ain’t good-lookin’,” contradicts the smooth texture of the instrumentals. The consistency of that textural contradiction lends itself to Holiday’s “defiant, aggressive and assertive” attitude (Griffin, 2001, p. 135), especially when she sings,

Makes me everything a good man (spoken) needs (sung).

By resounding these lyrics with a gruff sound quality, she assigns prevalence to female self-realization and freedom. The defiant mode of the song is reinforced by her speech-song textures. As she partly speaks and partly sings, she requires the instrumentalists to wait for her to finish her statement before they respond. She states that she is good enough—"makes me everything a good man needs"—and the instruments respond with "zwa dee dah duh, doh zwa, zwa," as if to say, "I know that's right, tell the truth." The beauty of this call-and-response is aligned to the function of the amen corner in the ring shout ritual or in the Black church (Stuckey, 1987). Holiday's antiphony is likened to Thompson's (1974) "correct entrance and exit or killing the song," similar to Smith's "Poor Man's Blues." The vocal-instrumental call-and-response imparts the kind of wisdom that is espoused in the Nigerian proverb "A wealthy man will always have followers" (Leslau, 1985, p. 43). A good woman—one who truly knows her value—will always have suitors.

Ashe! "Billie's Blues" is good because it affirms the early 1920s Black, female Blues tradition of female assertiveness well into the 1950s. Ehe! The yizet (hold the note) stylization demonstrates the idea of holding on to one's self-valuation, and the gradually detached pulsating motions in her song stylization lend themselves to the discovery that emotional burden will be overcome by intensively focusing on freedom. Ehe, again! Call-and response in "Billie's Blues" reenacts the democratic notion that every voice counts. Holiday speaks for herself and for women in bad relationships, imparting a message about strength and, through extrapolation on behalf of Blacks, imparting a message to America that Blacks have their own value system.

### **"EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR THE BEST"**

The spirit source of "Everything Happens for the Best" manifests from the failed love and work relationship between Billie and Artie Shaw in 1938 (Chilton, 1975). As she recalled her feelings about being without Shaw, her thoughts were centered on an "I love him but now he's gone" spirit:

I loved you so madly  
 . . .  
 Now this thing has happened dear  
 It's all over because we're through.

The rhythm source in "Everything Happens for the Best" emanates from her repetitive thoughts about getting over a failed relationship. As Holiday

came to the realization that it was probably better that the relationship ended, she considered how her tenure with Shaw helped her career grow, but she also recalled how it simultaneously subjected her to pain—Jim Crow encounters. Reflecting back on the failure of that love relationship, she reached a level of understanding, and it is at this point in her process that the rhythm source is palpable:

That's okay, everything happens for the best.

Holiday's source of creativity in "Everything Happens for the Best" spiraled out from her rhythmic thoughts, and she composed the storyline:

So sorry dear it ends this way  
 Since the world begin  
 The old folks say  
 Everything happens for the best.

Having reflected on her ability to see the good side of an ugly situation, Holiday's lyrics indicate the kind of strength that comes from wisdom. Recalling the wisdom of elders or ancestors, Holiday infused meaning into the lyrics:

Since the world begin  
 The old folks say  
 Everything happens for the best.

In this way, the song is beautiful because it demonstrates Welsh Asante's (1985) epic memory sense—memory of and reverence for the ancestors and the elders—and Thompson's (1974) ancestorism, or "belief that the closest harmony with the ancient way is the highest of experiences" (p. 28). Thus, there are goodness and perfection when she draws upon the wisdom of elders. The song is good because it means that "we cannot forget them [the ancestors and elders]," for their wisdom can bring peace of mind to us (Thompson, 1974, p. 28).

Holiday's vocal expressiveness demonstrates her cool ethos. She vocalizes a spirit of empowered resignation or coolness about her situation as she sings,

That's *okay*, *everything* happens for the *best*.

The ethos aspect is evident when she dramatizes "okay," "everything," and "best." For example, Holiday sings "okay" and "best" using a ruT (throbbing) motion that exudes a serene spirit, but as she sings "everything," she drops her

voice. Kebede (1995) refers to this drop in the voice as *difat*.<sup>45</sup> This downward descending *difat* motion adds beauty to the lyrics in two, similar ways. First, the downward direction of Holiday's sound indicates Welsh Asante's (1985) dimensionality sense—the dimensional feel of the motion emphasizes that there is a deeper presence beyond Holiday's audible sound. Second, the *difat*, throw down quality meshes with Thompson's (1974) "get down quality" and he states that downward motion is the most important quality in vocal stylization (p. 14). Holiday's voice drop, or throw down, or "singing and drawing a point" evokes a complete image of "honoring [the elders and ancestors] with virtuostic [sound] and total presence [of all life forces]" (Thompson, 1974, pp. 14, 15). Her sound motion is good because it acknowledges the world of the ancient elders; thus it brings about an awareness of intrinsic truths about life.

Her serene ethos is demonstrated through sounds that feel seamless, like "the whole [spirit] is moving towards generous conclusions based on total givings of the self to music and society" (Thompson, 1974, p. 44). Regarding the motif aspect in Holiday's "Everything Happens for the Best," something ancient is present in her words:

Since the world begin  
The old folks say.

The first line evokes the Dogon symbol that depicts a spiral as the origin of the world. The spiral is a helix. The Dogon peoples of West and Central Africa perceive "the origin of the world from a spiral mass." The direction of the Dogon spiral<sup>46</sup> mass moves from the inner core outward in a counterclockwise direction (Diop, 198, 1991), similar to the counterclockwise direction of the life cycle in the Kongo (Bantu) cosmogram—Yowa.<sup>47</sup> I am overwhelmed by the idea that there is a link, however blurred by time and space, between African (Dogon, Kongo, and Bantu) beliefs about the origin of the world and Holiday's lyrics.

The second line, "The old folks say," points to Welsh Asante's (1985) epic memory and Thompson's (1974) ancestorism. Here, the idea of ancestorism revolves around the belief that "destiny is achieved where man builds on what is right, what ought to be" (p. 28). The vision/feeling of elders and ancestors is invoked in Holiday's lyrics, for her words point to the African belief that the elders, who are closest to the ancestors, are to be respected, as is their wisdom. Her lyrics are beautiful because of the African motifs that can be derived from them.

The function of "Everything Happens for the Best" builds on the ideas of ancestorism and epic memory, and the listener gains clarity about what ought to be—what will be. Holiday's song reflects the belief that trial

and tribulation may come, but ultimately, “That’s okay, everything happens for the best.” Technically speaking, this version, which was recorded on March 21, 1939, includes Billie Holiday and her Orchestra for Vocalion in New York, featuring Hot Lips Page on trumpet, Kenneth Hollon on alto and soprano saxophone, Stanley Payne on tenor saxophone, Ken Kersey on piano, John Williams on bass, Jimmy McLin on guitar, and Eddie Dougherty on drums (Millar, 1979; Vail, 1996). The tempo is moderately fast and swings along in a 4/4 time signature. According to Maultsby’s (1991) “Evolution of African American Music” chart, the genre of this song is “Swing Band,” and swing is rooted in the “African American secular tradition” of syncopated dance music, ragtime, and New Orleans jazz.

The multiple layers of sound conform to Wilson’s (1999) “Heterogeneous Sound Ideal”<sup>48</sup> in African music. This African music sound ideal is the basis of the (African American) swing band sound and style. In terms of texture and rhythmic clash of accents, John Williams plays oomp-pah-doomp-pah on his bass and Ken Kersey catches the upbeat “pah” on the piano, which accents the velvety undercurrent and melorhythms (polyrhythm) of the song. Holiday’s voice is light, airy, and hollow sounding. She sings mostly in a middle-register voice,<sup>49</sup> running or smoothing several words together as one when she sings, “Its-over-all-over.”

Gourse says that Holiday’s style, or mode, is “minimalist in technique with a volcano inside” (1997, p. 175). From the beginning of the song until the middle of the second verse, which she repeats as the last verse, Holiday’s attitude is melancholy and sorrowful:

I loved you so madly  
 Knew you would be true  
 Now this thing is over dear (bwah, bwah, bwah—saxophones, clarinet  
 & guitar play simultaneously with her on this line).

Then, her attitude becomes very composed and confident:

*It’s over all over* because we’re through (Itsoverallover runs together)  
 So sorry dear it ends this way  
*Everything* happens for the best.

The volcano, to which Gourse (1997) makes reference, erupts in the last line. Holiday swings her voice upward into the high register as she sings this line. She places expressive emphasis on the word “Everything” by slurring the last syllable downward. She throws down and connects sound and the sacred world. Holiday also uses the ruT pulsation in her voice as she sings

“best.” This is where her confident attitude and “coolness” are evident. “Coolness” in the West African artistic tradition is an important mediating process; it shows one’s worthiness of a destiny filled with beauty, reconciliation, newness, social purification, and proximity to the gods (Thompson, 1974, pp. 43, 44).

Ashe! Her slow, swinging jazz song renews the function of original New Orleans jazz, when music was consciously used to celebrate the connection between life and death. The song is good because it is a celebration of life as it relates to the “death” of pain. Ehe! The song enables the discovery of African deep-structure concepts about the origin of life and the renewal of spirit through reverence of the elders and ancestors.

### “LADY SINGS THE BLUES”<sup>50</sup>

All of Holiday’s life experiences inform this song. The spirit source of the song emanated from her recollection of fifteen failed “love” relationships/affairs, issues of abandonment by her father as well as many of her lovers, consistent incarceration, criminality, and drug abuse. The opening lyrics are a window to her thoughts and memories of a painful childhood. Primarily, the spirit source came from being born Black, female, and poor.

The rhythms of fast living and short returns compound Holiday’s recollections. The vibrations are strong. As she recalled her days of living like there is no tomorrow, she went back to the memories of feeling worn down. The memories narrowed, came into focus, and slowed to a level of pessimism. For example, the downward, slurring of “Lady” and “feels” indicates a metaphysical *dimensionality*. She goes deep into the pain and brings it forth.

Furthermore, the energy bursts out from within her source of creativity. There is a sense that Holiday wants the listener to know what she knows. Holiday realized that regardless of bad choices and ugly actions, there was an innate strength within her. Therefore, strength is within us and we can call upon it to repair and renew ourselves. The creativity source is clear in portions of the song.

The meaning of “Lady Sings the Blues” ultimately signifies that tragedy must be met with triumph, even if triumph only exists as the will to be triumphant. The last moments in the song epitomize a coolness of spirit, similar to the coolness that is indicated in “Everything Happens for the Best.” In the song, such coolness, or “composure of the face,” according to Thompson (1974), is an African value because demonstration of coolness is beautiful and good (p. 45). She sings the last two words of the song using upward bending tones and ruT (pulsating rapid variations of pitch)

(Kebede, 1995). Kebede calls the upward bending motion “Kinat” from the Ge’ez term “maKnat”—“to raise up” (p. 28). The drama of the Kinat and ruT sound motions solidifies Holiday’s message—be triumphant.

Concerning the ethos aspect, Clarke (1994) says that “Lady Sings the Blues” has a quality of earthiness about it (p. 404). The energy of the song is like a pang of conscience—a reality check. The rolling and throbbing ruT intensity with which Holiday sings “never” is exacting. From the motion of that word comes a feeling that the inventory of Holiday’s life appeared before her, and she decided to let the rolling, thundering turbulence unlock her truth and restore harmony to her inner being. Her vocal drama is telling; it denotes deliverance—the kind found in old Negro spirituals (Harrison, 1972). Her sound motion is beautiful because of its “telling effect.” Floyd (1995) describes this kind of “telling effect” as a signifier of the “chariot trope” in African American music. The chariot roles along and carries both performer and listener from the earthly and chaotic to the heavenly and peaceful (pp. 96, 216). Holiday’s power, her ethos lies in the transcendental effect the song has on the listener.

The motif aspect in “Lady Sings the Blues” reflects a quartet-type oppression—Black, female, poor, and brokenhearted—within the female blues singer tradition. Levine (1977) notes the following folk definition of the blues: “Dem blues ain’t nothin’ / but a woman lost her man / De blues ain’t nothing / but a poor man’s disease” (p. 276). Similar to Smith’s “Poor Man’s Blues,” “Lady Sings the Blues” evokes an image of four different crossroads. The underprivileged soul who is left with the task of negotiating the crossroads needs a map and a plan to deal with Blackness in America, womanhood in a male-dominated society, poverty in the land of milk and honey, and brokenheartedness in a place and time that is filled with notions of happily-ever-after, romantic love. How else will that person negotiate the time and space between want to cry, finding the will not too, and determining that life must and will go on. The plan might very well require skills of wit, cunning, guile, and fortitude.

So, Holiday’s song/story resembles African and African American myths and folktales, where the underdog triumphs. I liken Holiday’s protagonist to the trickster who time and time again negotiates the crossroads with some degree of success. There is no time to waste on tears and fears; inevitably, the trickster must find a way to locate and travel down “survival road” or “triumph avenue.” Therefore, the “reflective song” or song-text role that Nketia (1974) ascribes to functionality in songs is relevant. “Lady Sings the Blues” functions to remind her listeners that numerous people have hard lives, but the gravity of hardship must be resisted and overcome.



There is beauty in her words, and that beauty is extended by vocal and instrumental ornamentation. “And, incidentally, such is the ambiguity of artistic statement that there is no need to choose between the personal implication and the social except as occasion requires,” and this song definitely is one of those occasions where the overtone of metaphysical and political pathos of the lyrics is countered by instrumentation (Murray, 1976, p. 68). The instruments, including the vocals of course, define the nature of the response to the blues situation at hand.

“Lady Sings the Blues” was originally recorded on June 7, 1956, at the Fine Sound Studios in New York City (Millar, 1979; Vail, 1996). This original version, cowritten by Herbie Nichols, features Holiday’s matured voice, with Charlie Shavers on trumpet, Tony Scott on clarinet, Paul Quinchette on tenor saxophone, Wynton Kelly on piano, Kenny Burrell on guitar, Aaron Bell on bass, and Lenny McBrowne on drums. Texture in this version is colored by her raspy voice, as she places short- and long-pattern emphasis on syllables.

The structural form or genre of this song, according to Maultsby’s (1991) chart, is “cool.” The “cool” genre is a descendant of the Bebop era. Bebop comes out of the swing band, New Orleans jazz, ragtime, and syncopated dance music line. However, the song is often referred to as jazz, wherein Holiday is a “Jazz Giant” (Lyttelton, 1982). Again, Wilson’s (1999) heterogeneous sound ideal is manifest. Charlie Shavers opens the song by entering with a loud, glaring, and sharp-sounding trumpet that sets a frightening mood. As Holiday begins to sing, Kenny Burrell improvises her melody with his guitar. His silky sound contrasts with her rough, scratchy voice. Further in the song, Paul Quinchette accents her lyrics with mellow tenor saxophone riffs.

Aaron Bell maintains a steady downbeat pulse with his bass, while Wynton Kelly accents both downbeats and upbeats with a clever tickling of the piano keys. Just as Holiday begins to sing, Wynton Kelly mimics her swinging melody. Tony Scott signifies on her sadness with his clarinet. When Holiday repeats the previous refrain, the trumpet, clarinet, and tenor saxophone call and respond to each other while simultaneously responding to her vocal solo.

In the last refrain of the song, Holiday’s manner is rough, brassy, and tired, until she sings. At this moment of completion, her voice becomes clear and sleek. The attitude is cool—as in the “cool” genre. Charlie Shavers closes the song with a similar glaring sound as in the opening of the song. However, his trumpet playing is not frightening. He completes the song by transmitting a relief-filled mood. The clear, sleek, concentrated textures communicate freedom. The seams or scars that heartache and depression

can leave become flattened—seamless—and in this way, the song is beautiful. Ashe! The New Orleans jazz celebratory tradition of crossing over is affirmed. Ehe! Coolness of attitude is demonstrated; thus, renewal and empowerment are communicated to the listener through lyrics and emphasized with sound.

### “FOUR WOMEN”

“Four Women” was originally recorded on September 30 and October 1, 1965. The spirit source of the song came from Simone’s self-criticism of her looks and from her criticism of her husband, Andy Stroud. She recalled moments when she felt unattractive because she did not meet White standards of beauty. She also reflected on the fact that her husband never really affirmed her beauty (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 117). Her self-criticism becomes part of the opening lyrics:

My skin is black, my *arms* are long  
My hair is wooly. . . .

The mixture of her thoughts boiled over and became the rhythm behind the more complex thoughts that would come. Simone says that “Four Women” “attempts to take the scab off of the sore of relationships between Black men and Black women by waking up Black women” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 117). The rhythm of Simone’s personal rage and weariness became communal—it became social. At some point in the contractions and vibrations of thought, Simone realized that she was probably not the only Black woman who needed to be reminded that she is beautiful. She contemplated the dilemma. If Black women are not receiving affirmation of their beauty from Black men, then who will affirm our beauty, our existence, our plights?

Consider what Simone says about her internal conflict. “I’d look in the mirror and see two faces, knowing that on the one hand I loved being black and being a woman, and that on the other it was my colour and my sex which had fucked me up in the first place” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 118).

I’ll *kill* the first mother that messes with me  
my *life* has been *rough*.  
My skin is brown, my *manner* is tough.

I believe that the creativity source in “Four Women” emanated from Simone’s memories of needing to be reassured that she was okay just as she was. Eventually she realized that she was the only one who could affirm her

beauty, and that Black women played the most significant role in affirming each other. Simone found a way to tell their stories and thus affirm their beauty and existence.

The meaning of “Four Women” is that Black women must not base their ideas about beauty and importance on the way they look. The historical stereotypes are associated with skin tones, and many Black women suffer from internalization of White standards of beauty.

My skin is black, my arms are long  
 My hair is wooly, my back is strong  
 Strong enough to take all the *pain*

...

My skin is yellow, my hair is long and straight, like some of yours  
 Between two worlds, I do belong

...

My skin is tan, tan, my hair's fine, it's alright, whatever way I fix it  
 My hips invite you, my mouth's like wine

...

My skin is brown, my manner is tough  
 I'll kill the first mother I see, my life has been rough.

The lyrics allude to social purification where Black female beauty and value are derived from the strength that they wield in overcoming their plights. The “coolness” that the song enlivens signifies the idea of “social purification” (Thompson, 1974, p. 43). Simone means to purify her listeners by prompting them to deal with the pain of their situations. Once they conquer their trials by fire, they can become cool.

We begin to wear our beauty with a “composure of the face” and a “mask of the cool” (Thompson, 1974, p. 45). Thompson says that the

[m]ystical coolness in Africa has changed in urban Afro-American assertions of independent power . . . [but] the name, *cool*, remains . . . the body [or sound] is still played in two patterns, one stable, the other active, part energy, and part mind [and] this image [is] indelible . . . resistant to Western materialist forces [like racism and enslavement] . . . similar [to the] shaping of the melodies of Africa. (p. 45)

The quote is important because of the way that he describes power in and assigns power to the shaping of sound.

The first pattern in Simone's sound is active and energetic, and the other pattern is stable and mindful. I perceive that this social purification

feature of coolness is activated when she sings “pain.” Simone expresses the word using *Ciret* (downward bending notes) (Kebede, 1995). The *Ciret* motion energetically and actively points to a historical dimensionality. The *Ciret* also points to a stable and mindful epic memory of Black womanhood. That memory of the suffering that Black women experience from skin color stereotypes has run, and still runs, deep (Hill-Collins, 1991). However, the power in both patterns in her stylization of the word “pain” points toward a resistance to the destruction that is perpetuated by Western materialist forces such as racism and enslavement. This leads me to the ethos aspect.

“Four Women” is filled with a self-realizing and soul-searching quality that exudes an efficacious, deliverance-type energy. Ethos is evident in the (down-down-down-down-down-down-up-up-up-up-up-up) motion of the word “gain” (again) in the following lyrical phrase:

Strong enough to take all *the pain*.

It's been inflicted *again and again and 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain, 'gain.*

The motion of the sound invokes the image of Floyd's chariot, which carries the “down-feeling” drama of pain up and away. The repetition sense brings the idea of deliverance to a climax. “Aunt Sarah” becomes the chariot. She carries her pain, Black people's pain, to an infinitesimal degree—from then to now, and somehow to somewhere beyond. Simone's preacher-like, repetitive dramatization of “gain” delivers Aunt Sarah's “pain” from being burdensome to being buoyant. The energy in the song is likened to the kind of strength that comes from having steadfast faith and determination.

Additionally, “Four Women” reflects the skin color motif by representing a spectrum of skin colors. Simone, like Smith, also challenges the idea of skin caste in this song. She leads off each verse with the following:

My skin is black. . . .

My skin is yellow. . . .

My skin is tan. . . .

My skin is brown. . . .

Simone's use of *Nommo* conjures up varied skin colors to reflect an extended family motif that describes a totality within the African American community. The message within the motif is one of connectedness; therefore, skin colors become ideograms that denote the proverbial “I am because we are.”

The function aspect of “Four Women,” according to Simone, is that it tells Black women that we must define ourselves (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 117). Due to its winding and layered indictment of stereotypes, Simone’s song plays both a reflective and historical role. She reflects on the fact that there may be moments of pain, confusion, misguided sexual activity, and bitterness; however, those moments in African American history do not define the Black woman. Furthermore, according to Simone, the song tells Black men that they should learn to understand the plight of each woman they know and/or love (Simone & Cleary, 1993). Thus, she conjures up the past as a force that must be reckoned with now, in the present.

This 1977 live recording of “Four Women” stars Nina Simone on vocals and piano, and includes guitar, bass guitar, conga, and drums.<sup>51</sup> This “folk/protest song” or “Civil Rights song” is arranged with a moderate tempo in a 4/4 time signature. According to Maultsby (1991), those genres descend from both sacred and secular African American music traditions. In other words, Simone’s folk/soul/protest song links directly back to the “gospel hymn” in the early 1900s. Further, the hymnal tradition traces back to the “folk gospel” and “folk spiritual” genres of the 1700s, and back to the work and protest songs of the 1600s.

Simone’s voice texture is at times raspy and harsh, and at other times it is velvety and smooth. As the bass plays a simple yet hypnotizing six-note riff (dom, dom, domp-domp, dom, dom), she sets an earnest mood. Consider her opening, chantlike monologue:

(Spoken) Four women. We’ve done this song many times for you, so we don’t have to explain Aunt Sarah too much to you, except to tell you that she’s still going to work every morning about 7:30, walking in the streets of Harlem. She’s 107 and she’s still scrubbing floors; but it’s okay, okay, she don’t have too long now. Aunt Sarah, she wears a rag on her head. And dig it, head rags are in fashion these days; they’re all in vogue. Aunt Jemima is in style (audience laughs). Aunt Sarah has lived long enough to see the full circle come round. (1977)

Each vocal texture corresponds to the variation of attitudes throughout the song. For instance, in “Four Women,” Simone’s raspy voice matches her painful sounding manner. She sings,

Strong enough to take all the pain  
It’s been inflicted again and again, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain,  
’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain, ’gain.

Later in the song, her attitude becomes conflicted and hostile in the following lyrics:

He forced my mother one night—(speaks) they call it rape  
So here I am, they call me, they call me, Saffronia!!! (Simone hollers the name.)

Simone moves on and personifies an erotic demeanor, which sets a sexual mood. She sings,

My hips, my hips invite you daddy, my mouth's like wine  
Whose little girl am I, anyone who has money to buy  
And they call me, on 125th Street, they call me sweet thang (tha-ha-hey-hey-hey-hang), they call me sweet thang (ha-hey-hey-hey-hang), they call me sweet thang (ha-ha-hey-hey-hey-hang).

However, the sexual mood turns hostile as her attitude becomes angry in the following lines:

I'm awfully bitter these days  
Because my parents, God gave 'em to me, were slaves—(she shouts)  
and it's crippled me.

On the one hand, the attitude that Simone displays reeks with discontentment about the effects of oppression (race and imprisonment). On the other hand, the affecting attitude is one of coolness. Black women's stories are affirmed, and our trials by fire leave us cool—beautiful in our own eyes. Ashe! The song is beautiful because it affirms the protest song tradition; particularly, it carries the feeling of “Negro spirituals” that gave voice to Black people's sorrows and joys. Ehe! “Four Women” allows the listener to discover that many Black women are struggling with issues of skin color and stereotypes. Blacks are renewed and empowered to rise above the treachery of (that kind of) oppression.

### “REVOLUTION (PARTS 1 & 2)”

“Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” was originally recorded on January 8, 13, and 27, 1969. The spirit source lies in Simone's memories of her discussions with political activists and artists such as Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Miriam Makeba, Stokely Carmichael, and the Black Muslims who were led by Malcolm X. According to Simone, “[T]he

idea of a separate black nation, whether in America or Africa[,] made sense . . . and the only way we could get true equality was if America changed completely, top to bottom. And this change had to start with my own people, with black revolution” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 100). The spirit source becomes evident in the opening lyrics of the song:

Now we got a *revolution*, cause I *see* the face of things to come  
 Yeah, your constitution, *well* my friend  
 It’s gonna have to bend

The rhythm source of “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” came from Simone’s memory of the moment when she figured out how to finally answer her mother’s question “Why do you sing out in the world when you could be praising God?” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 91). Simone recalled that the energy and sensations of forging the song were like a bloodletting at revival, when people would “come-through” and shout, where rhythm and emotion made people feel on a deep level (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 92). Set against the backdrop of the 1960s riots, the backlash from the suppression of Black leaders, Simone reflected back on her activism in the movement—those thoughts gave her a renewed sense of self-respect. Through the rhythm source, a defining moment of self-respect came to her, and she realized that the answer to her mother’s question was that she praised God in the world through her protest music. The rhythm source contracted, expanded, and pushed out the following lyrics:

The only way that we can stand in fact (Break)  
 Is when you *get your foot off our back*  
 Chorus: Don’t you know, *get back*, well alright, *get back*.

The source of creativity in “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” comes from Simone’s realization that the ideas of Black separatism and Black Power empower her and other Black people. As she is empowered, she then pours her empowerment into her music, for it is her way to instill pride in Black folk. The creative—political and ideological—source comes about as she recalls her impetus for writing the song. Simone says, “Stokely . . . had been working out his answer to the ‘where do we go from here’ question; he and Huey Newton combined all sorts of related ideas about economics, social justice and political resistance under the general heading of ‘Black Power’” (Simone & Cleary, 1993, p. 109). So she writes,

Singing ’bout a revolution

Because I'm talkin' 'bout a change.

The meaning of “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” is that the real revolution begins on the personal level:

Singing 'bout a revolution  
 Because I'm talkin' 'bout a *change*  
 More than just air pollution  
*Well* you know you've gotta clean your brain.

For example, one captivating moment in the song's meaning occurs just after Simone sings “change”—using a Ciret and ruT (downward, pulsating slur). Her entrance on the last two lines, above, is asymmetrical; she incorporates a serez, or “slight pause,” and starts singing “more” on the upbeat (Kebede, 1995). Hurston (1981) says, “The frequent change of key and time are evidences of this [break which causes an asymmetrical] quality in music” (p. 55). Here, the serez does not change the time signature (for example, 4/4 time to 6/8 time). It alters/pauses the rhythm, while the Ciret (downward slurring of three notes) that she uses on “well” re-alter the time and maintains the downbeat rhythm of the whole song. We then encounter the holistic sense, where “silence or stillness is as much a part of the music or dance as sound or movement” (Welsh Asante, 1985, p. 81). Simone actually changes the rhythm as she tells us that we must change.

Likewise, the ethos aspect of “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” has a theatrical, sermon-like quality that exudes energy akin to “being delivered” by the preaching of the gospel word. The ethos in this song is most evident in Simone's call-and-response drama. Stuckey (1987) says the African American foundation of the call-and-response drama is the “Amen corner.” The amen corner responds to the call of the ring shout ritual. The ring shout ritual honors the ancestors. In turn, the ancestors guide us toward the right road.

Furthermore, Floyd (1995) says that the ultimate Black music trope is call-and-response. The following lyrical moments demonstrate this amen corner, the ring shout ritual, and the call-and-response trope:

Chorus: Do your thang  
 Simone: Whenever you can  
 Chorus: When you must  
 Simone: Do take a stand  
 Chorus: It will end  
 Simone: Well, alright



Chorus: We'll get by

Simone: Stay alive

*Well alright, well alright, well alright, well alright, well alright, well alright.*

In this example, the chorus calls or testifies, and Simone responds or witnesses—she is the amen corner. Her repetitious responses, and her shouts “well alright,” carry the song toward a clashing, crashing climax. Performer and listener are delivered together.

In “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2),” Simone invokes a “playing the dozens,” or signifying, motif.

If I had to swim the ocean

Well (weh-heh-hell), I would just to communicate

It's not as simple as talkin' jive

The daily struggle just to stay alive.

When she refers to “talkin' jive,” she summons the image of Black folks talking trash about America. Her reference reflects an image of the African American practice of signifying or “playing the dozens” in the streets, on the block (Harrison, 1972). Black people on the block talk about second-class citizenship and the idea of fighting against America because it leaves so many Black people scarred. Consider how P. Harrison discusses the phenomenon of “playing the dozens,” or signifying:

The scar tissue on the face of the *block* is irreparable. We begin to witness wounds we thought had healed. Prostrate, we seek mouth-to-mouth resuscitation from the kinsmen—TALK TO ME BRUTHA!—hoping to revive the body to act. Having used a secular ritual with the power of the sacred to reveal the mode, we understand that oppression must be ended *by any means necessary*. We begin to understand that while finger poppin' may be an essential aspect of a ritual to awaken the spirit—which is good—in the service of evil, the receptacle of that spirit, the community itself, becomes eroded. And rather than a face-lift, we say TEAR THE WHOLE GODDAM THING DOWN! Yeah! too bad. (Harrison, 1972, pp. 227–228)

Roberts (1990) says that signifying is what the African American trickster figure/hero does best, through word and deed, to outdo the opponent. The newfangled tricksters—“brothas on the block”—can signify all they want, but that alone will not suffice. Simone declares that although jive talking

may help us build our ideas about tearing down oppression, it alone cannot assure our collective freedom. This leads me to the function of the song.

“Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” evokes the image of Black Panthers taking up arms to protect the Black community. They employ signifying deeds, not just words. The song functions as a reminder of the value that lies in Malcolm X’s declaration that we must do what had to be done “by any means necessary.” The song also calls to mind the end of nonviolent strategies espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The method/technique, form, and mode in this live version of “Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)” include Nina Simone on vocals and piano, accompanied by organ, guitar, drums, and background singers.<sup>52</sup> The song is arranged in an up-tempo, fast 4/4 time signature. The “Soul” and “Protest song” or “Civil Rights Song” genres best describe the shape or essential form of this song (Maultsby, 1991). The song’s textures are clean, echoing, and elastic—the instruments maintain a swing and sway, pull and push. They call and respond with shouts and hollers that are hollow, airy, and rounded.

Simone’s manner is angry, indicting, and serious:

I’m here to tell you ’bout *destruction* of all the evil that will have to  
*end*

(Chorus—it will, oh yes, don’t you know it’s gonna be alright).

While these lines are delivered angrily, the chorus’ luminous response softens the hostile mood, unlocks the chains of hatred, and transforms the mood into a vision of chains that vanish from millions of arms and legs. I feel that “it’s gonna be alright.” Ashe! Simone’s song directly projects ideas that the “Negro spirituals” indirectly addressed. We have to fight. Ehe! Simone’s melorhythmic change envelopes her call to change. The call-and-response drama allows discovery of the amen corner. Ehe! Ehe! The renewal of signifying is called upon to inspire active revolution.

## “TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK”

The title “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” comes from Lorraine Hansberry’s play by the same name. Simone’s memories of Hansberry’s teachings gave her cause to be active in the Black Power movement (Simone & Cleary, 1993). The spirit source of the song came from Simone’s thoughts about how she could give to others all that Hansberry had given to her so freely. Simone’s wish to empower others with a political education overwhelmed

her. I perceive the spirit source in the fifth verse because it references her awakening to race pride and consciousness. She passed that process of awakening on to Black people:

To be young, gifted and *black* (break short)  
 Oh how I long to know the *truth* (troo, ooh ooh ooth)  
 There are times when I look back  
 And I am haunted by my youth.

The rhythm source of “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” reverberated through Simone’s memory of Lorraine Hansberry and many other revolutionaries. Simone recalled following the 1960s protest engagements of the NAACP, SNCC, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) (Simone & Cleary, 1993). As she pictured the student sit-ins in Birmingham, Alabama, and elsewhere in the South, she had an epiphany of sorts. All these Black children have an awareness of their own strength, a racial level of consciousness that took her years to find. I perceive the rhythm source, that layer of internal and external recognition and confirmation, when she sings,

When you feel real low  
 Yeah, there’s a great truth you should know  
 When you’re young, gifted and black  
 Your soul’s intact.

The creativity source comes from Simone’s desire and need to answer Hansberry’s question: what are you doing for the movement? Thus, Hansberry’s question was the reason why Simone created this song. She realized that she could not be idle in Black people’s freedom. When she sings,

In the whole world you know  
 There are a billion boys and girls  
 Who are young gifted and black  
 And that’s a fact,

I am reminded that I too must not be idle in our freedom. After all, I, like Simone, am included in that “billion boys and girls who are young, gifted and black,” and that fact feels good. Simone’s spiritual and rhythmic contemplation—how to deliver a noble mission to Black youth—became her voice, the lyrics of this song.

The messages from all of my subjects’ songs seemingly merge together in the meaning of “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.” The song means that

vitality—the energy and power of fearlessness, suppleness, and optimism—inspires (older, brokenhearted, blue, and poor) Black people to remember their strength, claim their joy, and love their skin. When Simone sings,

To be young, gifted and black (spoken—abruptly ended)  
 Oh what a lovely, precious dream  
 To be young, gifted and black  
 Open your hearts to what I mean,

African and humanitarian consciousness is carried to Black youth. To find this particular meaning/consciousness in a song is vital to the goal of Black art (Gayle, 1972b; Neal, 1987; Baraka, 1987). Furthermore, Thompson's (1974) ephebism—"the stronger power that comes from youth"—is central to the meaning of the song (p. 5).

Simone says "black" with a percussive bang (break) that causes me to stop swaying, and yet in that moment there is a sense of "full power in response to [the percussive break]" (Thompson, 1974, p. 9). The meaning in this song meets Harrison's (1972) idea of the Black aesthetic because it transmits the kind of positive feedback that African Americans need in order to construct a progressive society with a larger oppressive society.

Meanwhile, the ethos in "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" comes out of Simone's celebratory process and exudes both joyful emotion and prideful energy. The song radiates the spirit of vitality:

Oh but my joy of today  
 Is that we can all be proud to say  
 To be young, gifted and *black, hit it, hit it*  
*Is where it's at!* ("at" is held)

The way in which Simone shouts and attacks "black," "hit it, hit it," and "at" demonstrates a quality of vitality that falls within the parameters of ephebism, particularly what Thompson (1974) identifies as "swing—every note and every color strong" (p. 7). The accentuation of her shouts serves as both heavy or solid rhythmic impulse and buoyant, dynamic drive.

Just after she shouts "black," she commands the background singers and instrumentalists to "hit it"—"hit it" like they never hit before—and they do. They attack "is where it's at," using serez (slight pauses) in between (Kebede, 1995). The feeling of buoyancy comes when the ensemble holds "at" for approximately sixteen seconds. The steady stream of sound balances the previous serez choppiness. Swing is achieved as eruption turned flow. Her ethos is a dramatic interpretation of the "divinity [in Black youth]"

that is necessary [for us] to identify the spirit responsible for our existence; [the kind of divinity that] consumes the community in choruses of [WE ARE] SUPER-BAD” (Harrison, 1972, p. 95).

In fact, Simone’s “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” identifies the main glimmer of hope that Blacks have in the struggle to stay alive. The motif, then, is Black youth, for they embody the vitality necessary to keep the struggle going. Simone tells them the kind of story that instills pride and determination:

You are young, gifted and black  
We must begin to tell our young  
There’s a world waiting for you  
This is a quest that’s just begun.

Stuckey (1987) tells us, “Black youngsters were eager to ‘shout,’ forming themselves into a circle, singing and dancing on the slightest suggestion, assuring the perpetuation of important religious and artistic values of their [African] people” (p. 86). Furthermore, the eagerness with which the children entered into the “Ring Shout” comes from their aspiration to emulate their elders (Stuckey, 1987). When the elders dance and sing and honor the ancestors, the children are socialized to do the same. The children learn to join in the quest for spiritual guidance in that ritual circle. The suggestion, the call to “a quest,” that lies in Simone’s words invokes the image of the Akan “Sankofa” symbol. “Sankofa” means “Return to the source” (Willis, 1998).

The Sankofa concept is symbolically interpreted in Welsh Asante’s Umfundalai dance technique. In the Umfundalai dance technique, the Sankofa motion is accomplished by moving one’s body and/or limbs through a figure-eight shape. Therein lies the connection of the physical world to the ancestral world. This movement derives from the “ring” ceremony, which, when danced, symbolizes one’s devotion to the ancestors and one’s understanding of the reciprocity between the living and the dead (Stuckey, 1987, p. 87).

The function of “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” reminds and advises Black people that at the core of our being, there is beauty, and the power (the being) of the ancestors is fresh in the souls (the being) of our children.

When you’re young, gifted and black  
Your soul’s intact.

The power of Black people, both the young and young at heart, is praised. Therefore, Simone’s “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” plays a reflective

song-text role in the sense that it shows Simone's love for Black people. The song also plays a historical song-text role in that it reminds Black people about the value of being strong, that is, keeping our souls (the shadow of our spirit) intact.

"To Be Young, Gifted and Black" was originally recorded in 1968 but was not released until 1969. The song showcases Nina Simone on vocals and piano, with conga, guitar, drums, and background vocalists. It is arranged in a moderately slow 4/4 time signature. Three genres are applicable to this song: "Soul," "Gospel," and "Protest," according to Maultsby's (1991) chart. In particular, there is a direct connection between "Soul" music and "Gospel Choirs" as evidenced in the ethos drama of the song.

The mode of the clear, full-bodied, interlocking voices and piano is luminous. Thompson (1974) says that luminosity "reduces the powers of darkness and social heat by means of shining, athletic grace" (p. 44). The attitude in "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" reduces the powers of oppression and racism, particularly because of the textural layer that Simone's dazzling and energetic vocal expressiveness adds to the song. For example, she sings,

In the whole world you know  
There are a billion boys and girls  
Who are young, gifted and *black*  
And that's a *fact*.

The way that Simone attacks the words "black" and "fact" is so forceful that she literally turns these nouns into action words—verbs (Hurst, 1981). Blackness is a state of being—a fact of African culture—and that is beautiful. The power in Simone's words and manner brings the listener to a state of joy. The heart is as light as a feather. After hearing this refrain, it is hard not to picture a billion colorful rainbows in the sky. This picture takes me back to the children's choir in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and I remember little brown-skinned children clumped together on little round, wooden stools, adorned colorfully as human rainbows.

Ashe! The song affirms the "gospel choir" song tradition and signifies it with an additional layer of protest. Ehe! Black people can rediscover the origin of the choir as the amen corner from the traditional ring shout ritual dances. The energy of the ancestors is renewed in Black youth—they share a close connection—and Blacks can revel in the vitality, potential, and beauty of Black youth.

Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances exhibit numerous sound motions that are decidedly African. Even though they vocalized

African-derived sound motions that implicate deep structures in African aesthetics, one cannot assume that it was their conscious spirit to do so. Perhaps, it was their unconscious spirit, their African spirit, that inspired their sound motion. This cannot, however, be proven. The goal of evaluation, in the Afrocentric aesthetic, is to improve, affirm, expand, and recommit an artist's process and product so that the artist and her community are enhanced. If in fact "the artist is the teacher, innovator and mythology maker" (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 15), then as long as Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs are heard, they will teach us about being Black, female, and decidedly African.

## Chapter Six

# Summary and Conclusion

From ancient times within African cultures the role of the artist has been one of elevating the consciousness of the people. Providing them signs and symbols of the higher forms of life and human functioning, the aesthete encouraged, educated and reflected those aspects of being to which humanity must aspire to fulfill its purpose.

Myers (1994, p. 21)

## SUMMARY

I have shown that Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone share certain common social and cultural experiences or survivalist traditions. They express those experiences as common themes in their music. Kariamu Welsh Asante's Pan-African aesthetic theory, *Nzuri*, sustains numerous African-centered aesthetics and is therefore meta-criteria for my analysis of the song performances of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone.

African American music, like African music, translates experience into sound and sound into experience. Black music also sounds out the effects of African sensibility against an American background. Furthermore, Black music often expresses values, survival tactics, and culture. Its beauty partly comes from appropriating expressive styles that are true to the social and cultural experiences being referenced (ya Salaam, 1995). Such musical virtuosity is necessarily contextualized as transmissions of meaning, ethos, motif, and function in relation to method/technique, form, and mode. Those transmissions emanate from and return to spirit, rhythm, and creativity (Welsh Asante, 1994).

This research sought to determine if Welsh Asante's conceptualization of *Nzuri* could be used to evaluate Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song



performances. Evidence has been presented in the preceding chapters showing that the theory/model provides structural criteria for numerous African aesthetics and is therefore applicable to my subject's song performances.

Sound motions or surface structures in their song performances were shown to demonstrate African artistic continuities. Those continuities are consistent with African dance, art, and sound motions that transmit deep structural values. In particular, Smith, Holiday, and Simone's sound motions are compatible with several of Welsh Asante's (1985) African aesthetic senses: holism, epic memory, curvilinear, dimensionality, and repetition; Thompson's (1974) art motion canons: ephebism, ancestorism, correct entrance and exit, coolness, call-and-response, and the get down; and Kebede's (1995) Ethiopian sound motion notation: yizet, ruT, Ciret, serez, difat, and Kinat. Additionally, qualities in their songs are socially compatible with Black aesthetic imperatives, including but not limited to demonstration of "Blues God mode" as style and form, anger, Black socializing, Black music tropes, and the Black female aesthetic of freedom. It is from an Afrocentric perspective that such aesthetic connections could be made.

## ISSUES

I incorporated Asante's (1998) four paradigmatic issues of Afrocentricity, which were cosmological, epistemological, axiological, and aesthetic (Nzuri). The cosmological issue was addressed in this study in terms of culture, which was approached as common and shared perceptions and attitudes about experiences, artistic and otherwise. The idea that Africans arrange experiences in particular ontologically ordered ways was applied to songs authored by Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone.

Black women's thoughts have been viewed as specialized thematic content that reflects their experiences (Hill-Collins, 1991). Thought became expression in the form of songs, likened to myths, legends, literatures, and oratures (Asante, 1992a, 1992b). These varied forms of expression dealt with race, culture, gender, class, and the cosmos. In this study, the cosmological issue was incorporated because it spoke to the problem of determining commonalities between the experiences of the three women.

The epistemological issue was used to address matters of language, myth, and dance-art-music. Epistemology dealt with the idea of truth in and about African American culture. Smith, Holiday, and Simone's artistic expressions were assessed as evolving mytho-forms that exposed their relationships with and interpretation of their cultural and social realities. How they expressed those truths through language, themes, analogies, and

musical characteristics was a key point of examination. The epistemological issue was integrated into the process in order to address the problems of (1) ascertaining commonalities between their songs and (2) examining and codifying their songs in accord with the Nzuri model.

The axiological issue was employed to understand value in my subject's experiences. It was attendant to the aesthetic issue because value was constituted by good/beautiful, right, and even ugly lyrics and sounds. That which was good and beautiful constituted that which was valued. Lyrics that indicated positions like self-love and protest were especially beautiful and, therefore, valued. Sound motions that recreated dance-art-music representation of fluidity and flexibility were valued, especially when the sound motions promoted the idea that flexibility is a necessary tool for survival and success. Sound effects that reinforced statements of conviction in the lyrics were valued. At times, the ugly could produce the beautiful. Specifically, sound effects, particularly onomatopoeia that mocked lyrical lamentations and invoked gestural responses of joy or pleasure, were valued.

The axiological issue was also used to determine what constructs in the Nzuri model were most applicable to which aspects in Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs. Welsh Asante refers to the model as both context and content—the context shaped the content. Certain lyrics and various sound motions were placed within appropriate contexts. Therein, description, examination, and evaluation of appropriate parts of a performance lent viability to evaluation of the whole song performance.

## NZURI

The aesthetic issue was at the cultural core of this investigation. The aesthetic issue set the other three issues in this study into motion. Established in this Pan-African aesthetic were dance senses, art canons, and Ethiopian musical notations. I used these African sensibilities for their attendant utility as part of the African aesthetic canon.

Welsh Asante (1994) says that “what has been created and who evaluates what has been created is just as important as the creation” (p. 12). Aesthetic analysis is a process of call-and-response. I responded to Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances as both critic and critical audience. Thompson (1974) drew from traditional African ideas that the African aesthetic is one of function. Within Nzuri, the mode of seeking out function in my subject's song performances sought beauty. The Afrocentric aesthetic Nzuri was seen as “organic and flexible, incorporating time, space, and values” from numerous African aesthetics.

The idea of coexisting occurrences of central rhythms or polyrhythms subsuming call-and-response between vocal/instrumental melorhythms including *serez* (pause) and *yizet* (syncopation) is clear. I described the presence of several distinct sounds in a song as they occurred in the context of the song, as part of polycentrism including the “heterogeneous sound ideal.” Where I perceived spatial relationships of one sound to another, and so on, that showed depth and energy—an awareness of vital force—I noted Welsh Asante’s (1994) dimensionality sense, and corresponding sound motions were cited: *Kinat*, *ruT*, *difat* (throw down), “get down,” *araray*, and *Ciret* (Kebede, 1995). I perceived Welsh Asante’s repetition as the similar recurrence of themes, lyrics, and/or sounds that were central to a song: call-and-response and Kebede’s *yizet*. The curvilinear sense (Welsh Asante) was used to note the curvedness or bending and sliding of sounds in a song: *difat*, *Kinat*, and *Ciret* (Kebede).

Welsh Asante’s (1994) epic memory sense was discussed in order to engage the idea that a song contained historic memory that permitted the artist and the audience to partake in the same celebration of ethos and/or pathos: Thompson’s (1974) “the cool” and “ancestorism,” and Kebede’s (1995) *difat* and *Ciret*. Finally, I incorporated a silent holism sense as a balance that unified all the parts of a song: the mixture of unique moments of the song (Welsh Asante, 1985, pp. 74–81). Holism was inherent in the analysis. Even though specific motions (words) were discussed, no motion outweighed the whole of the song. These senses were the essentials of my axial response to the selected song performances of Smith, Holiday, and Simone. Aesthetic sensibilities guided me in assessing which (content) themes and musical characteristics fit the Nzuri theory/model (context) and in what ways (shape).

## NZURI MODEL

According to Kariamu Welsh Asante (1994), spirit, rhythm, and creativity are sources that provide the axiological premise of the Nzuri model and offer a solid foundation for the aspects of the model to actualize and concretize as artistic manifestation—“The Nzuri model focuses on process even in its analyses on product” (p. 10). I observed and discussed my subjects’ artistic processes by elaborating on the specific character of each Nzuri source. Their song performances were described and examined with the seven aspects. The Nzuri model also contained four principles for evaluation. Two of the four principles were used to govern my notions about what had been created. I viewed Nzuri as a continuation of African worldview. Therefore, the song performances were evaluated as manifestations of life—*kuntu*, or style/attitude—about life.

I meshed Nzuri theory, the four Afrocentric paradigmatic issues, and African dance-art-music sensibilities within the Nzuri model to solve the problem and subproblems of this study. Common axiological and epistemological premises found in the previous conceptualizations were central. They justified my responses to the selected songs. I responded to the songs, in part, by dancing them physically and metaphysically, and in full, by centering myself within the experience of each song. Asante's (1992b) constructs of centeredness, wholism, and agency further justified my responses.

## CONCLUSION

Connections between dance-art-music throughout Africa and African-oriented cultures are pervasive. The combined traditions have transmitted thousands of years of storytelling via praise singing, praise dancing, dancing the mask, and so on. The depth and strength that came from African spirituality have maintained the African in Western culture (Richards, 1985). Dance-art-music traditions have continuously set spirit into motion. I have shown that Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances function within the parameters of dance-art-music traditions. Their performances deal with ugly topics and bad situations, but ultimately, they dwell on and foster beauty and goodness through reconciliation of spirit.

Common dance-art-music motions were found within the context of the Nzuri model aspects. Kebede's (1995) sound notation system was the first sensibility I applied. Welsh Asante's (1994) aesthetic dance senses and Thompson's (1974) art canons provided additional relevant motion sensibilities with deep African constructions of value.

Generally, in terms of sound motion, the most repetitive motions that communicated meaning were Kinat (to raise up) combined with ruT (throbbing pulsation). To a lesser extent, meaning was derived from the Ciret (downward slur) motion and the serez (pause) motion. Ethos found greatest expression in the ruT (throbbing pulsation) and to a lesser degree in the difat (drop the voice). Mode was expressed with ruT (throbbing) motion and araray (high vocal) range.

Each woman freely improvised, gliding up and down, through and around notes to convey deep feeling to the listener that cannot be musically notated. Specifically, in terms of sound motion relationship to lyric, how their songs moved the listener was "the function of a particular note [sound effect] in a particular phrase, in a specific song" (Kirk-Duggan, 1997, p. 106). Singers express intense feelings with transition tones.

Smith, Holiday, and Simone's song performances deserve to be established as repositories of African cultural continuity and as vehicles for

teaching African cultural consciousness. They always affect me in such a way that I feel like I am experiencing something as old as time, yet it is relevant to what is often going on in my life. I find that their songs helped me connect with many of the African style devices and lessons within African and African American folktales, so I feel that their songs can do this for others.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone's song performances redistribute expressions of African impulses through sound motion and song content. Africans use music in almost every aspect of life. An essence of vocal performance is sound effect, and this is complemented by instrumental sound effect. In this study, it has been determined that Nzuri is viable for aesthetic analysis of song performance.

Music recreates life through sound and motion. African American music recreates African impulses in response to "the" American experience. On the surface, there is sound. At the core, there is spirit. Motion connects the two. Smith, Holiday, and Simone's songs and performances have moved masses of people for over seventy years. An aesthetic analysis of their music broadens the horizon of music scholarship, beyond the pale of musicology.

Consider Alan Merriam's (1982) thought that studies of aesthetic behaviors can contribute vast sources of knowledge about culture to various disciplines, especially to interdisciplinary disciplines. By using Nzuri as a more creative and integrative approach to gathering information on music and song performance, musicians and scholars alike can gain insight into the aesthetic features of African music. Aesthetic studies of music reveal information that instructs the general study of African cultures.

The broader implications of the study propose future studies that further identify aesthetic behaviors, sensibilities, and values or at least connections between them. Moreover, traditional and classic sound motions have to be identified, codified, and documented according to their aesthetic characteristics. Notation systems for song need to be developed in order to sustain and expand the Ethiopian chanting style of praise music. There seems to be a need for more circular depictions of music, both in writing and in movement. The essence must be extracted and maintained.

Studies that cross-reference the significance of dances derived from various kinds of African American music, using, of course, Welsh Asante's (1994) Nzuri and (1985) dance senses, will potentially increase African American consciousness of Africa and African values. Furthermore, studies that apply Nzuri and the dance senses to paintings, sculpture, and folktales

(storytelling), and maybe even to photography and films, would enable discussions about moments and motions that can be used to discuss African cultural consciousness and/or continuity, particularly as it relates to African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Rican, or African-Latino experiences.

Studies that determine textural values from textiles in music would be fruitful in terms of better understanding the qualities of roughness in contrast to smoothness. Finally, studies that document sound movement (songs) through descriptive writing, creative musical notation, and sound recording, in order to capture the essence or *Umfundalai* of African vocal songs worldwide, would enable a song technique similar to Welsh Asante's *Umfundalai* dance technique to be constructed. Once constructed, this technique could be used in unison with her dance technique to further the lessons of our African ancestors, keeping our African traditions alive, dancing, and singing.



## Appendix One

# Discography

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## Appendix Two

# Life Profile Matrix

Cultural Data or Experiences	Bessie Smith	Billie Holiday	Nina Simone
<b>Birthplace</b>	Chattanooga, Tennessee	Philadelphia	Tryon, North Carolina
<b>Birth date</b>	April 15, 1894 or 1898	April 7, 1915	February 21, 1933
<b>Birth name</b>	Elisabeth "Bessie" Smith	Elinore Gough	Eunice Kathleen Way- mon
<b>Schooling</b>	None	At age 5	At age 5
<b>Mother's occupation</b>	Domestic	Domestic/prostitution	Housewife/Methodist minister/domestic
<b>Father's occupation</b>	Domestic	Musician	Business owner barber/ domestic
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Baptist	Baptist and Catholic	Methodist and Holi- ness
<b>Start of musicianship</b>	Vocal: age 5 on street corners	Vocal: between ages 5 and 10 in Baptist Church revivals and in Catholic mass	Piano and vocal: age 3 at home and church; recalls mother singing and father playing the black keys (pentatonic scale)

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Musician training and performance</b>	Age 18: with Moses Stokes's Show Age 19: opens at Baltimore's Douglas Gilmore Theatre	Age 14: from listening to records of Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong Age 14: singing at Paradise nightclub	Ages 4–12: at church services Since age 5: Technical training with Miz Mazzy
<b>Early life tragedy/adjustment</b>	After her birth: father dies By age 9: her mother and brother had also died	Age 10: taken from mother and put in reform school Age 11: raped	Age 4: father takes ill; she must take care of him Family moves to poorer side of town
<b>Number of siblings</b>	5	None	7
<b>Adolescence</b>	Performing	Working in brothel, in and out of reform school, Baltimore	1939: becomes aware of Jim Crow and segregation practices
<b>Complexion/race Issue</b>	1912: Irvin Miller rejects Bessie, claims she is "too black"	1928, age 13: moves to Harlem, New York	Making straight A's, training on piano diligently
<b>Performing</b>	1913: "81" club in Atlanta, GA, and touring Theater Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) circuit with several different companies	1929, age 14: arrested for prostitution; serves time in workhouse	1945, age 12 until age 18: with Edney Whiteside; she leaves for Julliard, brokenhearted
<b>First love</b>	1920: married to Earl Love until 1923; one year later, he dies	1930, age 15: starts singing at local Harlem after-hour joints	1950, age 17: moves to New York City to attend Julliard for one year

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Relocation</b>	1922: moves to Philadelphia, and stays in New York at times	1930: Drinking and smoking marijuana while hanging out with musicians	1951, age 18: denied a scholarship to Curtis Institute; believes rejection to be racial
<b>Letdown in career: race issue</b>	1923 Okeh Records rejects her because of looks	1932, age 17: meets record producer John Hammond when he hears her at Covan's on West 132nd	1951–1954, ages 18–21: tutors students in voice and piano while continuing her own lessons
<b>Career issue: money</b>	1923: Being cheated out of royalties and being stolen from	1933, age 18” “Your Mother's Son-in-Law” with Benny Goodman Orchestra; her first recording comes three days after Bessie's last recording in the same studio	1954–1957, ages 21–23: begins singing in Atlantic City Midtown Bar and Grill as Nina Simone
<b>Love relation</b>	1923 Marries Jack Gee; no time for honeymoon	Breaks racial barrier by sitting with White band to record	1956, age 22: meets admirer Don Ross; she needs to be loved
<b>Back to music career track</b>	1924, age 30: opens at Roosevelt Theatre in Cincinnati, Ohio; records “Sorrowful Blues,” “Pinch-backs Take 'Em Away,” “Rocking Chair Blues,” “Dying Gambler's Blues,” and “Woman's Trouble Blues”	1934, age 19: appears at Apollo Theatre; had to be pushed on stage because she was nervous Meets Teddy Wilson and begins to work with him; they collaborate on song selections	1957, age 23: meets Sid Nathan, owner of Bethlehem Records, who heard her “demo” recording of “I Loves You Porgy”—taken from a Billie Holiday rendition—from a club called New Hope in Philadelphia

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Famous social circle</b>	1924: Hangs out with Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and Lionel Hampton Drinking bootleg liquor	Billie dates Benny Goodman for a while	1957, age 23; "I Loves You Porgy," "Little Girl Blue," "Central Park Blues," and "My Baby Just Cares for Me"
<b>Relationship issues</b>	She hides her partying from Jack; they are volatile	Lester Young names Billie the "Lady"	1958, age 24; marries Don Ross in Philadelphia
<b>Temperament issues</b>	1925: has a fight with man while touring back home in Tennessee	1936: "Billie's Blues" 1944: "Lover Man"	1958: age 24, DJ Sid Marx helps promote the single "I Loves You Porgy" and "He Needs Me"
<b>Love issue</b>	Fighting with Jack	1937: her father dies	1959: signs with Columbia-Colpix
<b>Recordings about buffet flats<sup>a</sup></b>	1925: records "Soft Pedal Blues," "Dixie Flyer Blues," and "He's Gone Blues"	Billie sings lead for Count Basie orchestra	1958: "Central Park Blues" 1959: "Return Home" and "Under the Lowest"
<b>Recording</b>	1925: age 27 or 31 "St. Louis Blues" with Louis Armstrong, "My Man Blues" with Clara Smith, "Golden Rule Blues," and "Lonesome Desert Blues"	Blacks and Whites have different sleeping and eating accommodations, which abets a state of depression for Billie	1959: meets and befriends such artists as Lorraine Hansberry, Godfrey Cambridge, Dick Gregory, Langston Hughes, and Jimmy Baldwin; also meets Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Racial issue</b>	Problem with her entering through front door of the "81" club; her popularity, however, affords her the "right" regardless of racist practices	1937: at the Apollo, reviews give her praises over Ella Fitzgerald; animosity between the two occurs	1960: Meets policeman Andy Stroud, who makes her feel safe; things with Don Ross are not working out; they divorce
<b>Relationship event</b>	1926, age 32; adopts a son, moves family to Philadelphia, buys Jack Gee a car to appease him; both are having affairs	1938: Basie wants Billie to sing more Blues; she does not want to, and leaves Basie	1960: performs at the Apollo
<b>Recording about lust, mistreatin' men, and men troubles</b>	1926: "Baby Doll," "Lost Your Head Blues," "Hard Time Blues," and "Young Woman's Blues"	She joins Artie Shaw band; while touring the South, White lead singer has to replace her	1960: Andy beats up Nina out of jealousy
<b>Recording about Black poverty and men troubles</b>	1927: "Preachin' the Blues," "Back Water Blues," "Hot Springs Blues," and "Foolish Man Blues"	Leaves Artie Shaw band when hotel owner demands that she enter through the kitchen	1961: Nina and Andy are married
<b>Career moves</b>	1928, age 34: tours T.O.B.A. circuit with her Mississippi Days company	1938: sings at Café Society, writes big hit "Strange Fruit," Columbia refuses to record the song	1962: Nina travels to Nigeria with encouragement from Langston Hughes and Jimmy Baldwin; Africa is important

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Recording about lost love, street-wise women, bad times, and bad men</b>	1928: "Thinking Blues," "Pick-pocket Blues," "Standin' in the Rain Blues," "It Won't Be You," and "Spider Man Blues"	Breaks with Columbia and John Hammond; moves to Commodore with Milt Gabler	1962: Nina gives birth to daughter Lisa Celeste
<b>Man and money issues: deceit</b>	Jack Gee takes money for Bessie's work but keeps some for another woman	1939: "Long Gone Blues" and "Everything Happens for the Best"	1962: Nina realizes that classical music—her love—is a thing of the past
<b>Recording about bad relationships and Black protest to economic disparity</b>	1928: "Please Help Me Get Him off My Mind" and "Poor Man's Blues"	1939: "Fine and Mel-low"	1963: "If You Knew/Let It Be Me" and "Blackbird"
<b>Economic issues</b>	1929: Post-World War I economic disparity hurts Blacks, and stock market crash hurts T.O.B.A. and Black artists	1939: Billie and pianist Sonny White maintain a serious affair	1964–1968: Nina gets political education from Lorraine Hansberry and becomes more aware of Civil Rights movement Writes "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" after Hansberry dies
<b>Man issues</b>	1929: forces Jack to leave	1939: "Our Love is Different"	1963: Medgar Evers is killed; Alabama church bombing

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Recordings about desire for blissful love, pain, and a mistreatin' man</b>	1929: "It Makes My Love Come Down," "Wasted Life Blues," and "Dirty No-Gooder Blues"	1939–1940: She falls for hipster James (Jimmy) Monroe	1963–1964: "Mississippi Goddam," "Images," and "Old Jim Crow"
<b>Man and child issues</b>	Jack lies about Bessie's parenting; she loses Snooks as a result	1940: "Tell Me More (and More and Then Some)"	1964: moves to Philips label
<b>New love</b>	Richard Morgan becomes her new manager and lover	FBI file on Billie is extended due to the song "Over Here—the Yanks Are Coming"	1964: "Last Rose of Summer"
<b>Recording about lost love, searching for love, deserted love, and bitterness</b>	June 11, 1931: "In the House Blues," "Long Old Road," "Blue Blues," and "Shipwreck Blues"	Monroe advises Billie on her wardrobe: have to dress like a star to be perceived as a star	1965: "Four Women"
<b>Career track</b>	Record sales wane; she goes on tour with the troupe Gossiping Liza, meets Moms Mabley, and ends her recording career with Columbia	1941: "God Bless the Child"	1966: "Come Ye," "Backlash Blues," "Blues for Mama," "Do I Move You," and "Real Real"
<b>Recording about love, a mistreatin' man, and consequent revenge</b>	1931: "Safety Mama"	1941–1942: begins abusing heroin with James Monroe	1967–1968: Husband Andy becomes cold and unloving

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<b>Cultural Data or Experiences</b>	<b>Bessie Smith</b>	<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Nina Simone</b>
<b>Career track</b>	Slow, sketchy, and ironic; Bessie replaces an ill Billie Holiday at Connie's Inn, then works the Apollo and Art's Cafe	1943: begins seeing bass player John Simmons, who physically abuses her	1968: Let down by her husband and her father; the latter tells a lie about his role in the family, with disregard for her mother's role
<b>The end</b>	Dies in car crash in Mississippi	1944: moves to Decca Records, tours east coast theaters  1944–1945: Starts affair with Joseph Guy, who supplies her with drugs  1945: claims to have divorced James Monroe  1945: "Don't Explain"  1945: Billie's mother dies, and Billie abuses liquor and drugs more  1946–1948: Billie undergoes drug treatment and later gets arrested and jailed for drug possession; loses performance license	1968: "Nobody's Fault but Mine"  1968–1971: Andy mis-manages her finances, IRS intrudes  1967–1969: meets Miriam Makeba and Kwame Toure, and is influenced by Black Muslims  1969: Goes to Barbados to rest and has an affair with a government official  1969: "Revolution (Parts I & II)"  1969–1970: returns home, Andy is gone; they divorce, she goes back to Barbados for a while

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Cultural Data or Experiences	Bessie Smith	Billie Holiday	Nina Simone
		1949: Billie owes money to people; her manager has not been paying her bills	1974–1976: Nina stays in Liberia after Miriam Makeba invited her
		1950: leaves her manager John Levy	1976: moves to Switzerland
		1949: “Now or Never (Baby)” and “Somebody’s on My Mind”	1978: returns to United States to tour and is jailed for tax evasion on 1971–1973 taxes
		1950–1951: reconnects with old friend Louis McKay; they work together and get married	1978: White bailiff accosts and degrades her name
		1951–1953: leaves Decca Records and joins Aladdin Records, then the Mercury label	1979: tours United States, Israel, and France Decides to move from Switzerland to France as the French took her artistry more seriously
		1953: featured on TV show <i>The Comeback Story</i>	1981: moves to the CTI record label, and it lifts her career
		1954: tours France, England, and Switzerland	1982: “I Sing Just to Know That I’m Alive” and “You Took My Teeth”
		1954: “Stormy Blues”	1982–2001: tours the United States and Europe, her last appearance was in Britain

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*Continued***Cultural Data  
or Experiences****Bessie Smith****Billie Holiday****Nina Simone**

1956: her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, is published

2003: after suffering from cancer, she dies on April 20 at age 70

1956: “Lady Sings the Blues”

1957–1959: her health is failing, she separates from McKay, and longtime friend Lester Young dies; she goes into deep depression

1959: admitted to hospital, where she dies broke and alone

a. “Buffet flats” refer to parties where one could literally have a buffet of any sort of pleasure.

Appendix Three

# Life Profile Matrix: Analytic Categories Quantified per Singer

Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Number of Events: Bessie Smith	Number of Events: Billie Holiday	Number of Events: Nina Simone	Total Events per Analytic Category
Incarceration	Legal encounter, imprisonment	///	/		4
	Depression, / general, emotional burden	/	/		3
	Substance abuse, emotional burden	//// ////	//// //// //	///	26
	Tainted love, / man, emotional burden	///	//// //// //	//	19
	Mistreatment' man issues	/	/	/	3
	Dutiful love with man	/	/	/	3

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Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Number of Events: Bessie Smith	Number of Events: Billie Holiday	Number of Events: Nina Simone	Total Events per Analytic Category
	Depression, children, emotional burden	/			1
	Temperament issues, emotional burden	/	//	///	6
Love	Blissful love with man	///	///	///	10
	Children/family, maternal/universal	/	/	/	3
Race	Racial discrimination	/	/	/	3
	Skin/racial	/		/	2
	Jim Crow encounter	//	///	//	7
Freedom	Sexual freedom/pleasure	//// ///	////	///	16
	Break from tainted relationships	///	//?	//	7
	Protest	/	///	///	8

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Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Number of Events: Bessie Smith	Number of Events: Billie Holiday	Number of Events: Nina Simone	Total Events per Analytic Category
Religion	Denomination or religious exposure	//	//		5
Career	Career/genre // issues				3
Money	Career/man or love, money fouled	//	/	//	5
<b>Total events per singer</b>		43	56	35	





Appendix Four

# Life Profile Matrix: Analytical Categories Thematically Qualified

Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Bessie Smith	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Billie Holiday	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Nina Simone
Incarceration	Legal encounter, imprisonment		Jailed as a youth, then for prostitution; jailed for drug possession; FBI file for songs “Strange Fruit” and “Over Here”	Jailed unjustly because of being Black
	Abuse with man, physical abuse	Jack Gee physically abusive	John Simmons beats her	Andy attacked and almost killed her
	Substance abuse	Drinks very heavily for years	Drinks, smokes, and uses heroin	Drinks and smoke cigarettes
	Temper issues, emotional burden	Fights a drunken man at and after a party in her hometown		

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Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Bessie Smith	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Billie Holiday	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Nina Simone
Depression; children, family, self; emotional burden		hen she loses Jack Jr.: later loses him because of a lie told by Jack Sr	After her father's death, her mother's death, and Lester Young's death, and while imprisoned	Attempts suicide after realizing she was alone, almost broke, and away from familiar surroundings
	Money with man issues; emotional burden; MONEY	Jack Gee steals her money to produce shows for his lover	Allows James Monroe to dictate her career; he feels important	Husband leaves her in a financial crisis
	Dutiful love with man; emotional burden	Appeases Jack with a car, also with trips to Hot Springs, Arkansas	15 failed love affairs: McKay, Monroe, Guy, Shaw, White, and others	Marries Andy even though he almost killed her
Love	Blissful love with man	Falls in love and is temporarily happy 3 times; women's sexual freedom	Falls in love and is temporarily happy 3 times	Falls in love and is temporarily happy 3 times; has one affair
	Children issues, familial, Oshun	Adopts a son, Jack Jr.	Loves children but has none	Births a daughter, Lisa Celeste
Freedom	Sexual	Many lovers	Many lovers	Three lovers

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Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Bessie Smith	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Billie Holiday	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Nina Simone
	Break free from tainted love with man; sexual; LOVE	Keeps secrets from Jack Gee, forces Jack to leave, Jack hurts Bessie through Jack Jr., causes woman to explore many sexual/fun relationships, abets women's sexual freedom	Divorces James Monroe, separates from Louis McKay	Divorces Don Ross, divorces Andy Stroud
	Protest racial disdain; RACE; LOVE; universal		Singing "Strange Fruit"; not played in the South	Active with NAACP, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Civil Rights movement
Race	Skin/racial disdain	Called "too black"		Jailed unjustly because of being Black
	Racial disdain; CAREER	Rejected because of looks	Breaks segregation practices in recording career	Denied scholarship to Curtis Institute

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Analytical Categories of Cultural Data	General Breakdown of Thematic Indicators	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Bessie Smith	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Billie Holiday	Thematic Qualities of Occurrences: Nina Simone
	Jim Crow encounter	Cannot enter through front doors; bleeds to death after being denied admission to White hospital; KKK tries to disrupt her show	Separate sleeping and eating accommodations for band members; Southern tour calls for White lead singer to replace her; made to enter building through the kitchen instead of the front door	Not allowed to sit in pharmacy; parents made to leave front-row seats for White patrons at recital
Religion	Upbringing	Baptist Church and revivals	Catholic and Baptist	Methodist and Holiness Church; mother was a preacher
Career	Career/repertoire issues	Turns to male-composed pornographic songs to boost sales; moves toward jazz while White audiences demand the old Blues	Wants to get away from Blues to be more artistic, improvisational: jazz	
Money	Money fouled; CAREER; LOVE	Manager cheats her out of royalties	Manager mismanages her money—she owes everyone	Husband/manager mismanages her money; IRS and tax problems

Appendix Five

# Life Profile/Song Matrices

**Table A5.1** Life Profile/Song Matrix: Quantity of Analytical Categories Demonstrated in Bessie Smith’s Compositions and Quantity of Compositions Referenced

Bessie’s Compositions	Love Relationships	Race Issues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarceration	Religion	Career	Totals
Jail House Blues				/	/			2
Sorrowful Blues	/			/		/		3
Pinchbacks— Take ’Em Away!	/		/					2
Rocking Chair Blue	/						/	2
Soft Pedal Blues	/			/				2
Dixie Flyer Blues		/						1
He’s Gone Blues	/		/		/			3
My Man Blues	/	/		/				3
Golden Rule Blues	/		/					2

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Table A5.1 *Continued*

Bessie's Compositions	Love Relationships	Race Issues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarceration	Religion	Career	Totals
Lonesome Desert Blues	/							1
Baby Doll	/	/		/		/		4 <sup>b</sup>
Lost Your Head Blues	/		/					2
Hard Time Blues	/		/	/				3
<i>Young Woman's Blues</i>	/	/		/	/	/		5 <sup>c</sup>
<i>Preachin' the Blues</i>	/			/	/	/		4 <sup>c</sup>
Backwater Blues		/			/			2
Hot Springs Blues	/							1
Foolish Man Blues	/				/	/		3
Thinking Blues	/				/	/		3
Pickpocket Blues		/	/	/	/	/		5 <sup>d</sup>
Standin' in the Rain Blues								
It Won't Be You	/			/	/			3
Spider Man Blues	/	/				/		3
<i>Poor Man's Blues</i>	/	/	/		/	/		5 <sup>c</sup>
Please Help Me Get Him off My Mind	/				/	/		3

*Continued*

Table A5.1 *Continued*

Bessie's Compositions	Love Relationships	Race Issues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarceration	Religion	Career	Totals
It Makes My Love Come Down					/			1
Wasted Life Blues	/				1			1
Dirty No-Gooder's Blues	/					/		2
In the House Blues	/				/			2
Long Old Road Blue Blues	/				/			2
Shipwreck Blues	/				/			2
Safety Mama	/	/	/					3
Totals	25 <sup>a</sup>	9	7	10	17 <sup>a</sup>	11	1	

a. Life profile categories that represented 50 percent of the songs were *prevalent themes*. Total songs = 32 (32 \* .50 = 16). Prevalent themes: love, incarceration.

b. Songs that represented 50 percent of all life profile categories were considered *total life profile categories* = 7 (7 / .50 = 3.5 or 4).

c. Songs that demonstrated 100% of the most prevalent life categories were selected: "Young Woman's Blues," "Preachin' the Blues," and "Poor Man's Blues."

d. "Pickpocket Blues" excluded because its content mimicked that of "Jail House Blues."



**Table A5.2** Life Profile/Song Matrix: Quantity of Analytical Categories Demonstrated in Billie Holiday's Compositions and Quantity of Compositions Referenced

Billie's Compositions (total = 13)	Love	Relation- ships	Race Issues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarcera- tion	Religion	Career	Totals
<i>Billie's Blues</i>	/			/	/	/			4 <sup>c</sup>
I Love My Man	/			/	/	/			4 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Everything Happens for the Best</i>	/				/	/	/		4 <sup>c</sup>
Long Gone Blues	/				/	/			3
Fine and Mel- low	/			/	/	/			4 <sup>d</sup>
Our Love Is Different	/					/			2
Tell Me More (and More and Then Some)	/					/	/		3
God Bless the Child				/	/		/		3
Don't Explain	/					/			2
Now, Baby, or Never	/				/				2
Somebody's on My Mind	/								1
Stormy Blues					/	/			2
<i>Lady Sings the Blues</i>	/	/			/	/			4 <sup>c</sup>
Totals	11 <sup>a</sup>	1		3	9 <sup>a</sup>	10 <sup>a</sup>	4		

a. Life profile categories that represented 50 percent of the songs were *prevalent themes*. Total songs = 13 (13 \* .50 = 6.5 or 7). Prevalent themes: love, freedom, and incarceration.

*Continued*

Table A5.2 *Continued*

- b. Songs that represented 50 percent of all life profile categories were considered *total life profile categories* = 7 ( $7 / .50 = 3.5$  or 4).
- c. Songs that demonstrated 100 percent of the most prevalent life categories were selected: “Billie’s Blues,” “Everything Happens for the Best,” and “Lady Sings the Blues.”
- d. “Fine and Mellow” excluded because its content mimicked that of “Billie’s Blues” almost identically.

Table A5.3 Life Profile/Song Matrix: Quantity of Analytical Categories Demonstrated in Nina Simone’s Compositions and Quantity of Compositions Referenced

Nina’s Compositions	Love Relationships	Race Issues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarceration	Religion	Career	Totals
If You Knew/ Let It Be Me	/					/		2
Blackbird		/			/			2
Images		/			/			2
<i>Four Women</i>	/	/		/	/	/		5 <sup>c</sup>
Old Jim Crow		/			/	/		3
Mississippi Goddam		/			/	/		3
The Last Rose of Summer					/			1
Come Ye	/	/				/		3
Backlash Blues		/	/		/			3
Blues for Mama	/			/	/	/		4 <sup>b</sup>
Do I Move You	/			/		/		3

*Continued*

Table A5.3 *Continued*

Nina's Compositions	Love	Relationships	RaceIssues	Money Issues	Freedom	Incarceration	Religion	Career	Totals
Real Real	/				/				2
Nobody's Fault but Mine						/	/		2
<i>Revolution (Parts 1 &amp; 2)</i>	/	/			/	/	/		5 <sup>c</sup>
<i>To Be Young, Gifted and Black</i>	/	/			/	/	/		5 <sup>c</sup>
I Sing Just to Know That I'm Alive			/		/		/		3
You Took My Teeth			/		/				2
Fodder on My Wings					/	/	/		3
Compassion	/						/		2
Totals	11 <sup>a</sup>	13 <sup>a</sup>	2		13 <sup>a</sup>	15 <sup>a</sup>	15 <sup>a</sup>	1	

a. Life profile categories that represented 50 percent of the songs were *prevalent themes*. Total songs = 19 ( $20 * .50 = 9.5$  or 10). Prevalent themes: love, race, freedom, incarceration, and religion.

b. Songs that represented 50 percent of all life profile categories were considered *total life profile categories* = 7 ( $7 / .50 = 3.5$  or 4).

c. Songs that demonstrated 100 percent of the most prevalent life categories were selected: "Four Women," "Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)," and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black."

## Appendix Six

# Discography of Selected Song Performances on CD

- Holiday, B. (1986). Billie's blues. On *The Billie Holiday songbook* [CD]. New York: Polygram. (1956).
- Holiday, B. (2001). Everything happens for the best. On *Billie Holiday sings Billie Holiday songbook* [CD]. Spain: The Jazz Factory. (1939).
- Holiday, B., & Nichols, H. (1986). Lady sings the blues. On *The Billie Holiday songbook* [CD]. New York: Polygram. (1956).
- Simone, N. (1990). Four women. On *Nina Simone in concert* [CD]. Albuquerque, NM: Creative Sounds, Ltd. (1977).
- Simone, N., & Irvine, W., Jr. (1990). To be young, gifted and Black. On *Nina Simone in concert* [CD]. Albuquerque, NM: Creative Sounds, Ltd. (1977).
- Simone, N., & Irvine, W., Jr. (1994). Revolution (Parts 1 & 2). On *The essential Nina Simone* [CD]. New York: BMG Music. (1969).
- Smith, B. (1992). Preachin' the blues. On *Bessie Smith: The complete recordings, vol. 3* [CD]. New York: Sony Music Entertainment. (1927).
- Smith, B. (1992). Young woman's blues. On *Bessie Smith: The complete recordings, vol. 3* [CD]. New York: Sony Music Entertainment. (1926).
- Smith, B. (1993). Poor man's blues. On *Bessie Smith: The complete recordings, vol. 4* [CD]. New York: Sony Music Entertainment. (1928).



Appendix Seven

# Selected Songs/Prevalent Themes Matrices

**Table A7.1** Selected Songs and Prevalent Themes: Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith	Quantity and Quality per Analytical Category
<b>Young Woman's Blues (1926)</b>	
Woke up this mornin' when chickens was crowin' for day	Love
Felt on the right side of my pilla,' <i>my man</i> had gone away	
By his pilla' he left a note	
Readin' "I'm sorry Jane, you got my goat."	Freedom
No time to marry, no time to settle down	
I'm a young woman and <i>ain't done runnin'</i> , <i>round</i>	
I'm a young woman and <i>ain't done runnin'</i> , <i>round</i>	
Some people call me a hobo, some call me bum	Race

*Continued*

Table A7.1 *Continued*

Bessie Smith	Quantity and Quality per Analytical Category
Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I've done	Religion
I'm as good as any woman in your town I ain't no high yella, I'm a <i>deep</i> killer <i>brown</i> I ain't gonna marry, ain't gon' settle down I'm gon' drink good moonshine and run these browns down See that long lonesome road, Lord, you know it's gotta end And I'm a good woman and I can get plenty men.	
<b>Preachin' the Blues (1927)</b>	
Down in Atlanta GA under the viaduct every day	
Drinkin' corn and hollerin' hooray, pianos playin' 'til the break of day	
But as I turned my head I loudly said	Love
Preach them blues, sing them blues, they certainly sound good to me	Incarceration
I been in love for the last six months and ain't done worryin' yet	
Moan them blues, holler them blues, let me convert your soul	Religion
'Cause just a little spirit of the blues tonight	Freedom
Let me tell you, girls, if your man ain't treatin' you right	
Let me tell you, I don't mean no wrong	Religion
I will learn you something if you listen to this song	

*Continued*

Table A7.1 *Continued*

Bessie Smith	Quantity and Quality per Analytical Category
<p>I ain't here to try to save your soul            Just want to teach you how to save your good            jelly roll            Goin' on down the line a little further now,            there's a many poor woman down            Read on down to chapter nine, women must            learn how to take their time            Read on down to chapter ten, takin' other            women men you are doin' a sin            Sing 'em, sing 'em, sing them blues, let me            convert your soul            Lord, one old sister by the name of Sister            Green jumped up and done a shimmy you            ain't never seen            Sing 'em, sing 'em, sing them blues, let me            convert your soul.</p>	
<b>Poor Man's Blues (1928)</b>	
Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind	Money
Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind	Incarceration
Give the poor man a chance, help stop these hard, hard times	Love
While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times means	
While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times means	
Poor working man's wife is starvin,' your wife's livin' like a queen	Religion
Please listen to my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long	Race
<i>Continued</i>	



Table A7.1 *Continued*

Bessie Smith	Quantity and Quality per Analytical Category
Oh, listen to my pleading, can't stand these hard times long	
While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times means	Race
They'll make an honest man do things that you know is wrong	Money
Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again	
Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again	
He would do anything you ask him in the name of the U.S.A.	
Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you	
Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you	
If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man, what would you do?	

Table A7.2 Selected Songs and Prevalent Themes: Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
<b>Billie's Blues/I Love My Man (1956)</b>	
Lord, I love my man, I'm a lie if I say I don't	
I love my man, I'm a lie if I say I don't	
But I'll quit my man	Love
I'm a lie if I say I won't	Incarceration
I've been yo' slave every since I been yo' babe	
I've been yo' slave every since I been yo' babe	

*Continued*

Table A7.2 *Continued*

Billie Holiday	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
But before I'll be yo' dog (slave) I'll see you in yo' grave	
My man wouldn't give me no breakfast Wouldn't give me no dinner Squawked about my supper then he put me outdoors	
Had the nerve to leave a matchbox on my clothes	Money
I didn't have so many But I had a long, long way to go	Incarceration
I ain't good lookin' and my hair ain't curls I ain't good lookin' and my hair ain't curls But my mother she give me somethin' It's gonna carry me through this world	Freedom
Some men like me talkin' happy Some cause I'm snappy Some call me honey Others think I got money Some tell me Billie, baby you're built for speed Now if you put that all together Makes me everything a good man needs	
<b>Everything Happens for the Best (1939)</b>	
Always blue, all in a mist It's plain as can be You're so mean to me But everything happens for the best	Incarceration

*Continued*

Table A7.2 *Continued*

<b>Billie Holiday</b>	<b>Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories</b>
You always play around	Freedom
You're running my heart so deep in the ground	
That's okay everything happens for the best	
I loved you so madly	Love
Knew you would be true	
Now this thing has happened dear	
It's over all over because we're through	
So sorry dear it ends this way	
Since the world begin	
The old folks say	Religion
Everything happens for the best	Freedom
(Repeat last verse again)	

**Lady Sings the Blues (1956)**

See Chapter 5.

**Table A7.3** Selected Songs and Prevalent Themes: Nina Simone

<b>Nina Simone</b>	<b>Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories</b>
<b>Four Women (1977)</b>	
(Spoken) Four women. We've done this song many times for you, so we don't have to explain Aunt Sarah too much to you, except to tell you that she's still going to work every morning about 7:30, walking in the streets of Harlem. She's 107 and she's still scrubbing floors; but it's okay, okay, she don't have too long now. Aunt Sarah, she wears a rag on her head. And dig it, head rags are in fashion these days; they're all in vogue. Aunt Jemima is in style (audience laughs). Aunt Sarah has lived long enough to see the full circle come round.	Race Incarceration Money/career Race Incarceration

*Continued*

Table A7.3 *Continued*

Nina Simone	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
My skin is black, my arms are long	Race
My hair is wooly, my back is strong	
Strong enough to take the pain	Incarceration
It's been inflicted again and again	
<p>What do they call me, my name is Aunt Sarah          (Spoken) I'll leave her there. I could tell you a story about my mama in the South and they called her auntie in these grocery stores. I only wish I could have been there when they called her auntie. No Mrs., iyee, okay.</p>	
<p>(Spoken) Second woman; 'cause you see I know Berkeley's on fire. I mean that in a positive way. I kinda have to hold myself down here because the vibrations are so strong. But I tell you this, if I had been there when they called my mama "auntie," I would have burned the whole goddam place down. I tell you that (audience whoops and hollers, whistles and applauds), Second woman.</p>	Race
<p>But I tell you this, if I had been there when they called my mama "auntie," I would have burned the whole goddam place down. I tell you that (audience whoops and hollers, whistles and applauds), Second woman.</p>	Incarceration
My skin is yellow, my hair is long, and straight like some of yours	Freedom
Between two worlds, I do belong	Race
My father was rich and white	Incarceration
He forced my mother, late one night—they call it rape (she shouts it)	
So here I am, they call me, they call me Saffronia	Race Incarceration
My skin is tan, tan, my hair's fine, it's alright whatever way I fix it it's fine	
My hips, my hips invite you daddy, my mouth's like wine	
Whose little girl am I, anyone who has money to buy	
And they call me, on 125th Street, they call me sweet thang, sweet thang, sweet thang	

*Continued*

Table A7.3 *Continued*

Nina Simone	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
<p>My skin is brown, my manner is tough            I'll kill the first mother I see, my life has been rough            I'm awfully bitta these days            Because my parents, God gave 'em to me,            were slaves—and it's crippled me (she shouts it).            What do they call me, my name is Peaches!!!</p>	
<b>Revolution (Parts 1 &amp; 2) (1969)</b>	
<p>Now we got a revolution, 'cause I see the things to come</p>	<p>Race            Freedom</p>
<p>Yeah, your constitution            well my friend,            it's gonna have to bend</p>	<p>Freedom</p>
<p>I'm here to tell you 'bout destruction of all the evil that will have to end</p>	
<p>(chorus: it will, oh yes, don't you know it's gonna be alright)</p>	<p>Freedom            Love</p>
<p>Some folks are gonna get the notion, I know            They say I'm preachin' hate            if I had to swim the ocean            well, I would just to communicate            It's not as simple as talkin' jive            the daily struggle just to stay alive</p>	
<p>(chorus: alive, oh well, alright, don't you know it's gonna be alright—love)</p>	
<p>love,            singing 'bout a revolution,</p>	<p>Incarceration            Race</p>
<i>Continued</i>	

Table A7.3 *Continued*

Nina Simone	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
<p>because I'm talkin' 'bout a change  more than just air pollution  Well you know you've gotta clean your brain  The only way that we can stand in fact, Lord  Is when you get your foot off our back</p> <p>(chorus: don't you know, get back, well  alright, get back)</p> <p>(chorus: What to do Nina? What to do now?)  I'm tellin' you  soon you'll know  it will be through</p>	Religion
<p>1-2-3, what do you see  4-5-6, I've got my stick</p>	
<p>Do your thang  Whenever you can  When you must  Do take a stand  It will end, well alright,  We'll get by  Stay alive  WELL alright (repeat 6 times)</p>	

**To Be Young, Gifted and Black (1977)**

(Simone instructs the crowd to refer to their Love programs for the lyrics.)

*Continued*

Table A7.3 *Continued*

Nina Simone	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
(Spoken) The song is dedicated to the memory of my dear, dear friend, whom I miss very much, and if I don't control myself, I could talk about her all night. Lorraine Hansberry, who wrote <i>Raisin in the Sun</i> and died before her time.	Race Race
To be young, gifted and Black Oh what a lovely, precious dream To be young, gifted and black Open your heart to what I mean	Freedom Race Freedom
In the whole world you know There are a billion boys and girls Who are young, gifted and black And that's a fact	Race Religion
You are young, gifted and black We must begin to tell our young There's a world waiting for you This is a quest that's just begun	Incarceration
When you feel real low Yeah, there's a great truth you should know When you're young, gifted and black Your soul's intact	Freedom Race
Young, gifted and black How I long to know the truth There are times when I look back And I am haunted by my youth	Incarceration
<i>Continued</i>	

Table A7.3 *Continued*

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Nina Simone	Quantity and Quality of Analytic Categories
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Race

Oh but my joy of today  
Is that we can all be proud to say  
To be young, gifted and black  
Is where it's at!





Appendix Eight

# Explanation of Nzuri Model Contexts

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**Nzuri Model: Three Sources, Seven Aspects, and Three Principles**

	<b>Definition/Explanation</b>	<b>Perception of the Song</b>
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force. Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion.	Explained in terms of the singer's life experiences that influenced or foreshadowed the idea of the song
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	Explained in terms of the singer's active engagement in activities that aided her realization of lyrics and melody
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	1. Explained in terms of the song's effect on listeners 2. Explained in terms of the singer's discovery of her own power, strength, and/or resilience

*Continued*

*Continued*


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**Nzuri Model: Three Sources, Seven Aspects, and Three Principles**

Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Meaning	Significance of the song/ dual role  1. Explained in terms of how the song affects the Black community 2. Explained in terms of how the song allowed the singer to express her wisdom.
Ethos	Quality exuding emotion, energy  Explained as descriptive nouns and adjectives that portray the emotion(s) of the song.
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage.  Described as symbols, motifs, and issues that indicate African American culture and heritage
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed  Explained as descriptive quality of the feeling in the song
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community  Explained in terms of what the song did for the singer and the community
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song  Explained in terms of musicians and instruments
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition  Explained in terms of the arrangement, essential form, and vocal style of the song
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance.  Explained in terms of what the song affirms about African American social, cultural, and traditional practices.

*Continued*

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Ehe/oral principle

Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance

Explained in terms of how well the song demonstrates African aesthetics and in terms of how the song can be used to teach African consciousness and female consciousness



Appendix Nine

# Application of Nzuri to Selected Song Performances

**Table A9.1**  
Application of Nzuri to Bessie Smith’s “Young Woman’s Blues” (1926)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion.	Smith’s relationship with Jack Gee was turbulent. She foresaw their breakup and realized that she had options
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist’s thought	She realized that she was desirable. She was actively cheating on Gee.
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Enriched (1) women’s self- realization of independence and self-reliance, and (2) her realization of surviving abandonment and thriving anyway
Meaning	Significance of the song/ dual role	A woman should not worry about a man who does not want to be with her.

*Continued*

Table A9.1 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Quality: rebellious and defiant Emotion: confidence
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Challenged African American skin color, “caste” system
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Alloof and bold
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	The song expressed that Smith’s female independence and embrace of sexual pleasure could be instructive to Black women.
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Coronet: Joe Smith Clarinet: Buster Bailey Piano: Fletcher Henderson
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Arrangement: 4 counts per bar, tempo “slowly” Essential form: popular song Vocal style: deep, rich, round tones with some voice pulsation
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirmed that “deep killer brown” skin is beautiful—precursor to “Black is beautiful”

*Continued*

Table A9.1 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Perceived African and female consciousness Critiques European, male-centered patriarchy

Table A9.2  
Application of Nzuri to Bessie Smith's "Preachin' the Blues" (1927)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Recounts atmosphere of meeting Johnson, drinking heavily, and partying in Atlanta
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	Defies Christian piety—see mode section, below Turns the blues into spiritual discourse about love
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Blues singer as preacher: testifies her wisdom and signifies on church sermon with blues sermon Contests condemnation of blues
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	Expresses wisdom about women respecting each other's relationships and taking control of their sexuality

*Continued*



**Table A9.2**  
**Application of Nzuri to Bessie Smith's "Preachin' the Blues" (1927)**

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Mock sermon, sermon like: spirit of religion and spirit of blues are juxtaposed
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Joyous/limber "shimmy" dance and jook joint-jookin'
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Lighthearted, unabashedly blasphemous tone; humorous and sarcastic
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Advises Black women on relationships and sexual freedom
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals: Bessie Smith Piano: James P. Johnson
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Structure: moderately fast, 2/4 and 4/4 rhythms Shape: popular song with blues postures (humor and sarcasm) Composition: low-register tones
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Jook joint atmosphere—freedom of sexual expression, and group interaction (dance and testifying)
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Pulsating conversion of the soul, dropping of burdens, and imagery of a/the heavenly chariot

Table A9.3  
Application of Nzuri to Bessie Smith's "Poor Man's Blues" (1928)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Painful, post–World War I economic conditions that foreshadowed the Great Depression—Black suffering
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	Her active engagement was more social than personal—she was witness to Black suffering.
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Complaint/protest against oppressive conditions
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	Gross disparities between wealthy and poor must change.
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Realistic, humorous, and ironic
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	African Americans fight for America, but for them the benefits are unrealized.
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Taunting yet humble
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Acts as an indictment to the wealthy whose luxuries hurt the masses

*Continued*

Table A9.3 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals: Bessie Smith Trombone: Joe Williams Clarinet and Alto Sax: Bob Fuller Clarinet and Alto/Tenor Sax: Ernest Elliot Piano: Porter Grainger
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Structure/arrangement: slow Shape/essential form: 12-bar blues Composition/texture: Small contractions and elongations of syllables; improvises repeated words; rough
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms Blacks' commitment to freedom, despite continuous disappointment
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Blues songs, despite direct calls to action, represent social problems; hence, they voice political aesthetic.

Table A9.4

Application of Nzuri to Billie Holiday's "Billie's Blues" (1936)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force	Billie migrated to men who did not want her and abused her.

*Continued*

Table A9.4 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
	Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion.	
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	She had been singing the blues all her life—the words came, and she sang them.
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Affects the listener as a blues domain song telling of her loving man who has done her wrong. Pain is often voluntary.
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	There's only so much that a Black woman will/has to take in the name of love.
Ethos	Quality exuding emotion, energy	World wise and cool
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Comparison of women and cars: blues tradition
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Defiant, aggressive, and assertive
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Identifies her/communal emotional horizons as often one central emotion—sadness that must be overcome

*Continued*

Table A9.4 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals: Billie Holiday Trumpet: Roy Eldridge Tenor sax: Coleman Hawkins Piano: Carl Drinkard Guitar: Kenny Burrell Bass: Carson Smith Drums: Chico Hamilton
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Structure: moderately slow Shape: formal blues Composition: minimalist vocal style
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms societal tradition amongst Black women: one monkey don't stop no show.
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Discovers strength in the face of oppressive (even self-induced) conditions

**Table A9.5**  
**Application of Nzuri to Billie Holiday's "Everything Happens for the Best"**  
 (1939)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Billie had recently broken love and working ties with Artie Shaw.

*Continued*

Table A9.5 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	She holds on to faith that everything will work out.
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	1. A sense of self-worth in the face of loss 2. A sense of power: use of humor to see the bright side of bad situations
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	Put on a happy face in unpleasant circumstance. Wisdom comes from elders.
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Acceptance; empowered resignation to the situation
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Respect for elders' wisdom
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Melancholy, sorrowful, yet very cool
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	She let go of some inner turmoil, which lets us know that she (we) will be okay.
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals: Billie Holiday Trumpet: Hot Lips Page Alto sax and soprano sax: Kenneth Hollon Tenor sax: Stanley Payne Piano: Ken Kersey Bass: John Williams Guitar: Jimmy McLin Drums: Eddie Dougherty

*Continued*

Table A9.5 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition.	Structure: Slight up-tempo Essential form: popular/jazzy blues Composition: Vocal style light, clear, and sensuous; instrumental style: dark texture
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms African American traditions of respecting and abiding by the wisdom of elders. “One monkey don’t stop no show”
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Response to discovery: will to overcome unpleasantness, bad experiences

Table A9.6

Application of Nzuri to Billie Holiday’s “Lady Sings the Blues” (1956)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Her entire life!
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist’s thought	Rhythms of Black, poor, and female consciousness: sometimes overcomes, sometimes succumbs to adverse odds

*Continued*

Table A9.6 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Discovery that in spite of bad choices and ugly actions, there is an inherent strength. We are reminded of this.
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	Triumph over your tragedies.
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Pang of conscience, earthy realism
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Motif of being Black, female, poor, and strong
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Rough, brassy, tired, and determined
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Reminded her that cool is the rule; hence, we are reminded.
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals: Billie Holiday Trumpet: Charlie Shavers Clarinet: Tony Scott Tenor sax: Paul Quinichette Piano: Wynton Kelly Drums: Lenny McBrowne
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Arrangement: moderately slow Form: blues Composition: glaring yet sinuous style; raspy, rough, interlocked vocal/instrument

*Continued*



Table A9.6 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms song-text function: relays moral of prevailing
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	If <i>love man = love freedom</i> and the struggle for either = pain or being duped, then what doesn't kill you will make you stronger.

Table A9.7

## Application of Nzuri to Nina Simone's "Four Women" (1977)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	She often worried about being attractive.
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	She wanted to take the scab off of the sore of relationships between Black men and women.
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	She needed someone to reassure her that she was okay just as she was—she realized that she had to be that somebody.

*Continued*

Table A9.7 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Meaning	Significance of the song/ dual role	Black women's ideas about their beauty and importance should not be affected by the tone of their skin.
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Soul searching, self-realization, and realism
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Skin color; the word "slaves"
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Angry, boastful, sexual, and painful
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	We (Black women/people) must define ourselves.
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	No information found
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Structure: moderate tempo, 4/4 time Shape: popular and folk song Texture: raspy, harsh, and smooth
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms historical issues about skin color associations
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Renews faith in overcoming externally imposed skin color issues

**Table A9.8**  
**Application of Nzuri to Nina Simone's "Revolution (Parts 1 & 2)" (1969)**

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Inspired by associations with Langston Hughes and James Baldwin; partly inspired by Beatles song of the same name
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	Riots of the 1960s—the backlash from the suppression of Black leaders
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	She discovered that she was about separatism and Black Power—a way to return Black people's pride.
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	There is going to be/is a revolution (legal and internal).
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Sermon-like song exudes gospel energy, testifying.
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Talkin' jive and telling the oppressor to get his foot off of our back
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Angry, indicting, and serious
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Tells us to be prepared mentally and physically to stand up for ourselves

*Continued*

Table A9.8 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocal and piano: Nina Simone Also organ, guitar, and drums
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	2/4 or 4/4 time—up-tempo; jazzy/soul; clean and swinging, with call-and-response/chorus
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms societal (improvisational) myth of revolting against oppressive conditions
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Response is to the renewal of revolutionary propaganda.

Table A9.9

Application of Nzuri to Nina Simone's "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (1977)

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Spirit source	The first manifestation of life force Metaphysical and physical connected as felt by demonstration of emotion	Inspired by Lorraine Hansberry's play with the same name. Nina realized that she was involved in the movement.

*Continued*

Table A9.9 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Rhythm source	Life force that guides acts of creation and the material results of artist's thought	Wrote the song in memory of Lorraine and many other revolutionaries; student sit-ins in Birmingham, Alabama, with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).
Creative source	The most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of (1) enriching the universe audibly (felt) and (2) enriching the singer via inward experience of discovery.	Lorraine questioned Simone about what she was doing for the movement while others were active. She/we must not be idle in our freedom.
Meaning	Significance of the song/dual role	Black youth are full of power and are inspirational.
Ethos	Quality of the song that exudes emotion, energy	Proud quality exudes faith and vitality.
Motif	Use of symbols and/or motifs reflecting African American culture/heritage	Black youth reflects cycle of life and value in youthful vitality.
Mode	Manner or attitude in which a song is expressed	Gratified, joyous manner and enthusiastic attitude
Function	The operative relationship of the song to the individual and community	Tells young and young-at-heart people of color that we are gifted beyond measure.
Method/technique	Practical, physical, and material means of realizing the song	Vocals and piano: Nina Simone Also background singers, congas, drums, and guitar

*Continued*

Table A9.9 *Continued*

Nzuri Model Sources, Aspects, and Principles	Definition/Explanation	Perception of the Song
Form	Status of the song in terms of structure, shape, and composition	Moderately slow 4/4 time Soul/gospel-like protest song Interlocked voices, clear
Ashe/oral principle	Affirmation of societal symbols, myths, or cultural traditions as transmitted in song, storytelling, dance, attire—in short, performance	Affirms tradition of teaching the children to be proud of their heritage—to know they are strong and are our inspiration for protesting and revolting.
Ehe/oral principle	Response to creativity, discovery, and renewal as transmitted in performance	Response to renewal of faith and belief in the cycle of life. Youth will make a way.



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# Notes

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. The renowned African dance scholar and choreographer Kariamu Welsh Asante is now known as Kariamu Welsh.
2. Culture is a “style of social and artistic expression peculiar to a society” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1976, p. 321).
3. Art is “the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1976, p. 74).
4. Dona Richards is now known as Marimba Ani.
5. Although Thompson’s (1974) African aesthetic is primarily applied to African sculpture and dance, there are important aesthetic implications for the study of music.
6. Africa, in a philosophical sense, speaks to values from a particular view of existence (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 2).
7. “Music itself, of course, falls within the aesthetic aspects of culture, and its relationship to other aesthetic aspects, such as folklore, dance, and drama,” is evident (Merriam, 1982, p. 72).
8. I understand Merriam’s use of the phrase “aesthetic behavior” to mean aesthetic aspects of culture.
9. For example, the train trope speaks to the historical phenomena of train hopping by Black men in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and riding the train during migrations to the North. It also refers to the aesthetic function in music, whereby train sounds in songs characterized the much-valued freedom that the train tended to represent for Black people (Floyd, 1995, pp. 216, 217).
10. According to Welsh, the idea of functionality is often unvaried in traditional African aesthetics. However, in contemporary African practices, the aesthetics only tend to include some features of functionality (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 2).
11. In this study, “performance” denotes vocal singing accompanied by instruments.

12. Southern (1997) notes that European travelers frequently mentioned that one of the most striking features of African life was the centrality of music and dance. For the earliest report written in English, see Jobson (1623).
13. Style of delivery—how performers employ bodily movements, facial expressions, and clothing—is excluded because I analyze recorded song performances of Smith, Holiday, and Simone. For a thorough discussion on the function of “style of delivery” in Black gospel music, see Burnim (1988, p. 115).
14. Jones’s description is among the less arbitrary descriptions of African music. For a thorough discussion on the arbitrary descriptions of African singing found throughout ethnomusicological studies, see Agawu (1992b).
15. For an interesting recapitulation of ancient observers of African music in the periplus (coastal voyage) of Hanno, king of the Carthaginians, see Fryer (2003).
16. The term is used here to reference North America, South America, and the Caribbean. However, the focus of this study is on African American music in the United States of America.
17. Dona Richards uses this Kiswahili term to indicate how the enslavement of Africans was a system that sought to destroy African values, self-images, and self-concepts. She argues that the brutality inflicted on Africans served to replace African cultural patterns, worldview (religion), and customs with an “order of slavery” where “fear was the great immobilizer” (1985, p. 215).
18. “African oral tradition(s)” refers to a “comprehensive body of oral discourse on every subject and in every genre of expression produced by a people,” and is also termed “oral literature” or “orature” (Asante, 1998, p. 96). The term also “means, ‘that tradition whose origins stretch back to pre-colonial Africa and the beliefs associated with it’ (Conteh-Morgan, 1991, 126)” (Alkebulan, 2003, p. 31).
19. Historian Sterling Stuckey discusses the funerary practice of the ring shout dance: “Wherever in Africa the counterclockwise dance ceremony was performed—it is called the ring shout in North America—the dancing and singing were directed to the ancestors and gods, the tempos and revolutions of the circle quickening during the course of movement” (1987, p. 12).
20. See Thomas (1903).
21. A detailed discussion on the economic forces of slavery is beyond the scope of this study; however, for a thoughtful discussion on the effects of the *Asiento*, in terms of processing of slaves, see Bennett (1988, Ch. 2).
22. See Frazier (1949, pp. 123–168).
23. No one has documented exactly when the blues began, but based on the content and form, the blues began when Africans were forced on board the first slave ship (Murray, 1976).
24. According to Herbert (2000), the blues reflected “[b]lack cultural life . . . and the envisioning of new possibilities and new racial realities. Like its ancestors, the blues inspired active movement rather than passive reception. . . . Despite the connotations of its name, the blues were

‘good-time’ music . . . among people whose everyday lives were filled with adversity” (p. 152). The blues provided instant gratification.

25. Murray argues that the blues idiom or continuum, starting with the work songs, communicates the union of sacred and secular. For example, he discusses performance of the blues and gospel music. Both adhere to a common “technology of stylization”: the blues corresponds to the Saturday night function, and gospel music corresponds to the Sunday church function. However, both function as a means of release for Black people (Murray, 1976).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Cosmologically speaking, I looked for connections between African mythology and sound stylization in Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s song performances; mythology comprised issues of race, culture, gender, and class. Epistemologically speaking, I looked for my subjects’ use of a language that indicated Black and Black female truths. Axiologically speaking, I looked for goodness and indicators of right conduct in my subjects’ truths (lyrics and sound stylizations).
2. Good is intrinsically beautiful, and beautiful is intrinsically good. This connection is symbiotic and provides insight into a value system that, while no longer whole and operational in America, remains linked to Africa (Welsh Asante, 1994).
3. To describe something or someone as bad can actually mean that the thing or person is good. For example, when some Black people refer to something as being “bad,” the actual meaning is “good.” Take, for example, the statement “I’m bad.” It can mean “I am good,” “I look good,” “I sound good,” “I’m smart,” “I’m witty,” “I’m attractive,” and even “I’m strong.”
4. See Appendix H for definitions and explanations of the seven Nzuri aspects.
5. Looking through the lenses of Nzuri, I focus on sound motions within various lyrical moments in my subjects’ song performances and discuss how those moments illustrate Black women’s experiences and, more importantly, how those moments can be used to illustrate aspects of an African worldview.
6. My discussion of their life themes and the lyrics that demonstrate those themes is the topic of Chapter 4. Beauty was assessed in their song compositions in terms of convergences with existing research on African American social issues.
7. Fifty percent calculations are as follows. Table E.1, Bessie Smith: 32 songs \* .50 = 16; Table E.2, Billie Holiday: 13 songs \* .50 = 6.5 or 7; and Table E.3, Nina Simone: 19 songs \* .50 = 9.5 or 10.
8. Seven Analytical Categories of Data \* .50 = 3.5 or 4.
9. I analyzed the November 11, 1956, live version of “Billie’s Blues” from her concert at Carnegie Hall.

10. I analyzed the 1977 live versions of “Four Women” and “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” from Simone’s concert at Berkeley (see Appendix F).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. The practice of code switching includes saying one thing to mean another, as in the term “Juba,” where the word could bear several different contextual meanings, usually dealing with symbolic content so as to secure unity amongst enslaved Africans (reference to game song and food/slop); and also speaking one way (Ebonics) at home or in one’s community, and speaking another way in mixed company (“proper English”) (Johnson, 1992; Asante, 1991).
2. Janheinz Jahn’s *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World* was originally published in 1961. However, I am employing the revised edition that was published in 1990.
3. Alain Locke’s “The New Negro” and Arthur A. Schomburg’s “The Negro Digs Up His Past” were originally published in 1925 in *The New Negro*, which was edited by Alain Locke. Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” was originally published in 1926 in *The Nation*, vol. 122 (June 1926).
4. “[A]ufheben [a German verb] resonates with a double meaning: to cancel and to affirm” (Thompson, 1974, p. 10).
5. For better readability, I included Welsh Asante’s (1985) corresponding senses and some linkable components from her (1994) Nzuri theory and model in parentheses.
6. See “Glossary” at the end of this book for definitions of Kebede’s (1995) Ge-ez language-based music terms.
7. Some were not substantive to this study ( see Case, 1981; Cook, 1986a, 1986b; Crowther, 1989a, 1989b; Hazeldine, 1989; Birnbaum, 1991; Lands, 1991–1992; Rainey, 1991; Reitz, 1991; Hillman, 2002a, 2002b; Hawes, 2003). Others were quite useful (Cook, 1986a, 1986b; McGuire, 1986; Munnery, 1986–1987; Tucker, 1990; Harrison, 1993; Lands, 1993; Colombé, 1997; Hillman, 2002a, 2002b). The authors concluded that Bessie’s songs “Young Woman’s Blues,” “Preachin’ the Blues,” and “Poor Man’s Blues” were forceful, full and powerful, exciting, earthy, expressive, and moving.
8. (See Gleason, 1959; Wilson, 1961; Peters, 1972; Schier, 1972; Webb, 1973; Kendall, 1975)
9. (See Cook, 1983, 1986a; Stevens, 1981; Poses, 1983; Rusch, 1985; Bargebuhr, 1987; Bourne, 1987; Sohmer, 1987; Horricks, 1988; Tomkins, 1988; Rainey, 1989; Scott, 1989; Rowland, 1993; Bany, 1998; Williams, 2002).
10. (See Giddins, 1980; Siegel, 1980; Cook, 1984, 1993; Friedwald, 1986; Horricks, 1987; Brodacki, 1987; Blackwell, 1988; Bellerby, 1990a; Colombé, 1992; Sohmer, 1992; Waterhouse, 1993; Crowther, 1997; Chase, 1998; Hilgart, 1998).

11. Both present fairly glamorous depictions of her life. Ambassador Ed Perkins on September 26, 2003, told me that Nina Simone loved to drink champagne, and lots of it. He witnessed her drinking activities in Morocco in the 1970s while she was there to perform a concert. This kind of information is not found in her autobiography or in Nathan's depictions of her life.
12. (See Crowther, 1994; Stewart-Baxter, 1983; Pareles, 1998; Jungr, 1998; Kirk, 1998; Powers, 2001; Gallo, 2003). Their reviews supported my descriptions of Simone's selected songs. Less relevant to this study, but containing important information about Simone's performances of other composers' works, are the music reviews of Dallas (1979), Valentine (1979), Shewey (1983), Wyckoff (1983), McRae (1984), Stewart-Baxter (1985), Henriques (1986), Futrick (1987), Wolley (1988), Spencer (1991), Dupont (1992), McKenna (1993), Arundel (1994), Gribetz (1994), Jenkins (1995), Berg (1995), and Becker (1998).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. See Appendix One, "Discography," for the total sample of their original song compositions.
2. Several of their life experiences are shown in greater detail in Appendix Two, "Life Profile Matrix."
3. This discussion proceeds through the prism of aesthetic value in lyrics; therefore, in-depth discussions about history, sociology, politics, and economics are beyond the scope of this study.
4. Blues, with a capital "B," is intended to reference the blues continuum in African American music, which encompasses all genres present and past.
5. The title is a direct spin-off of the kinds of "songs of war" sung by Black soldiers. The "Jail House Blues" were often parodies of spirituals that told of soldiers contracting all kinds of blues, including incarceration blues—blue spirituals (Southern, 1997, p. 355).
6. New prisons, especially prisons for women, are being built at an alarming rate today (Davis, 1999b).
7. Davis (1999b) also argues that instead of sentencing petty offenders to jail terms, reform and rehabilitation are needed.
8. Many Black men fell prey to "high pressure propaganda about the brotherhood of man and all the promises of one equal" nation (Murray, 1970, p. 176).
9. I cannot help but to wonder if the title of this song references the Blackbirds comedy troupe of 1936—where predecessors of Richard Pryor began politicizing their comedy, as much as they could. See Watkins (1995, p. 489). Simone talks briefly about her encounters with Richard Pryor when she witnessed his early political comedy (Simone & Cleary, 1993, pp. 70–71).
10. There is evidence of reference to Blackbirds in the Wolof (Senegal) tale "Hare Seeks Endowments from Allah." The birds are tricked by Hare,



trapped in a bag, and delivered to Allah so that Hare can gain greater intelligence. The tale is supposed to teach a lesson about good sense: duty and ambivalence (Jarmon, 2003). It is interesting that intelligence can be paralleled with White supremacy and that Blacks continue to pay the price (from our imprisoned states) for their power.

11. According to Albert Murray (1970), this kind of psychological bondage is found in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* [1952], where Blacks [do not] choose [their] brotherhood name, it is chosen for [them]" (p. 177). Black women are lost in external definitions of who we are, and what makes us beautiful.
12. Singers like Bessie Smith, Mamie and Clara Smith (no relation), Ma Rainey, and Victoria Spivey sang openly about sex, female desire, and the female body (Harrison, 2000). This was in sharp contrast to the mission of middle-class Black women's clubs of the early twentieth century (also, see the discussions on the Love and Freedom themes later in this chapter).
13. Kern-Foxworth (1994) conducted a detailed analysis of how "Aunt Jemima" characters were used to market various products in America for over seventy years.
14. For example, early in Bessie Smith's career, Irvin C. Miller hired her for his Southern tours in 1912. However, he glorified the "brownskin" girl and eventually fired Smith because, in his words, she was too black, and she did not act like a lady—that is, Smith was known to drink, use profanity, fight, and gamble (Albertson, 1972).
15. According to Floyd (1995), the "motherless child" theme was derived from the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child" (p. 216). He calls this theme the "Sometimes trope," and he argues that uses of this trope in Black music convey despondency, loneliness, and mistreatment (p. 217).
16. For descriptions of Black people's attempts to reunite with family members, see Litwack (1979).
17. Negative aspects of Black male–Black female relationships have historical precedents in slavery. According to Maulana Karenga (1989), in order "to understand the negatives of our relationships, we must understand the negative characteristics of society which have shaped them" (p. 47).
18. According to D. Harrison (2000), male victimizers in Black female blues songs are identified as "mistreatin'" men.
19. "Billie's Blues (I Love My Man)," written by Billie Holiday. Permission to reprint lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.
20. For descriptions of physical abuse in slave households, see Malone (1992).
21. Simone was physically abused by her boyfriend Andy Stroud during a jealous tirade, and she still married him (Simone & Cleary, 1993).
22. "Long Gone Blues," written by Billie Holiday. Permission to reprint lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.
23. For an in-depth discussion on the tendency of Black females to defer to Black males, see Franklin (1997).

24. Due to the slavery-based trend of breaking Black families apart, Black men were often reluctant to commit to relationships or marriage. This trend evolved into the “playboy” tendency amongst many Black men who sought to mimic White males (hooks, 2001; Franklin, 1997). Also, see Franklin and Schweninger (1999), and Osofsky (1969).
25. “Somebody’s on My Mind,” written by Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog, Jr. Permission to reprint lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.
26. Davis (1999a) argues that Tin Pan Alley composers dictated notions of romantic love through their voluminous publication of “popular” songs, or ditties, about a certain kind of love. She further argues that the romance they depicted was restricted to people with leisure time and lots of money; of course, these kinds of attributes were not common amongst working-class Black people. Therefore, these White male standards of romantic, or Victorian-type, love were somewhat destructive to Black notions of “serious” love (Davis, 1999a, p. 165).
27. “Tell Me More and More (and Then Some),” written by Billie Holiday. Permission to reprint lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.
28. Levine (1977) states that “the physical side of love which, aside from some tepid hand holding and lip pecking, was largely missing from popular music [of the time], was strongly felt in the blues” (p. 279).
29. A heartfelt exploration of how to make love work in the Black family can be found in Haizlip and Haizlip (1998).
30. Marita Golden tells a moving story about her mother and father’s “real” love, the kind of love Simone references in her lyrics. See Golden (1993a).
31. Lyrics about romantic, out-of-this-world, heavenly love have given way to “Lust and struggles for power” as the defining nature of “black heterosexual romance” (hooks, 2001, p. 168).
32. Similar ideas about Black love in the social and political sense were espoused by singer Abbey Lincoln (hooks, 2001).
33. hooks also states that “love in the sense of sex, though fleeting, was/is a means to balancing our day to day struggles” (1991, p. 17).
34. It is important to note that “[a] woman is not considered *loose* and *fast* because of her sexual overindulgences, but rather because her behavior is out of scale with the harmonious rhythm of the community, which prefers less fluid, if not otherwise judicious relationships between men and women” (Harrison, 1972, p. 127).
35. “The cult of true womanhood” is dealt with in DuBois (1968), McDougald (1925), and Davis (1933).
36. Davis (1999a) refers to this complex situation as the “sexualization of race” or the “racialization of sex.”
37. “God Bless the Child,” written by Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog, Jr. Permission to reprint lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.

38. D. Harrison (2000) notes that several Black female blues singers often made the declaration that any woman who thinks she has her man all to herself is a fool. Smith's fluid ideology allowed her to assert such a declaration.
39. For a more in-depth discussion on Black women's ideological shift toward self-reliance, see Franklin (1997, pp. 32–42).
40. See McCartney (1992).
41. For a revolutionary discussion on ideological reorientation, see Friere (1970).
42. "Archetype" refers to "a primary or dominant image, impression, or symbol that recurs often enough in a body of literature or orature to be considered as an element of the whole experience," and it results from individual and collective memories of a shared past (Pennington, 2003, p. 296). Pennington believes that Sojourner Truth's discourse is archetypal of Black women's discourse, primarily due to the use of spiritual or religion-based personification—preacher or sermon mode.
43. During slavery, African Americans, "married" or single, were often forced to marry or partner with people they did not know or love (Gutman, 1976; Staples, 1994).
44. Levine also notes that phrases like "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" were proactive and reactive responses to White aesthetic ideals of physical beauty. Darker persons could find solace in the statement by invoking it when their darkness was attacked; they also used this phrase to declare that they were of "purer-blood" than light-skinned Blacks (1977, pp. 270–274).
45. Evidence in blues lyrics shows that many preferences for "Black" skin were gendered. It was acceptable for a male to be "Black," but depictions of "Black"-skinned women often painted them as evil and confrontational (Levine, 1977).
46. "The music [lyrics] of King Oliver, Bessie Smith, W. C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, James P. Johnson, and hundreds of others was impressing an affirmative consciousness of blackness" as an agent of cultural unity (Murray, 1970, p. 172).
47. Asante (1992a) refers to "skin recognition" as the first level of awareness in the transformation toward Afrocentric awareness (p. 49).
48. Her choice of generic colors is a restatement or continuation of Duke Ellington's statements about Blackness as political identity. Included are his compositions from the 1930s and 1940s, "Black, Brown, and Beige" as well as "Sepia Panorama."
49. It is important to note that although Smith's statements about Blackness, or skin color, as cultural identity are in line with the New Negro Movement, Smith's music was representative of the Black working class, and not the middle-class Black elitists and Black literati (Albertson, 1972; Murray, 1970). Her songs personify Blackness as a social and cultural identity, similar to representations of Blackness in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*.
50. Smith's generation would spawn the Civil Rights movement—her songs (blues continuum) helped birth, through synthesis of culture, historical continuity of struggle, and aesthetic extension of activist/elegant statement,

the nascent revolutionary stance that all identification with Blackness came to mean in Simone's protest songs (Murray, 1970). I elaborate further in Chapter 5 of this study.

51. Although "spiritualism"—"any philosophy, doctrine, or religion [that emphasizes] the spiritual rather than the material" as in "belief that the dead communicate with the living" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1976, p. 1246)—encompasses religion, I use the term "religion" because Smith, Holiday, and Simone's (auto)biographies were laden with reference to the specific term "religion."
52. In order for a theme to have been taken into consideration as a prevalent theme, it must have appeared in 50 percent of the total available sample of songs per singer. Religion did not appear in 50 percent of Smith's songs; therefore, it was ineligible as a prevalent theme in her songs (see step 6 in the section "Two-Part Method" in Chapter 2).
53. See Puckett (1926/2003), Levine (1977), Blassingame (1979), Abrams and Szwed (1983), and Stuckey (1987) for detailed descriptions of this phenomenon.
54. Bad luck would be removed with the use of "sacred medicine," which was believed to have been given to "mankind by God, who is called "Nzambi Mpungu" in the Bakongo spiritual systems (Thompson, 1983, p. 107).
55. One example of such dolls, or "minkisi-figurines," were made by Kongo-Cuban practitioners of Vodun of the nineteenth century to "mystically attack slaveholders and other enemies, and for spiritual reconnaissance. Minkisi are considered as "sacred medicines." Vodun is also known as "Voodoo." The doll or charm can be used to inflict bad luck on enemies or rivals and can also be used for spiritual recovery—good luck in a sense. In Haitian Vodun, the doll charms are also called "Pacquets" and "Prendas" (Thompson, 1983, p. 125).
56. According to Kirk-Duggan (1997) and Reed (2003), references to the "Lord," "God," and "Jesus" can be rhetorical and/or devotional. In either situation, through religious exclamation, a singer places herself in physical proximity with God, thereby blurring the lines between the sacred and secular worlds.
57. Smith's use of the word "Lord" could also be construed as a casual referent, like using the word "Hmmm" or "Well."
58. The devil is/has been characterized as the Yoruba deity Eshu by Western-minded Yoruba and missionaries. Eshu functions in many ways, and in Simone's reference there is likeness to the Black Cuban belief that Eshu has the power to modify "the worst of fates" (Thompson, 1983, p. 19). In African American culture, Eshu is well-known as the guardian of the crossroads. Many blues artists gave their souls to him "at the crossroads" in order to play music with a virtuosic intensity (Floyd, 1995).
59. For example, the Akan of Ghana place no credence in an original sin because humans are "born the purest soul[s], with a Nkrabea (destiny) ordained and endowed for [them] direct from and the hands of Nyankopon (Supreme Being)." A person's spirit may be reborn because his "fullness in goodness is not complete" (Harrison, 1972, p. 103).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Albert Murray argues that performance of lyrics—sound motion and spirit—brings the lyrics to life and thus imparts deeper values or ideals for negotiating bad and good times in life: “What the [B]lues instrumentation [including vocalization] in fact does, often in direct contrast to [or as reinforcement of] the words, is define the nature of the response to the [B]lues situation at hand, whatever the source” (1976, p. 68).
2. I believe that beauty and goodness are inherent in Smith, Holiday, and Simone’s artistic processes; therefore, as I describe and examine their spirit, rhythm, and creativity sources, I diverge from the Nzuri model in that I do not evaluate (assign value to) those sources.
3. This conceptual use of the terms “ashe” and “ehe” comes from Umfundalai dance class. To affirm (that is, evaluate) a dancer’s embodiment of a particular dance (statement), the class says, “Ashe!” To respond to (that is, evaluate) the style, execution, and success of a dancer’s total embodiment of a dance (effective statement), the class says, “Ehe!”
4. I use the terms “sound effects,” “sound motions,” “vocal acrobatics,” “sound rhythms,” and “stylization of sound” synonymously. Sound effects, in this study, should not be confused with the kind of sound effects that are used as background effects in staged theatrical productions.
5. It is common knowledge that African music (song performance) and dance always go together. They are viewed as two parts of the same kind of artistic expression. There is movement within each, and these movements can move the observer/listener (Nketia, 1974; Murray, 1970, 1976).
6. Though I comment on the importance of the thought in terms of rhythmic repetition, it is well-known that repetition of chorus lines is fundamental in the blues genre (Southern, 1997).
7. Early in her career, she lost a singing job because a club owner thought that she was too dark (Albertson, 1972).
8. For purposes of emphasis, I have italicized important words in lyrical phrases to indicate to the reader that said words will be described and examined in terms of sound stylization and quality, in order to point out how evaluation was derived.
9. D. Harrison (2000) notes that Black female audiences responded with ecstatic hollers when they heard these kinds of lyrics by such blues singers as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Sippie Wallace, and Victoria Spivey.
10. The cosmogram is a circle with a cross through the center. The cross represents the crossroads between the top half (“the mountain of the living”) and bottom half (“the kingdom of the dead”) of the circle (Thompson, 1974, p. 109). The cosmogram is used in several traditional and neotraditional African spiritual systems, including Yoruba or Ifa, Vodun, Santeria, Condomblé, Lucumi, and New World Voodoo. These systems are practiced throughout the world, and particularly in parts of Central and West Africa, as well as in Americas and the Caribbean (Thompson, 1974, 1983; Karade, 1994).

11. Thompson (1983) also explains that the line dividing the physical world from the spiritual world in the cosmogram is made of water. The spirits dwell below water.
12. RuT is derived from an Ethiopian language Ge'ez word "meroT," which means "to run or vibrato" (Kebede, 1995, p. 28).
13. Although Kebede (1995) derives his sound motion notation from Ethiopian Fellasha chant, the system includes African singing motions in general.
14. African ontology, anthropocentrically speaking, sees physical and spiritual life in the following order: (1) God; (2) the deities, ancestors, and living-dead; (3) humans; and (4) biological and nonbiological life (Mbiti, 1970). Humans are at the center of this ontology, but all life is interdependent and humans draw certain kinds of strength and wisdom from God, the deities, and the ancestors.
15. "The Blues God reminds us that [her] voice, even when silenced, still sings. [Her voice] ranges from celestial falsetto to basso profundo, both at once. [She] influences the Nommo that gives us imagery to our dances, style, to our gestures, and coherence to our actions. . . . [She] was the first to say TALK THAT TALK! WALK THAT WALK! and you shall be free. Liberated!" (Harrison, 1972, pp. 63, 64). The Blues God ethos is confident.
16. Many White club owners and White Americans, plus middle-class Northern Blacks, preferred lighter skin tones—the sepia color (Reitz, 1991; Hurston, 1981).
17. Black female blues singers often used declarative statements in their songs about what they were going to do—they would "go public" and start "talking smart" in order to inform other Black women that "going public" is a declaration of independence. This kind of Blues reminded Black women that they were part of a strong and significant kinship. After all, there was no need to deal with abuse or abandonment—they could be independent (Harrison, 2000, p. 89).
18. However, by following Maultsby's (1991) chart, Smith's song falls into the blues genre, which can be traced back through New Orleans jazz, vaudeville blues, ragtime, folk gospel, and folk spirituals. All of those "genres" are descended from African American work songs, field calls, and protest songs. Furthermore, Kebede (1995) describes this 1920s era of blues as "city blues" or "classic blues," that is, standardized versions of country or rural blues (p. 141).
19. In the Blues form, call-and-response between vocalist and instrumentalists is vital (Southern, 1997).
20. "Coolness" is a desirable attitude and demeanor in many traditional African systems of value (Thompson, 1974).
21. Kebede's (1995) ruT motion invokes the idea of the world of spirits and ancestors who dwell below the water line, and the sacred dimension of the secular world comes to mind.
22. Through epic memory: the perfect balance of spiritual and physical, sacred and profane, that comes from calling on the memory of ancestral wisdom: one invokes knowledge of right and wrong (Welsh Asante, 1985; Thompson, 1974).

23. The effect of silence and sound becomes a preacher's "elocutionary magic Nommo, which invokes the spirit [in man to] focus [on] those forces that [are] considered [to be] damaging to the cohesiveness of man" (Harrison, 1972, p. 81).
24. The shimmy motif extends into a motif of the jook joint, in its varied forms (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990).
25. Interestingly, Bessie Smith did not like to include drums in her recordings (Albertson, 1972; Brooks, 1982).
26. Floyd (1995) discusses how lyrics indicate the chariot trope, for example "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"; however, Smith's stylization of sound actually demonstrates the motion of the chariot as it "rolls along" (p. 213). The blues function in the same way as the spirituals in that they carry us through our pain and toward our joy; in the blues, the chariot became the train (Floyd, 1995; Murray, 1976).
27. The song is also known as "Black Man's Blues" (Davis, 1999a; Southern, 1997).
28. I find myself wanting to be bold enough to say what she said, the way she said it. When a song moves a listener toward positive action, it is beautiful (Murray, 1970).
29. When ruT pulsating sound motions are combined with Kinat, the sound motions bring about the "silt" mode (Kebede, 1995, p. 29). The silt mode is used to express outbursts of emotion, like anger. Smith sounds angry.
30. Ten thousand Black men fighting in the American Revolution; Black men comprising 20 percent of the American Navy in the War of 1812; 186,000 Black men fighting in the Union Army, as well as 30,000 sailors and 250,000 laborers during the Civil War; and, more temporally relative, the 400,000 Black men fighting in World War I (Bennett, 1988; Smallwood, 1998).
31. "Myth in its Afrocentric reinterpretation may be used to elevate and sustain African Americans in the challenges ahead." Improvisational myths are historically thematic but topically current (Welsh Asante, 1994, p. 8).
32. Hooks refers to Black integrity as the willingness to share with and validate one another, which will ensure our success in ways that financial wealth and hedonistic materialism cannot (1999, pp. 127-143).
33. However, according to Maultsby's (1991) chart of Black music, Smith's song is descended directly from work songs, field hollers, and protest songs of the 1600s. In terms of its form, the song is in the "blues" genre (Southern, 1997, Murray, 1976).
34. According to Olájubù (1997), "Yoruba command language" utilizes repetitions of three and seven to effectively communicate prayers to God.
35. See Stuckey (1987, pp. 252, 253).
36. Thompson refers to an Ashanti gold weight that depicts two people facing each other. One asks a question, and the other contemplates and responds. Both enter and exit the conversation correctly, and thus kill or "realize perfected sequence" in the dialogue (Thompson, 1974, pp. 18-24).

37. I chose this version because it is the last recording of “Billie’s Blues,” and arguably the best (Gleason, 1959). Traditionally, matured voices are considered more effective (Bebey, 1975).
38. “Billie’s Blues (I Love My Man),” written by Billie Holiday. Permission to reprint of lyrics granted by Edward B. Marks Music Company to Melanie E. Bratcher and Routledge.
39. According to Kebede (1995), the term “yizet” comes from the Ge’ez word “meyaz,” which means “to hold” (p. 28).
40. Melorhythm is pervasive in African singing style, and it speaks to the combination of melody, particularly speech-song melody and rhythmic accentuation (Bebey, 1975).
41. Hurston writes of Janie, “She was just basking in freedom for the most part without the need for thought” (1990, p. 88). Janie finally learned to let go of her worries about her fate with Tea Cup because she felt at peace with her beauty and allure.
42. For a more in-depth discussion on Black female self-reliance and valuation, see Chapter 5 in Hill-Collins (1991).
43. “Billie’s Blues” was originally recorded on July 10, 1936, in New York on the Vocalion label (Millar, 1979).
44. The rhythm and blues/urban genres descend from rural blues, which is directly connected to seventeenth-century work songs, field calls, and protest songs. The “Bebop” genre traces back to swing bands, New Orleans jazz, ragtime, and syncopated dance music. According to Griffin (2001), “Billie’s Blues” is shaped as a “formal blues,” like two of her other original songs, “Now or Never, Baby” and “Fine and Mellow” (p. 30).
45. The term “difat” comes from the Ge’ez language in Ethiopia. Difat is derived from the root word “medfat,” which literally means to “throw down” (Kebede, 1995, p. 28).
46. “The Bakong symbolized the daily journey of the sun around the mirrored worlds of the living and the dead by means of the spiral shape of the *kodya* shell. . . . A newly elected king would make a circular tour of his domain, symbolically passing through the worlds of the living and the dead, thereby acquiring mystic insights” (Thompson, 1983, p. 106). The function of the spiral is significant throughout many traditional African spiritual systems that deal with the origin and nature of spiritual power.
47. The Kongo (Bantu) life cycle cosmogram moves counterclockwise, and this stirs up the image of the ring shout dance. Evidence of this dance, in the Kongo Square in New Orleans and throughout the southern areas of North America, further indicates connections between Africa and America (Stuckey, 1987; Thompson, 1983).
48. Wilson (1999) states that rhythmic clash of accents (swing), percussive singing and instrument playing, call-and-response, tendency to fill up musical space, and aural motion are necessary components in African musical events (p. 159).
49. She often stated that she did not like her younger (higher-register) voice (Clarke, 1994; Nicholson, 1995).



50. Unfortunately, Universal Music Publishing Group “does not wish” for lyrics from “Lady Sings the Blues” to be reprinted; therefore, I am unable to include those lyrics in my discussion of the song.
51. I have contacted both ASCAP and BMI, and I have been unable to locate any information on the names of the instrumentalists or other vocalists on this 1977 live recording of the University of California, Berkeley, concert. This also applies to the song “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.”
52. No information about the instrumentalists and background vocalists is given in the liner notes of the 1994 release of the *Ne Me Quitte Pas* CD that includes the same version I am using.

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# Glossary

**Abiy-tsefa** means “[m]oderately fast. Equivalent to *allegretto*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Aesthetics** is the branch of philosophy that provides the technology of/for assessing perception of the beautiful and good, especially in creative products (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Africa** can be understood in four ways: political, anthropological, geographical, and philosophical. Political Africa speaks to the Africa post 1885, whereby political identities were assigned in conjunction with the development of countries. Anthropological Africa speaks to the fact that Africa is the birthplace of humans. Geographical Africa indicates the land mass/continent called Africa. Philosophical Africa implies that Africa is wherever culturally African people exist (Welsh Asante, 1995, class notes).

**Afrikanische Aufheben** is the “simultaneous suspending and preserving of the beat.” It is more complicated than syncopation in that accentuation/suspension can be placed on both weak single notes and long series of notes (Thompson, 1974).

**Ancestorism**, or the “ability to incarnate destiny,” refers to the African belief that “[d]estiny is achieved where man know[s] what is good and builds on what is right, what ought to be. The sequence depends upon a supposition: the person of character and the ancestors are one. Ancestorism is the belief that the closest harmony with the ancient way is the highest of experiences, the force that enables a man to rise to his destiny. . . . ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’” (Thompson, 1974).

**Apposition** is the idea of a suitable accompaniment. The term is incorporated to replace the term “opposite.” This reflects African holistic values that see phenomena as trinities; for example, the apposite of day is night and day (Diop, 1991).

**Araray** refers to high (relative octave range), ornamented, and fast chant (Kebede, 1995).

**ArwaSi** means “[f]ast. Equivalent to *allegro*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Ashe** is an Akan term that means “[s]o let it be” and is used to signify faith that some declaration of action or intention will be manifested (Ofori-Ansa, 1997).

**Ashe principle (Nzuri)** refers to the “affirmation of one’s tradition through reinforcement, reliance, enhancement and retrieval in the artistic product” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Audience** is connected to the artist. An audience is understood as part of the whole; it is not separate from the performer(s) (Maultsby, 1991).

**Ba** is an ancient Egyptian or Kemetic term for the soul—the external manifestation. It is the shadow of spirit (Gardiner, 1994).

**Call-and-response**, or “the politics of perfection,” refers to “solo-and-circle,” wherein “the leader receiving solid rhythmic support from the metrically accurate rolling repetition of phrases by the chorus, is free to embroider.” This process is seen as a level of “perfected social interaction” (Thompson, 1974).

**Ciret** means to “start high and proceed with downward *glissando*. The *Ciret* vocal melody is often connected to a cadence. The term is derived from *Cira*, ‘tail’” (Kebede, 1995).

**Complementary** denotes and connotes the following: that which is connected with another is made whole. A trinity is formed, similarly to the idea of apposition (Diop, 1991).

**Coolness**, or “truth and generosity regained,” refers to “a strong intellectual attitude, affecting incredibly diverse provinces of artistic happening, yet leavened with humor and a sense of play.” The concept is widespread

in Africa and can be translated to mean “calm, beauty, tranquility of mind, peace, verdancy, reconciliation, social purification, purification of the self, moderation of strength, gentleness, healing, softness (compared to cushions, silk, even the feel of a brand-new mattress), silence, discretion, wetness, rawness, newness, greenness, freshness, proximity to the gods” (Thompson, 1974).

**Correct entrance** and exit, or “killing the song,” “cutting the dance,” or “lining the face,” refers to a soloist controlling the song by ending any given phrase properly (Thompson, 1974).

**Cradle songs** describe the role of song texts that usually reference typical life situations, mainly children and family. They also convey matters of personal interest—such as strained relationships and envy—and are used for reflection and commentary (Nketia, 1974).

**Creativity source** comprises the third innermost “ntuonic unit,” that is, “the creative has been the most identifiable and attainable, yet the most intangible.” It has several roles: “First, it is indeed an expansive concept, one that enlarges and envisions the world as a specific society as well as the artist him/herself. Secondly, it is one of the material manifestations of spirit and rhythm, the two preceding sources. Thirdly, creativity is both communal and individual consequently affirming and serving both. Finally, creativity is the metatext for creation itself and through man’s and society’s creative expressions, clarity and purpose is shed on the Supreme Being’s master plan” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Culture** is the ordered, dynamic traditions and arts that establish and maintain human beliefs, customs, and institutions (Richards, 1985).

**Curvilinear sense** refers to “form, shape, and structure. This sense applies to and appears in most African dance. . . . The circular quality of the African artists’ world is ever apparent” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Deret** means to “sing in a low, deep, voice. Chest register. Also applies to singing with the lips closed, with clenched teeth, and with deep chest resonance. Humming at the lowest range of the male voice” (Kebede, 1995).

**Difat** means to “[d]rop the voice. Skip to a lower range. Often refers to singing an octave lower. The root verb is medfat, ‘to throw down’” (Kebede, 1995).

**Dimensionality sense** refers to the fact that “one aspect of depth in the African dance is texture. Music is textured; the dance is textured; the art is textured. The dimensional sense accounts for the fuzziness or graininess, that one sees, hears, or feels” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Ehe principle (Nzuri)** is “integral to the creative response. It places a value on expression that comes from an individual that is new but is a creative voice that is contained and continued within the value parameters of society. It acknowledges the existence of the activity and inherent in that acknowledgement is a critical response. Essentially, the *Ehe* principle is discovery and renewal” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Eph ebism**, or “the stronger power that comes from youth,” refers to admiration of fine form that is understood as the “beauty that blazes out of bodies which are most alive and young.” It includes the ideas of “swing: every note and every color strong; vital aliveness: playing the body parts with percussive strength; and flexibility: a priceless cultural resource—the suppleness of . . . dancers” who dance as if they “have no bones”(Thompson, 1974).

**Epic memory sense** “contributes to the ideal in the African artistic expression. Perfection cannot be achieved unless the experience or memory sense is drawn upon” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Ethos** is the modality of a cultural group. For Africans, the ethos is spirituality (Richards, 1985).

**Ethos aspect** refers to the “quality of expression that exudes spirit, emotion and energy” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Form aspect** refers to the “status of artistic product in terms of structure, shape and composition” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Function aspect** refers to the “operative relationship of artistic product to individual and community” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Ge’ez** is an Ethiopian language largely used in the recitation of sacred texts (Kebede, 1995).

**Ge’ez** “means low (relative octave range), first or foundation or free,” that is used to express “feelings of despair, disappointment, and sorrow” (Kebede, 1995).

**General songs** refer to the role of song texts that deal with philosophical and religious themes, or with specific problems of human existence, in a general way. They reflect on social order in general, instead of on the actual conflicts and stresses that a given social order generates. They also refer to symbols and manifestations of nature as well as to ritual symbols (Nketia, 1974).

**(the) Get down** refers to the “[d]escending direction in melody, sculpture, dance.” In African and African-derived music, it “is characterized precisely by a predominantly descending course in melody” (Thompson, 1974).

**Helix** is a spiral that is circles within circles. It is associated with origin and creation as in the primordial spiral. It is significant as a symbol and icon of creation. It depicts life/energy cycles (Diop, 1991).

**Heterogeneous sound ideal** refers to “a common approach to music making in which a kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting qualities of sound (timbre) is sought after in both vocal and instrumental music” (Wilson, 1999).

**Hidet** means “[g]radually getting faster and louder. Sing each syllable distinctly. Equivalent to *accelerando*, *crescendo*, and *portamento* at the same time” (Kebede, 1995).

**Historical songs** refer to the role of song texts that remind people of the past and of the values of a society. They are usually called “the songs of the elders,” and in a larger view, they manifest the past as a force in the present (Nketia, 1974).

**Holistic sense** refers to the idea that “the parts of a creation are not emphasized or accentuated beyond the whole; neither is the individual. Silence or stillness is as much a part of the music or dance as sound or movement” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Izil** “refers to the middle (relative octave) range, secondary, and moderate” that is “regarded as emotionally neutral” (Kebede, 1995).

**Ka** is an ancient Egyptian or Kemetic term for the spirit—the personality, the temperament that is shadowed by the soul (Gardiner, 1994).

**Kinat or aKina** means “upward *glissando*. Both terms are derived from the verb *maKnat*, ‘to raise up’” (Kebede, 1995).



**KurT** “[r]efers to singing a cadential formula which often ends on the home tone. Its root is the root is *meKureT*, ‘to end,’ or ‘to cut.’ Equivalent to *coda*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Looking smart**, or “playing the patterns with nature and with line,” refers to “moving with flair” in order to bring “craftsmanship, song, and line into even tighter grouping” (Thompson, 1974).

**Meaning aspect** refers to the “significance of expression in relationship to individual and community” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Merged** means “very slow, broad, and solemn. Equivalent to *largo* and *grave*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Method/technique aspect** refers to the “practical, physical and material means of realizing artistic product” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Milikitch** are “neumatic signs (curves, dots, dashes, etc.)” that are used in Ethiopian music notation (Kebede, 1995).

**Mode aspect** refers to the “manner in which artistic product is expressed” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Motif aspect** refers to the “incorporation and use of symbols in artistic product that reflect a specific culture and heritage” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Multiple meter**, or “dancing many drums,” refers to “the giving of the person to more than one musical argument, to more than one musician, to more than one source of musically elaborated form of speech” (Thompson, 1974).

**Nommo** is speech/sound that puts forth creation and sharing. It indicates the magic power of the uttered word (Jahn, 1990).

**Nommo spiritual mode (Nzuri)** is the “manifestation of energy in all of its varied forms both spoken and unspoken, movement and gesticulation” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Nuis-merged** means “[s]low. Literally ‘faster than *merged*.’ Equivalent to *adagio*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Ntu** is the vital life force. It is the being of existence (Jahn, 1990).

**Nzuri** is the theory of a Pan-African aesthetic wherein goodness and beauty are synonymous, and the opposite of beauty is ugly, but not bad (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Oral principle (Nzuri)** is the “[t]ransmission of traditional art forms including storytelling, music, dance, and literature.” “It is not to be confused with *Nommo*” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Oral tradition** is the tradition of transmitting knowledge, stories, morals, values, and ultimately culture through the use of sound accompanied by movement (Mutere, 1995).

**Pathos** is a modality in which pity, sympathy, tenderness, or sorrow is actualized.

**Polycentrism** refers to the following: “Movement . . . is motion spending time, the occupant of a time frame and not the moving from point A to point B” (Welsh Asante, 1985). In this study, it is conceived of as several centers of sound.

**Polyrhythm** “is the motion sense.” “The rhythmic quality of the aesthetic is the most distinguishable of its qualities. It is the world within another world, the deeper you travel, the more you feel, hear; it is multidimensional” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Reflective songs** refer to the role of song texts that are used to entertain, inform, praise, insult, exhort, warn, advise, or inspire their audiences. They can be philosophical, sentimental or satirical, and humorous or comical (Nketia, 1974).

**Repetition sense** refers to “the intensifying of one movement, one sequence, or the entire dance. Intensification is not static, it goes by repetition from one level to another until ecstasy, euphoria, possession, saturation, and satisfaction have been reached” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

**Rhythm** “is omnipresent; it permeates the existence of all beings and is expressed in *Muntu*, humanbeingness, *Hantu*, time and place, and *Kintu*, things” (Jahn, 1990).

**Rhythm source** comprises the second innermost “ntuonic unit” that is “ntuonic energy and life force that permeates and guides all acts of creations and the material results of artistic thought” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Rikrik** is the “[r]apid repeat of a single syllabic tone. This style of singing usually creates a sense of tension at the high range. Equivalent to *tremolo*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Ring shout** refers to the sacred circle dance that led to the development of Black Nationalism. It is typically danced in a counterclockwise movement wherein participants shuffle their feet, sing, and shout. At times, the circle is halted and the participants acknowledge the present in terms of their long past—they face southward and revere the ancestors and the spirit world (Stuckey, 1987).

**RuT** means “[t]hrobbing, warm and expressive singing style with rapid but narrow pitch fluctuations. The term is derived from *meroT*, ‘to run.’ Equivalent to *vibrato*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Sankofa** is an Akan word that means “[t]he past offers a guide for the future” or, essentially, know your past in order that you may know your future. It is commonly understood in symbolic use as an Akan gold weight carved to look like a bird, with head turned and looking backward (Ofori-Ansa, 1997).

**Serez** means “slight pause” (Kebede, 1995).

**Signifyin(g)** “is a way of saying one thing and meaning another; it is a reinterpretation, a metaphor for the revision of previous texts and figures; it is tropological thought, repetitions with difference, the obscuring of meaning—all to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations, and to achieve pleasing results for the signifier” (Gates, 1988).

**Siraye** is the “letter notation taken from the *Ge’ez* alphabet” that accompanies the milikitochneumatic signs in Ethiopian music notation (Kebede, 1995).

**Spirit** is “the metaphysical experience of humans and as such it provides an ethereal extension to both the super world of deities and the inner world of ideas, thoughts and emotions” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Spirit source** comprises the innermost “ntuonic unit,” that is, “the first manifestation of *Ntu* as it is most closely linked to *Kra* or the soul” (Welsh Asante, 1994).

**Trickster** refers to a figure in animal, human, and/or divine form that is able to attain its “ends through the application of native wit and guile rather than power and authority” (Levine, 1977).

**Trickster tales** “are told not just for humor, but to instill discipline and ingrain fear, a sense of accomplishment, pride, and humility” (Floyd, 1995).

**Tsefat** means “[a]s fast as possible. Equivalent to *prestissimo*” (Kebede, 1995).

**Umfundalai** is a Kiswahili word meaning essence or essential that “has come to mean artistic school of thought” (Welsh Asante, 1994). Also, “It is a technique used to devise or create a specific character or persona in an artistic product” (Welsh Asante, 1994). Furthermore, the term was coined by Welsh Asante to describe an African dance technique that is based on essential dance movements derived from worldwide African dance.

**Vividness cast into equilibrium**, or “personal and representational balance,” includes “stability or straightness: personal balance,” and “mid-point mimesis: representational balance.” The goal is to maintain and demonstrate a personal and representational balance of moral perfection as the subject of art (Thompson, 1974).

**Yizet** notes a detached and accented tone. It is “derived from the verb *meyaz*, to hold. Equivalent to staccato” (Kebede, 1995).



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