Detention Barracks Blues:
Masculinity and Difference in the Music and Biography of Lester Young

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Abstract:

Tenor saxophonist Lester “Pres” Young is often celebrated as a herald of modern jazz, an important innovator known for his highly sophisticated melodic approach and a tone that at once anticipated bebop stylings and paved the way for cool jazz. Young has equally been immortalized for his ‘originality:’ his eccentric personality; his hip and cryptic jargon; and the pork pie hat emblematic of his particular sartorial style. Yet Young’s canonical status in jazz history is shadowed by the legend of his ill-fated induction into the U.S. Army during World War II. While many believe Young’s dishonorable discharge for possession and yearlong sentence in a detention barracks was the traumatic beginning to a tragic decline that claimed his music, and eventually, his life, Young’s posthumous biographers largely work to refute this narrative. My project critically examines the multiple discursive constructions of Young’s identity, seeking to uncover sites of difference articulated to race, gender, and sexuality within the denotation of ‘original.’ This work considers gender in biographical and critical texts, historicizes formulations of racialized masculinity at the moment of Young’s induction, and explores the role of speech and voice in identity configurations, toward a goal of contextualizing Young’s enigmatic persona.

Abrégé:

Saxophoniste ténor Lester Young est généralement considéré comme un héraut de jazz moderne parmi les amateurs de jazz. Il est un innovateur important, connu pour ses mélodies sophistiquées qui anticipaient le style du bebop, et pour son timbre doux qui a inspiré cool jazz. Young a également été immortalisé pour son "originalité": sa personnalité excentrique, son jargon cryptique, et son style vestimentaire inhabituelle, démontré par son chapeau "pork pie" typique. Pourtant statues canoniques de Young dans l'histoire du jazz est ombragée par la légende de son intronisation dans l'armée américaine pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Beaucoup de gens croient que le renvoi pour manquement à l'honneur de Young et sa peine d'un an dans une caserne de détention était traumatique commençant une baisse tragique qui a détruit sa musique, et finalement, sa vie. Cependant, ses biographes travaillent surtout à nier ce récit. Mon projet examine de façon critique les nombreuses constructions narratives de l'identité de Young, et je tente de découvrir les lieux de différence reliée à la race, le sexe et la sexualité sous le titre de «original». Ce travail considère le sexe dans les textes biographiques et critiques, historicise des concepts de masculinité racialisée au moment du service de l'armée de Young, et explore le rôle de la parole et de la voix dans la création d'identité, avec un but de contextualiser le personnage énigmatique de Young.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

> *There is a big story to be told about the life and death of Lester Young…*
> John Hammond[1]

Jazz critic Dave Gelly prefaces his biography of tenor saxophonist Lester Young with a striking quote from an interview with François Postif in 1959, shortly before Young died: "But you take a person like me. I stay by myself, so how do you know anything about me?" Though considered a major star in the jazz firmament by enthusiasts, the mention of Lester Young's name will generally, as Gelly has noted, "be greeted by blank looks."[2] Explanations of Young's obscurity follow a narrative of tragic decline: Young rose to prominence in the late 1930s with the Count Basie band, only to be conscripted by the U.S. Army in 1944 at the height of his career. After unsuccessful training, Young was later dishonorably discharged for drug possession and made to serve a harrowing sentence in a detention barracks. Many believe this experience destroyed Young in the prime of his artistic life, robbing him of his creative spirit and pushing him over the edge of a precipitous descent into alcoholism and drug use that would eventually end his life. Written into this narrative is the conclusion that Young's tragic flaw was ultimately his 'sensitive' nature.

While he is revered for his sonic innovations and viewed as highly influential on the progress of midcentury jazz, Young has always been pegged as an eccentric. References to Young are rarely without comment on his exceptionality. One particularly striking depiction, from pianist Bobby Scott, characterizes Young as "a visitor from a small planet. Everything that I'd imagined to be way out and bizarre was living reality in Prez."[3] Young is known for an offbeat sartorial style that included his trademark pork pie hat. Widely credited with popularizing jive terms such as 'cool,' and 'dig,' Young was reputed for his distinctive jargon that only those close to him could interpret. Further, Young's musical expression was constantly touted as remarkably different from the popular styles of his day. Commentators have framed these differences variously, with understandings of Young's identity ranging from the negative

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[1] John Hammond, "Lester Young," in Lewis Porter, ed., *A Lester Young Reader* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 28.
[2] Dave Gelly, *Being Prez: the Life and Music of Lester Young* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), ix.
[3] Bobby Scott, "The House in the Heart," in Porter, *Reader,* 191.

(bizarre and alienating) to the positive (original and genius). As such, Young's assertion in the above quote – "I stay by myself" – seems to be included in order to indicate his awareness of his distance (and difference) from his community. More importantly, Young's question of "How do you know anything about me?" speaks to a fundamental problem wrestled with in the discourse about his life and work. Studies of Young all attempt some deeper understanding of his enigmatic character, asserting his importance and inclusion in the jazz canon while insisting on his difference and distinction from it.

This project will critically analyze the historiography of Young's life, surveying the language of Young's biographers, critics, and peers, to seek the role of racialized gender in shaping their narratives of his difference. Drawing on critical theories of gendered and racial identity, I will examine what Michael Uebel calls the "cultural limits [that] define racial masculine identity," and locate those limits as they were constructed in the particular historical moment of American culture during World War II.[4] I follow Roderick A. Ferguson to suggest that the nationalist sentiment incited by wartime propaganda promoted an abstract ideal of a universal American citizen, an ideal that was white, heterosexual, and that patriotically supported the war effort. In order to foster this universality, a tightening grip of heteronormative controls pathologized racialized gender and sexual difference. As a figure embodying difference in each of those categories, Young is "multiply determined, regulated, and excluded by differences of race, class, sexuality, and gender."[5] I connect Young's transgression of these intersected categories to detrimental effects on public perception of his identity as a man, and by extension, assumptions about the meaning of his music. After locating these concerns in the biographical discourse surrounding Young, I intend to historicize their influence further by considering the differences in norms of masculine identity in the forty-year gap between the period of Young's musical activity during World War II and the time of his posthumous biographies. Following this, I will illustrate the ways in which biographers were informed by contemporary notions of manhood, using these notions to refashion Young's racial and gender identity according to their individual goals. As an important, influential, and beloved figure in jazz history, extensive research on the facts of Young's life and music has already been carried out. I do not hope to add

[4] Michael Uebel, "Men in Color: Introducing Race and the Subject of Masculinities," In Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2.
[5] Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2004), 14.

any previously unknown facts to this body of research, nor to prove or disprove any of the authors' conclusions. My intention, rather, is to examine this discourse at a critical distance, looking outside the frame of existing biographical research to identify where gender and race have shaped interpretations of the facts of Young's biography and conclusions about his subjectivity. In the initial chapter of this thesis, I survey Young's biographical materials and note the common legends that emerge as important stories in his life. I analyze these legends for their symbolic significance, discovering the authors' constructions of Young's racial and gender identity through a close reading of the language of their biographical texts.

Jazz historiography is well known to be a male dominated field, both by writers and musicians. Yet traditional jazz biographies generally have not considered matters of masculinity, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, gender has often been seen as only problematic for women. This arises from the presumed dominance of the male subject position: Homi K. Bhabha explains that masculinity (and further, *white, straight* masculinity) is defined as the "natural state" against which other gender performances are "compulsively" compared against and found lesser.[6] Yet men do not experience idealized masculinity as "natural.' Judith Butler asserts that gender does not occur naturally but is performed: "we must begin with the presupposition that masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but accomplishments."[7] Bhabha and many others observe that the supposed fixedness of masculinity as the natural standard leaves men as subjective individuals in constant tension with the shifting and plural definitions of masculinity around them. From this perspective, when I refer to masculinity, I am referring to formulations and performances that were understood as masculinity at a particular historical moment, with the understanding that the term is fluid. Secondly, as Scott DeVeaux has noted, narratives of jazz history have often sought to counter racist stereotypes by legitimizing the artistic genius of black men and the value of jazz as a modern American art form.[8] As such many biographies, written by journalists and fans with the goal of celebrating the artistry of the subject, contribute to a consistent trend in jazz history toward hagiography. Biographies of Young, though their narratives underline the misfortune of his life and acknowledge his tragic flaws,

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[6] Homi K. Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" in Maurice Berger et al., eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[7] Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," Berger et al., *Constructing Masculinity*, 24.
[8] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25 no. 3 (1991): 525-560, 3.

tend to contain traces of hagiography in their celebration of his originality and their emphasis on Young's misunderstood character and genius.

In recent decades issues of gender in jazz have begun to attract scholarly interest. Initially, many of these projects were devoted to restoring the presence of women that have too long been discredited and excluded from the narratives of jazz history. Mirroring the progression of gender scholarship that began exploring masculinity in the 1990's, more work on the role of masculinity in the jazz scene has emerged.[9] Following the examples of Nichole T. Rustin, David Ake, and others, my goal is to contribute to this stream of scholarship that has been working to illuminate the complex intersectional position black male jazz musicians had to navigate. As Rustin writes in her study of jazz bassist Charles Mingus and postwar black masculinity, "while jazz was a counterculture that embraced black men, it also policed articulations of black masculinity that did not fit within certain models."[10] In my second chapter, I outline models of masculinity enforced both within the jazz world and in the mainstream world of militaristic World War II America. Focusing on the incidence of Young's induction into the military and subsequent trial, I take this penultimate legend of Young's life as a starting point to examine the tensions between these models of masculinity and the impact of their restrictions on Young, on the postwar reception of his music, and on his later biographers.

One of the most important factors to consider in analyzing critical and biographical discourse on Young is the gendered language used to describe him. Young's music and his character are described in feminized terms such as "soft," "sensitive," "gentle," "introspective," and "beautiful." Although these words might be interpreted to mean that Young himself was feminine or effeminate, I am more interested in exploring the queer subtexts of such gendered language. Young's status as a unruly queer figure in jazz is strongly evident in the many thinly veiled homophobic passages raising a knowing eyebrow about Young's style of dress, speaking, and carrying himself, as well as in many authors' explicit and indignant rebuttal of "false rumors" that Young could have been homosexual. Let me make it clear that I am not interested whatsoever in "outing" Young in any way regarding his sexual orientation. In using the term 'queer,' I am following after Sherrie Tucker's line of thought in her article "When Did Jazz Go

[9] Michael Uebel, "Men in Color," 1.
[10] Nichole T. Rustin, "Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture," PhD Diss., New York University, 1999, 3.

Straight?"[11] I do not wish to perform a scavenger hunt of moments and qualities that add up to a "queer" identity for Lester Young. Rather, I wish to question or "name the norms" that Young has been discursively contrasted against. As Tucker points out:

> If a dominant fantasy of the "jazzman" (I am using "man" intentionally) in one discursive moment or another is constructed, even romanticized, as hyper-hetero-masculine, we might aim to disrupt this routine by proving that some actual jazz musicians and fans "deviate" from that norm. But to do so without "naming the norm" and "considering it perplexing," is to risk mapping another set of desires on bodies already saturated with sexualized and romanticized projection.[12]

Further, I follow Roderick A. Ferguson's 'queer of color' analysis as a mode of examining the ways in which the gender and sexual heteronormativity of minority racial identities is more strictly policed and therefore more harshly punished.[13]

My goal is to historicize the masculine norms that acted as "straightening" influences in the historiography of Young's life and works. I explore how Young became situated (and as a result, ostracized) as a queer figure in the sense that he transgressed the requirements of racialized masculine performance in the community and era in which he lived. If I categorize the language Young has been described in as 'feminine,' this is because these were the dominant norms under which the discourse was produced. Writers described Young in feminized terms because during Young's lifetime (and continuing after) gender was understood as a strict binary. Young did not satisfy the conditions of "masculine," therefore he had to be "feminine." This created a problem for writers: although certain of Young's qualities were culturally coded as feminine, Young was still a man.[14] As a successful jazz saxophonist in a very masculinist music scene, many writers balked at the idea of categorizing Young as feminine. Therefore, in order to reclaim Young and try to understand or excuse what was understood as femininity but what essentially amounts to "queerness," writers used coded words to describe Young, and usually attributed these "feminine" qualities to the products of a creative sensitivity.

One particularly remarkable example of this gendered discourse is found in the treatment of Young's speaking voice. Writers have often characterized Young's speaking voice as "soft," and "high." Lee Young, Lester's younger brother, described his reunion with Lester when Lee

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[11] Sherrie Tucker, "When Did Jazz Go Straight?: a Queer Question for Jazz Studies," *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation* [Online] 4 no. 2 (2008).
[12] Sherrie Tucker, "When Did Jazz Go Straight?," 2.
[13] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black,* 4.
[14] Qualities of softness, beauty, sensitivity, and shyness continue to be culturally coded as feminine to this day.

was a little boy. Lester had been away for several years and Lee did not know his brother. Upon being reintroduced, Lee blurted out, "He sounds like a girl!"[15] Lee Young recalls later realizing that he himself had the same vocal register as Lester, and that he had simply perceived Lester's to be high. Further, the audio evidence of Lester Young's speaking voice preserved by François Postif's 1959 interview reveal Young's vocal tone to be not particularly high at all, simply that of an average tenor. While Young's voice would certainly have deepened somewhat with age at the time of the 1959 interview, it seems unlikely that his speaking voice ever did actually sound "like a girl" in terms of register or timbre. Rather, it seems that something in his presentation, and in the manner in which he spoke, was read as feminine (or as not typically masculine) by his peers and critics.

Unable or unwilling to describe it explicitly as feminine or queer, writers and friends translated this quality into the terms "soft" and "high." The final chapter of my study will address gendered aspects of Young's voice and speech through an analysis of Postif's interview. The interview has functioned not only as a major primary source for biographers citing Young's subjective opinions on the legends of his life, but as the main archive of both the sound of Young's voice and the particularities of his speech. This document is considered particularly authentic as it is available in full, unedited form, and Young specifically requested Postif's permission to be able to freely "talk nasty." Following Monica Hairston O'Connell and Sherrie Tucker's recent work on aurality in jazz trombonist Melba Liston's interviews, I explore the aural backdrop of Postif's interview with Young, as well as the role voice and speech play in the performance of black masculinity.

By considering biographical accounts of Young's life and music at a critical distance, I aim to address Young's question – how can we know anything about him? How does what we know, or think we know, about him affect our understanding of his music?

[15] Lee Young and Patricia Willard, "Lester's Style: The Lee and Lester Young Band," in Porter, *Reader,* 34.

Literature Review

Sherrie Tucker and Nichole T. Rustin's foundational anthology *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz* was the first volume to name gender analysis as its core focus, though the authors take care to acknowledge that scholars had been "listening" for gender in jazz historiography for many years prior. Stirred by an interest in women jazz musicians that grew out of the 'Second Wave' feminist movement, scholars searched for participants in the jazz scene that had been obscured by male-dominated jazz historiographies.[16] While many of the contributions to *Big Ears* illuminate women subjects, the project's intent is not simply to insert women musicians into pre-existing histories: rather, women come into focus as a result of "listening differently" to the margins of jazz culture.[17] By "listening" for gender in jazz histories, the authors of *Big Ears* encountered constructions of race, sexuality, and embodiment. Their volume emphasizes the legitimacy of considerations of gender as a focus for jazz studies, and challenges traditional evolutionary narratives of jazz history.

As scholars have established, within jazz subculture, normative models of racialized gender performance, while discrete from mainstream hegemonic ideals, produce and restrict both personal identity and musical production. As Lara Pellegrinelli demonstrated in her contribution to *Big Ears,* jazz performance has been gendered since its "birth," descending from a ragtime 'father' and a blues 'mother.' Pellegrinelli details how these two roots of jazz language were coded according to a gender binary: "The blues is feminine, a natural product of the untrained voice associated with the body and the sexuality of its performers, whereas ragtime is masculine, associated with instruments as tools and technical skill."[18] Demonstrating the disappearance of vocal forms from jazz histories after "birth," Pellegrinelli argues that the blues remains a primitive ancestor: progress meant men abandoned the voice and emotive expression to master instruments and advance modernity and sophistication. These codes meant musical expression became restricted according to gender.[19]

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[16] Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, "Introduction," in Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, eds., *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 9, 13.
[17] Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears,* 2.
[18] Lara Pellegrinelli, "Separated at 'Birth': Singing and the History of Jazz," in Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears,* 34.
[19] As a result, women have largely been relegated to the position of singer, and, as Sherrie Tucker has posited, as symbolic sexual foil to the male band. In her important article "When Did Jazz Go Straight?" Tucker theorizes that hegemonic gender roles in jazz have aligned the singer and the instrumentalists as a symbolic sexual relationship. This symbolic relationship still exists. See Tucker, *When Did Jazz Go Straight?,* 11.

Jazz scholarship asserts that gendered assumptions about the musical content of jazz also map onto the biographical narratives of musicians producing it. In her book on Billie Holiday, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday,* Farah Jasmine Griffin investigates the "myths" that have been written into Holiday's biography: "There are images and myths that seem to swallow up individuals who are too complex to be explained by them, yet cannot escape their powerful hold. This is especially so when these myths are undergirded by social, political, and economic forces."[20] Rooted in constructions of Holiday's race, gender and sexuality, Griffin argues that these myths inform our understanding of Holiday's musical sound as tragic, a direct correlation between her musical output and assumed raw feeling. Acknowledging that her own narrative "cannot help positing an alternative fictional Holiday," Griffin asserts the impossibility of accessing the "authentic" or "real" subject, and instead focuses on discourse.[21] My analysis of Young's biography follows similar explorations, and while I likewise cannot avoid constructing my own fictionalized impression of Young, my intention is to resist projecting my own conclusions about Young's subjectivity and to restrict my analysis to the level of biographical discourse.

Sherrie Tucker's work similarly questions the role of intersectional gender constructions in historical narratives, both in biography and in musicians' own subjective understandings of self. Tucker's book, *Swing Shift,* searches for stories of women's participation in swing music during World War II. Tucker carefully historicizes oral histories of the women's experiences, the music they produced, and their conception of themselves as musicians, contextualizing them according to the shifts in gender roles during wartime and rooting them in discourses of race and gender. Here, as in her most recent work on Melba Liston's recorded interviews, Tucker's treatment of oral histories is exemplary. Tucker's careful consideration of contextualizing variables of gender and race, and her caution to resist the "temptation to use oral histories as authenticating sound bites," heavily influences my final chapter.[22]

These explorations of women in jazz form the body from which studies of jazz and intersectional masculinity extend, and my work has benefitted from their model of the many ways in which music can acquire gendered meaning. As David Ake disclaims at the opening of

[20] Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 28.
[21] Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, xiii.
[22] Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 26.

his important piece "Regendering Jazz: Ornette Coleman and the New York Scene in the Late 1950s": "Musical practices, like all cultural practices, only 'mean' in relation to other practices."[23] Particular instruments, timbres, or phrasings cannot be correlated to gendered qualities without an exterior framework of discourse. In other words, the meaning in descriptions of Young's saxophone tone as "soft" depends on pre-existing associations in language of softness with femininity. As Ake notes, "jazz communities had already established tacit conceptions of the masculine," structural codes for male behavior that translated here into musical language. Ake analyzes the gendered framework that set the stage for the uproar surrounding "cultural outsider" Ornette Coleman's musical style. His work provides an excellent example of the role of gendered discourses as informing the reception of musical style and the musician producing it.[24] Nichole T. Rustin's work on bassist and composer Charles Mingus's autobiography *Beneath the Underdog* further expands the web of the multiple factors influencing a musician's reception. In her dissertation, "Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture," Rustin challenges direct, one-to-one correlations between the events of a musician's life and the music they produce: "The musical performance has often been interpreted as another type of autobiography – it appears to offer unmediated insight into the psyche."[25] As evidenced by the misguided critical bias against Young's postwar music based on assumptions of his personal trauma, this oversimplified correspondence obscures the intricacies connecting the performance of music to the performance of black masculinity. Rustin uses an interdisciplinary approach to explore the meaning in Mingus's own discourse about himself with regards to black masculine identity. Though I do not have the subjective access afforded by autobiography, Rustin's work informs the ways in which I examine the discursive complexities of biography. As such my project does not explore Young's subjectivity, but rather the influence of models of black masculine identity and music on Young's biographers, critics, and peers.

Both Rustin's and Ake's projects followed several years of scholarly exploration into constructions of masculinity. As summarized in the 1995 anthology *Constructing Masculinity,* scholars had established the multiple and socially constructed nature of masculinity, and explored the great variety of masculine experience and enactment. A few years later, the 1997

[23] David Ake, "Regendering Jazz: Ornette Coleman and the New York Scene in the Late 1950s," in David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 62.
[24] Ake, "Regendering Jazz," 74.
[25] Nichole T. Rustin, "Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture," PhD Diss., New York University, 1999, 15.

volume *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* asked, "How do men inhabit simultaneously their colour and their gender?"[26] Exploring the questions that extend from that intersectional starting point, the work's authors asserted that "offering multiple paradigms for reading the cultural intersections of race and masculinities enriches our general understanding of identities as constructed and negotiated within and against a complex historical matrix of alterities, against a 'web of difference.'"[27] I pattern my attempts to explore the 'web of difference' visible in the narrative constructions of Young's biography on these studies.

Robin D.G. Kelley's study of Malcolm X's performance of black masculinity during wartime demonstrates the countercultural and oppositional identity that was shared among bebop musicians, zoot-suiters, and youth of colour.[28] Style of dress, musical taste, and manner of speech all contributed to a performance of racialized masculinity that defied and challenged the dominant white hegemonic expectation.[29] Eric Lott further characterizes the hipster persona as an aggressive, revolutionary masculine identity, and connects its production to style topics of bebop innovation.[30] The analysis of hegemonic masculine ideals located in musical style – speed, power, intellectual complexity, penetrative power – surfaces in the discourse of jazz criticism throughout history. Krin Gabbard locates the correlation between sound and black male identity in his characterization of the trumpet as a phallic object, suggesting that jazz artists used their physical horns as a tool to assert their manhood. Young's biographer Frank Büchmann-Møller similarly suggests that Coleman Hawkins, Young's stylistic rival in the 1930s, was the first to transfer this phallic power to the saxophone and legitimize it as a solo instrument.[31] While masculinist praise was attributed to Hawkins, descriptions of Young were decidedly un-phallic, focusing instead on the innovation and intellectual approach of his softer, slower melodies.

Gabbard frames the construction of the jazz musician's identity as "manipulat[ing] musical modes of masculine sexuality," and argues that their construction is a way of signifyin(g) on

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[26] Uebel, "Men in Color," 2.
[27] Ibid, 11-12.
[28] Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II," in Harry Stecopoulos, and Michael Uebel, *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 232.
[29] Robin D.G. Kelly, "Riddle of the Zoot," 241.
[30] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," in Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 246.
[31] Frank Büchmann-Møller, *You Just Fight for Your Life: the Story of Lester Young* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 46.

mainstream models of masculinity.[32] The concept of "signifyin(g)" is a long-standing form of rhetorical African-American cultural criticism and creative expression: to signify is to take a text (literary or musical, or otherwise) and provide some form of critical comment. Gabbard's arguments here claim the agency of the subject in crafting their masculine identity. For those men whose sounds deviated from the hard and fast dictates of jazz masculinity, some compensated off stage in the form of aggressive or violent practices coded as hyper-masculine. Gabbard suggests Miles Davis's proud investment in boxing as one compensatory example. [33] Hazel Carby suggests Davis's violence against women also functioned as a bolster to his masculine persona, compensating for his musical intimacy with his male band members and balancing the introspection of his playing. [34]

In addition to the models of masculinity required within the jazz sphere, political formulations during the period of World War II brought additional expectations for men's identities. As Monica Hairston writes in her contribution to *Big Ears,* Popular Front political ideologies drew on the gendered aspects perceived in swing ("driving" "virile" "force") to privilege that music as a masculine art form that matched their conception of the American worker.[35] Black American men became insignia of Popular Front political goals. Further, the black male voice, such as Paul Robeson's, was politicized and adopted as emblematic of "people's music," which, as Lisa Barg theorizes, caused conflicts at the site of Robeson's own national and racial identities.[36] As Christina Baade and Sherrie Tucker have noted, the increasing draft and U.S.O. entertainment tours changed previously established understandings of swing performance. Stages on the home front were suddenly free, and black men and women took advantage of the performance opportunities newly opened to them. Similar vacancies in other industries brought about a blurring of societal roles that caused increasing anxiety over gender identity. As Baade explains in her study of British women's swing bands, women's work

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[32] Krin Gabbard, "Signifyin(g) the Phallus: Mo' Better Blues and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet," in Krin Gabbard, ed. *Representing Jazz* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 108.
[33] Gabbard, "Signifyin(g) the Phallus," 109.
[34] Hazel Carby, "Playin' the Changes," in *Race Men* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998). Leo Braudy has also remarked that this was a strategy of avoiding and countering gender and sexual suspicion used by artistic men in all fields, such as Ernest Hemingway. See Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 396.
[35] Monica Hairston, "Gender, Jazz, and the Popular Front, in Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*, 71.
[36] Lisa Barg, "Paul Robeson's Ballad for Americans: Race and the Cultural Politics of 'People's Music,'" *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2 no. 1 (2008).

threatened men's "prestige."[37] This shift resulted in more strictly enforced hegemonic gender norms in Britain, much as in America: "the nation became obsessed with maintaining, even heightening, gender difference."[38] For men, this meant that the only full expression of culturally acceptable masculinity was through conscription and embodiment of military ideals.[39]

A further extension of gender studies, queer theory, disrupts structures of heteronormativity by exploring behaviors and identities that deviate from those norms. As Roderick A. Ferguson theorizes in his book *Aberrations in Black,* constructs of 'universality' in American culture cause stricter policing and harsher punishment for those that do not confirm to the 'universal' identity. Ferguson's queer of colour analysis emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in African American culture. Identifying African American culture as a "site of gender and sexual formations that have historically deviated from national ideals," Ferguson argues that instituting the nation as "the domain determined by racial difference and gender and sexual conformity" enables the state to enact racist control through restrictions on gender and sexuality.[40] Ferguson concludes that the state creates an abstract concept of the citizen in order to establish universality. This ideal of an abstract universal citizen opposes the individual particularities that establish non-heteronormative racial identities. A queer analytic provides a space for questioning and disrupting the multiple formations of heteronormativity.[41]

Biographies of Lester Young

Throughout this project, I will draw from five biographical works that form the bulk of the literature on Young's life and music. Of these, three are regarded as definitive for their detailed data collection. First published in 1985, Lewis Porter's biography *Lester Young* was the first of its kind.[42] Biographical interest in Young had begun to emerge after researcher John McDonough first published his archival work detailing Young's 1945 court martial proceedings, as liner notes

[37] Barg, "Ballad for Americans."
[38] Christina Baade, "The Battle of the Saxes": Gender, Dance Bands, and British Nationalism in the Second World War," in Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears,* 92.
[39] Baade, "Battle of the Saxes," 91.
[40] Ibid, 2.
[41] As one example, Lisa Barg takes a different approach to applying queer theoretical framework in her musicological work to explore "queer contexts" that inform the techniques and themes of Billy Strayhorn's compositions. See Lisa Barg, "Queer Encounters in the Music of Billy Strayhorn," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 no. 1 (2013): 771-824.
[42] Lewis Porter notes in the preface to the revised edition of *Lester Young* that Dave Gelly had in fact published a short book on Young the previous year, but Gelly's book did not incorporate the most recent biographical research. See Lewis Porter, *Lester Young*, Rev. ed., (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2005), x.

for a boxed set of recordings for Time-Life in 1980.[43] Porter's work comes from his perspective as a musician and academic, and insistently emphasizes empirical analysis of Young's music. As Porter indicates in his preface, this was out of deference to Young's assertion that "[my life] was music; that's all there was."[44] Through this focus, Porter creates a comprehensive catalogue of Young's style techniques and innovations in order to untangle them from his influences and imitators and claim Young's right to the title of jazz composer. Porter then wields this data to take issue with critical conception of the decline in the quality of Young's artistry after his army experience, demonstrating that Young's style and sound do not change drastically after 1945 from a technical standpoint. Acknowledging the mythical quality of Young's persona, Porter privileges data, not impressions, in an attempt to objectively prove Young's consistent artistry, or, as he puts it, "rectifying the situation."[45] Yet, in the course of this project, Porter inescapably posits his own narrative, positioning Young as a misunderstood genius, in the wrong place at the wrong time. Porter's efforts to present hard data extended to a collection of primary materials he published six years later, drawn together by his contextualizing commentary. This meticulous work has been an invaluable resource for subsequent scholars of Young, including myself.[46]

Five years after Porter's music-centric biography was published, Danish librarian Frank Büchmann-Møller published his painstakingly thorough research on Young's life, *You Just Fight for Your Life: The Story of Lester Young.* The book was published in tandem with a reference work cataloguing Young's entire musical output. Büchmann-Møller's project follows Porter's corrective mission. The work explicitly states in the first paragraph of the foreword, written by Porter, that discourse on Young's life was "too much legend and not enough factual knowledge," and that this volume was intended to "set the record straight."[47] Büchmann-Møller's narrative presented every available detail known about Young's life, with a similar emphasis on the tragic misunderstanding of Young's value.

Over a decade later in 2002, Douglas Henry Daniels, a scholar of black studies and history, published a critical biography nearly double the length of Büchmann-Møller's work. Daniels draws on many of the same factual materials Büchmann-Møller presented, but brings a new

[43] David Horn, "Book Review: Lester Young," *Popular Music* 6, no. 1 (1987), 117.
[44] Porter, *Lester Young,* x.
[45] Porter, *Lester Young*, xiii.
[46] Porter's original publication was "part of the broadly based 'Twayne's Music Series', the main purpose of which is to provide the musically literate reader and the specialist with bio-critical studies in which musical analysis plays a significant part." See David Horn, "Book review," 118.
[47] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight For Your Life,* xi.

critical perspective to interpreting and contextualizing those findings, along with extensive original interviews. Of the biographers I survey, Daniels is one of only two Americans, and is the only writer in the subject position of an African-American man. I do not note this in order to discredit or essentialize Young's white and European biographers, or to discredit their perspectives on his work. Guthrie P. Ramsey calls for acknowledgement of the influence of racial identity on a scholar's work, but asserts that scholars of all races bring productive knowledge to the table, and none should be discredited nor exclusively sanctioned.[48] Yet, as Sherrie Tucker points out, "Although often fanatically well intentioned, most of these white male journalists, aficionados, and musicologists have mostly not been positioned in ways conducive to challenging origin stories, periodizations, or canons produced by white brokers of black culture."[49] The different perspective afforded by Daniels's racial subject position and his focus on issues of race are not only evident in his discourse, but are explicitly stated as a goal of his historical project at the outset of the book.[50] Daniels suggests that his strategy to contextualize Young's experience and primary stories of his life in issues of black history and culture could be 'controversial,' as "often the opinions of Black folk are not taken seriously, both in the United States in general and in jazz scholarship in particular."[51]

British jazz journalist Dave Gelly's book *Being Pres: the Life and Music of Lester Young,* published in 2007, was his second publication to profile Young. His first, published in 1984, was a brief "appreciation" essay that formed a part of a biography series, effectively, the first book about Young.[52] Gelly proclaims his intent to bring together Young's life and art into one cohesive chronological narrative, something he feels the more meticulous, research-based

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[48] Guthrie P. Ramsey, "Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade," *The Musical Quarterly,* 85 no. 1 (2001): 1-52. I would be amiss when broaching the racial identity politics of scholarship not to address the incongruence of my own identity to this topic. As a white, female Canadian, I must acknowledge my complete distance from issues of racialized masculinity, and cede any pretense to understand black, male, queer, or American subjectivity. It is for this reason that I attempt to remain grounded in my outsider position and limit my explorations to discursive analysis.

[49] Tucker, *Swing Shift,* 14.

[50] See also John Gennari, "(Much More Than) A Few Words About Jazz," in *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 1-17. Gennari notes that as their voices are the minority, African-American critics can often feel "the burden of 'representing the race' in a way that answers to the complex and often contradictory demands of their communities," 8.

[51] Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: the Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 5.

[52] David Horn notes that an unpublished PhD dissertation, "A Study of Lester Young and His Influence Upon His Contemporaries," produced in 1981 at the University of Pittsburgh by Robert A. Luckey existed before this, but neither Gelly nor Porter acknowledged or reference it. This work did not surface in my search for literature on Young. See David Horn, "Book Review," 118.

biographies did not do. Gelly's storytelling, journalistic narrative makes no pretense of objectivity, and instead presents his interpretation of Young's identity.

French scholar Luc Delannoy's work *Pres: The Story of Lester Young* was inspired by the recollections of Young's peers, principally, Gunther Schuller. Delannoy eschews the record-straightening approach taken by his predecessors: he specifically notes that his work is not meant to be an all-inclusive 'magnum opus.' Reflecting on the "mythical or heroic proportions" biographical subjects can take on, Delannoy decided not to attempt to empirically debunk these myths, choosing instead to build a narrative that emphasizes reminiscences.[53] Delannoy leaves his account "doubtlessly incomplete, just as the deeds and responses of Lester Young were. The intention was only to open a door, to conjure up – or put to flight – a few dreams and demons."[54] The different focuses of these works allow me to view to the legends of Young's life through a variety of discursive lenses. Through analysis of these lenses and the sociopolitical factors that inform their perspectives, I hope to bring the constructed image of Young into clearer focus.

[53] Luc Delannoy, *Pres: the Story of Lester Young* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), xiv.
[54] Ibid, xvi.

Chapter 1: He Said, She Said: Gendered Language and Legend in Young's Biographical Narrative

Within the story of Young's life, several events have accrued mythic qualities through the surrounding discourse, essentially elevating their facts to jazz legend. In this chapter, my intent is to analyze the language used in descriptions of Young himself, as well as the language used to construct the legendary tone of these events. Critics, peers, and biographers describe these biographical events in gendered language that emphasizes Young's difference in multiple categories. Before these myths could be retold, however, Young's biographers and critics consistently opened their writings by setting the stage for Young's difference. Whitney Balliett, the *New Yorker'*s jazz critic, used his poetic gifts to provide the following description of Lester Young in his 1986 anthology, American Musicians:

> Very little about the tenor saxophonist Lester Young was unoriginal. He had protruding, heavy-lidded eyes, a square, slightly Oriental face, a tiny mustache, and a snaggletoothed smile. His walk was light and pigeon-toed, and his voice was soft. He was something of a dandy. He wore suits, knit ties, and collar pins. He wore ankle-length coats, and pork-pie hats – on the back of his head when he was young, and pulled down low and evenly when he was older. He kept to himself, often speaking only when spoken to. When he played, he held his saxophone in front of him at a forty-five-degree angle, like a canoeist about to plunge his paddle into the water. He had an airy, lissome tone and an elusive, lyrical way of phrasing that had never been heard before. Other saxophonists followed Coleman Hawkins, but Young's models were two white musicians: the C-melody saxophonist Frank Trumbauer and the alto saxophonist Jimmy Dorsey -- – nether of them a first-rate jazz player. When Young died, in 1959, he had become the model for countless saxophonists, white and black. He was a gentle, kind man who never disparaged anyone. He spoke a coded language, about which pianists Jimmy Rowles has said, "You had to break that code to understand him. It was like memorizing a dictionary and I think it took me about three months…[55]

Passages pointing out Young's light skin, quiet manner, verbal eccentricities, unique sartorial style, and red hair emphasize Young's oddness at the same time as they are used under the guise of describing his 'originality.' As Rustin and Ake have shown, the jazz community had its own version of racialized masculinity articulated to musical production. The attribution of all Young's idiosyncrasies to 'originality,' 'uniqueness,' and 'creativity' seem to act as a way to

[55] Whitney Balliett, "Pres," in *American Musicians: Fifty-Six Portraits in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 234.

retool Young's non-heteronormative masculine performance to make it legible and to align it to masculine values specific to the jazz community. Naturally, Young's originality had great value in terms of his musical contributions, but when it came to his personal comportment, his digressions from cultural norms are described in feminized language.

Keeping the discursive complications of difference in mind, I turn to the legends that define Young's biography. The first three stories of recurring importance focus on Lester's opposition to Coleman Hawkins and the legacy of his sound. First, there is the tale of Young's last-minute substitution for Hawkins at a concert by Fletcher Henderson's band in Kansas City in 1934. Young had gone over to the venue between sets at his own engagement to try to hear Hawkins play. When it came out that Hawkins was absent, Fletcher Henderson left the club looking for a replacement, and Lester stepped in to take his place. The story is usually framed as quite a dramatic musical emergency, conjuring a panicked Fletcher Henderson bursting from the club to find his tenor hero coolly standing by to save the day. Young's own idiosyncratic account from the much later 1959 interview (some 25 years after the fact) with Postif is used to that effect:

> I ran a million miles to hear Coleman Hawkins play and he wasn't there. So Fletcher Henderson ran out, saying, "Don't you have no tenor players here in Kansas City? Can any of you motherfuckers play?" You know, that type of shit like that? Herschel [Evans] was out there – you dig – but he couldn't read. Herschel played good but he couldn't read. So them motherfuckers just said, "Red" –they called me "Red" then – say, "Red go [on in there] and blow this goddamn saxophone." And I'm coming to see Coleman Hawkins, they told me how great he was, I ain't seeing the fuck how great he is. You know? That type of shit.
> So they shoved me on in there and I get up and grabbed his saxophone and played the motherfucker and read the music and read his clarinet parts and everything. Now I got to run back to my job where there's thirteen people in it. Run ten blocks back to get to them.[56]

Taken without a grain of salt, Young's stylistic exaggerations give the air of legend to the tale. However, these embellishments were a common feature of Young's speech and were not specific to this particular event. Further, at the time of the interview Young had spent the past 25 years being pitted against Hawkins in the press and in his professional engagements, with Hawkins usually coming out as the more powerful and impressive player with the bigger sound. It is

[56] Postif, *Interview,* 186.

feasible that Young would relish this story as an example of how easily he replaced (and therefore equaled) Hawkins.

An account by Leonard Phillips included by Büchmann-Møller points to a more orderly process for Young's substitute gig. Hawkins had taken the day off from Henderson's Kansas City engagement to visit family in St. Joseph, and Henderson had sent out a call for a replacement:

> Fletcher Henderson asked for a tenor player to play for him that night. Lester asked Herschel Evans: "Why don't you go and make it, Herschel?" "No, I can't make it, Red," Herschel couldn't read so good. In Kansas City they called Lester "Red." His mother was lightskinned, and he was red. "Marine Red" that was what we called him, and after that we called him "Kentucky Red." "Lester said: "You scared to go, man?" "Yeah man, I'm scared to go!" Fletcher Henderson was a name in those days. Prez said: I ain't scared, man!" and then he went and played that night.[57]

The differences between the two versions reveal the effects of the media-constructed rivalry between Young and Hawkins. Young's late life version of the story indicates his glee over the triumph of seamlessly filling in for Hawkins, showing his awareness of the rivalry and great pride in this instance where he came out equal. In Young's version, he was also pressed into the gig –"they shoved me on in there" – rather than volunteering (after first deferring to his friend Hershel). Phillips's account, while showing that the substitution may not have been as dramatically spontaneous as the legend goes, does demonstrate Young's confidence in his abilities, and a lack of intimidation by the reputation that preceded Hawkins. Later critics, such as Dave Gelly, have superimposed a psychoanalytic anxiety onto Young's difference from Hawkins, and his supposed inability to measure up to the size and power of Hawkins's sound. This legend has symbolic value in the historiography of Young, because in it, Young literally filled Coleman Hawkins's shoes. Young played Hawkins's instrument and read his music at a minute's notice with no rehearsal, all the while having no qualms. Gelly takes care to emphasize what a feat this was for Young.[58] Though we have no indication how the audience reacted to the difference between Young and Hawkins in terms of sound, this story functions to prove Young's musical equality with Hawkins, as well as Young's exceptionality as a player.

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[57] Lester Young, interviewed by François Postif, Paris, February 6, 1959, quoted in Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 45.
[58] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 28.

The second incident, which Gelly calls "one of the great myths of jazz," concerns a Kansas City jam session with Hawkins in attendance. According to Mary Lou Williams, Young and the best of the KC tenor players all came to face off with Hawkins. The story goes that Hawkins stayed all night in the club attempting to out-blow Lester and the other players. Williams's account is the most frequently quoted:

> The word went round that Hawkins was in the Cherry Blossom, and within about half an hour there were Lester Young, Ben Webster, Herschel Evans, Herman Walder, and one or two unknown tenors piling in the club to blow. Bean didn't know the Kaycee tenor men were so terrific, and he couldn't get himself together though he played all the morning. I happened to be nodding that night, and around four a.m., I awoke to hear someone pecking on my screen.
> I opened the window on Ben Webster. He was saying, "Get up, pussycat, we're jammin' and all the pianists are tired out now. Hawkins has got his shirt off and is still blowing. You got to come down."
> Sure enough, when we got there, Hawkins was in his singlet, taking turns with the Kaycee men. It seems he had run into something he didn't expect. Lester's style was light, and, as I said, it took him maybe five choruses to warm up. But then he could really blow; then you couldn't handle him on a cutting session. That was how Hawkins got hung up. The Henderson band was playing in St. Louis that evening, and Bean knew he ought to be on the way. But he kept trying to blow something to beat Ben and Hershel and Lester. When at last he gave up, he got straight in his car and drove to St. Louis. I heard he'd just bought a new Cadillac and that he burnt it out trying to make the job on time. Yes, Hawkins was king until he met those crazy Kansas City tenor men.[59]

This story, along with other examples of Young's ability to "cut" or defeat his peers in contest, act as a counter-balance to aspects of Young's personality that differ from mainstream expressions of masculinity. Williams's account suggests that Hawkins's ousting was more of a group effort than a Young-Hawkins duel. However, Büchmann-Møller's meticulous biography contains a second account from double-bassist Gene Ramey. Ramey recalls Lester as the sole contender against Hawkins: "…and man, Hawk was cuttin' everybody out, but Prez got him. He tore Hawk up so bad, Hawk missed a date in St. Louis. Hawk was still trying to get him at 12 o'clock the next day. Seemed like the longer Prez played, the longer they had that head-cuttin' session, the better Prez got. He played more creative things."[60] This legend shows some of the ways Young's sensitivity, and introspective, creative musicality are justified by his proven ability to outplay his peers, most impressively his heavyweight rival Coleman Hawkins. Between

[59] Young, quoted in Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 47.
[60] Ibid.

the legend of Young's substitution for Hawkins, and the legend of the jam session, biographers can set up an evolutionary trajectory of the storied rivalry between Young and Hawkins. By subbing for Hawkins, Young stepped up to the plate; by cutting Hawkins in a jam session, Young knocked it out of the park.

Young's "competitive spirit" is a very important tool in reclaiming his masculinity.[61] Writers highlight this aspect of Young's personality even in telling of his childhood years. A favorite anecdote tells of a youthful Lester in short pants, sneaking into a dance where his older cousin Boots (a colleague in the Young family band) was employed. Lester jumped up on stage to "cut" Boots and apparently outplayed his furious cousin quite easily.[62] This cheeky story demonstrates Young's enjoyment of the fun of competition, but a second anecdote reveals a more personal origin of his competitiveness, and to a certain extent the origin of some of his skill. As a young musician in his father's band, Young had such a good ear that he could get away with learning the parts by listening to his sister and harmonizing against her. Billy Young, a strict disciplinarian, insisted that his musicians read. After tricking Lester into revealing he could not read, Billy Young kicked him out of the band in front of his peers. Young's recollections of these events reveal his bitterness and indignation at this humiliation – he wasted no time in proving his ability to come out on top. Young learned to read right away, citing as his motivation to "fuck these motherfuckers completely up."[63]

The above stories supporting the legend of the Hawkins/Young cutting contest cultivate Young's competitiveness as the most acceptable token of his masculinity. Writers often draw comparison with sport in order to emphasize the cultural meaning of competition as a masculine rite. Lee Young compares his brother to a wrestler: "but anyone who picked up a saxophone you know, Lester wanted some of it, as the saying goes – you know, he really wanted to see who was the better man. It would be just like a prize fighter or a wrestler."[64] Rudi Blesh characterizes Young's musical athleticism differently, calling it "lithe rather than heavy muscled, a sprinter rather than a wrestler."[65] Blesh's comments are explicitly defensive against anyone who would characterize Lester's tone as "effeminate."[66] In keeping with this metaphor, the cutting contest

[61] Porter, *Lester Young*, 6
[62] See Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 12.
[63] Porter, *Lester Young,* 6.
[64] Lee Young with Patricia Williard, "The Young Family Band," in Porter, *Reader,* 20.
[65] Rudi Blesh, *Combo, USA: Eight Lives in Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), 90.
[66] Ibid.

functions symbolically like a sporting event or wrestling match, where musical muscles are flexed and the better man wins. The athleticism of the cutting contest played an important role in shaping the articulation of jazz with midcentury machismo. Thus, Lester Young's starring role in this most epic of contests is a highlight on his masculine curriculum vitae. Another anecdote used to underscore Young's competitive nature is his friendly rivalry with Herschel Evans, a fellow tenor in the Basie band. Gelly explicitly identifies this as a masculine expression. He explains that Billie Holiday, who observed their tussling while singing with the Basie Band, could never understand the relationship between Herschel and Lester: "such antics are, after all, very much a male thing."[67] By emphasizing Young's competitive nature, biographers can align him with at least one vestige of mainstream masculinity.

In setting up his telling of the legendary K.C. cutting contest, Büchmann-Møller takes the opportunity to offer his analysis of the differences in Hawkins's and Young's playing styles. Büchmann-Møller's reading is based on his personal expertise as a saxophone player, but his description uses strongly gendered terms:

> Hawkins used fairly hard reeds and special mouthpieces with large openings, which enabled him to produce a large, round tone which was a match for the most penetrating of brass instruments. He used plenty of vibrato and, at the beginning of his career, a lot of staccato, which later gave way to a smoother style of playing, Even so, this later style was somewhat jagged because of his frequent used of dotted eighth notes. His pauses were few and short, almost nothing more than for taking breath, and this made his playing sound a bit breathless in faster numbers. Emotionally speaking, his solos could be called extrovert, almost to the point of sounding aggressive. They were made up of short phrases of two or four bars and always kept within the bar lines and the structure of the melody. He was one of the first men to improvise on the harmony scheme of the melody instead of on the theme itself; often he even used the harmonies with passing notes. He linked arpeggios in a refined way and used as many embellishments as possible when so doing. He was also taken up with different timbres and often played with a growl or overblowing the tenor sax to reach the harmonics, which lie outside the normal range of the instrument.[68]

Woven into Büchmann-Møller's description of Coleman Hawkins is the contingency of his success upon his embodiment of masculine ideals. Explaining the techniques Hawkins used to produce his powerful, "large" tone, Büchmann-Møller attributes Hawkins's ability to sonically

[67] Gelly, *Being Prez,* 60.
[68] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 46.

"penetrate" to his equipment: the construction of his horn, and the hardness of his reeds. Büchmann-Møller also credits Hawkins with transforming the sax from a sort of "circus instrument" into a legitimate brass contender. As mentioned above, here the phallic significance Krin Gabbard ascribes to the trumpet translates to the saxophone. The logic of Büchmann-Moller's argument suggests Coleman Hawkins made the saxophone equally phallic by using the instrument to its loudest and most powerful extent, making it on par with the trumpet as a solo instrument. Büchmann-Møller's denotation of Hawkins's style as an "extroverted" and "aggressive" presence follows a common technique in jazz biography that blurs the lines between an artist's sound and their personality. Blesh even graphically personified Hawkins's sound as "hairy – robust, masculine, forceful – it never asked, it told you."[69] Further, Hawkins was commended for his innovative saxophone techniques and his expansion of the timbral possibilities of the instrument, continuing the trope of masculine technological progress. Countless portrayals of Hawkins use masculine terms like these to brand his sound.

Descriptions of Lester Young set him up as the answer to Hawkins: his sound, a feminized antithesis of Hawkins's masculine blare. Büchmann-Møller juxtaposes the following sketch directly after his characterization of Hawkins above, as a prologue to Young's cutting contest victory myth.

> Opposed to this was Lester's new style of playing, a style which sounded revolutionary at first. His ideal sound was a light, thin tone, almost completely devoid of vibrato or intruding sounds and, compared with Hawkins, his tone was somewhat weak, partly because he used softer reeds, but also because he didn't blow all that hard or use growl or overtones. Another difference was that, as opposed to Hawkins, he carefully sought out tones from the harmonic foundation of the music for his considerably simpler melodic solos. Lester was also interested in timbre, but he made use of a whole series of alternative fingerings of his own invention to this end, fingerings later adopted by a host of other saxophone players.[70]

Thin, light, pale, weak, soft: words implying delicacy dominate images of Young's playing, as do variations on "beauty" and "grace." Where Hawkins's sound personality commandingly fills the space around him, Young's sound personality is instead praised for its cerebral, dream-like

[69] Blesh, *Combo U.S.A.,* 90.
[70] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for your Life,* 46.

nature, its internality. Where Hawkins's sound "buttonholes you," as Balliett describes it, Young's sound "turns away."[71]

This analytic and internal nature of Young's melodic creativity was another ground on which admirers reclaimed Lester's masculinity. As Rudi Blesh writes, "Lester's tenor was light in tone but anything but effeminate…It could ask as well as tell. It had nuance. It was the jazz voice of tomorrow."[72] Blesh, along with many other writers, claimed Lester's masculinity in the form of intellectual progress and modernity. Even though he was only five years younger than Coleman Hawkins, Young was positioned as the fresh voice of a new generation of jazz players. Especially when evaluating his life retrospectively, critics and biographers position Lester to smooth over a historical gap as the forward-thinking prophet of both the introspection of cool jazz and the melodic innovations of bop. Blesh's narrative illustrates his evaluation of Young as the progenitor of seamless musical progress:

> What Lester brought was more than a beautiful, new, light concept of tone; more than a lithe grace of phrase; more than a certain coolness that refused to shout and thus made you listen. It was more than a relaxed athleticism that did not need to push the beat. It was more than a new concept of the swinging beat. Any one of these, alone, would have been a major contribution. Lester's greatest contribution was to widen, immeasurably, the very horizons of jazz creativeness; melodic invention.[73]

It is important to note here that this binarizing instinct reflects normative modes of thinking about gender that were contemporary to Young's career, but are largely still in effect. I do not mean to say that these descriptors are an insult to Young, or do not accurately represent him. Rather, I suggest that the perception of Young's personality and sound as somehow feminized or queer resulted in a pathology of his difference. This pathology informed general belief that his shy, sensitive nature made him a tragic figure, proven by his army failure as simply too fragile to handle the realities and demands of manhood. As a result, Young's music has been devalued by the gendered slant of his biography.

If the above legends cemented an irrefutable binary between Hawkins and Young, the next two incidents serve to establish the opposition between Young and the rest of his community. The second three stories broaden the focus out from chalking Young's difference from Coleman

[71] Balliett, "Pres," 236.
[72] Blesh, *Combo U.S.A.,* 90.
[73] Ibid.

Hawkins up to a gendered binary opposition that was mostly coded in sound, and point to a growing chasm between Young's personality and the social norms of his era. These stories do not focus explicitly on Young's sound as difference, but begin to detail his social difference as a precursor to the postwar depreciation of his sound and artistry.

In the narrative arc of Young's life, the next trial to test his mettle after proving himself against Coleman Hawkins in Kansas City involved actually replacing Hawkins in Fletcher Henderson's New York band in 1934. Word had gone around the jazz community that Hawkins would be accepting a job in London, and Young left the Count Basie band to accept the role of Hawkins's successor. Evaluation of this story requires detangling Young's self-confidence in his own abilities and unfaltering originality from the imposed psychoanalytic analysis of the anxiety and psychological damage this incident caused him. The first consideration of this legend is how Young got the job in the first place. There seems to be some dispute over whether Fletcher Henderson sought Young out or whether he volunteered. According to Büchmann-Møller, Lester was proactive in going after this key opportunity, and boldly wrote to Fletcher Henderson after hearing rumors of Hawkins's departure. Taking what Büchmann-Møller calls an "unusual step," Young had networked with a friend, George Dixon, a trumpet player in Henderson's band, and had serendipitously already sent the letter indicating his interest in New York opportunities when Hawkins's departure was confirmed. Dixon recalls catching Henderson in a moment of despair over how to replace Hawkins, the same day he received Young's letter: "I've got just the man for you," he told Henderson.[74] Büchmann-Møller feels Dixon's account is accurate, and interprets Young's action as a sign of ambition and "receipt for what was his due."[75] At the same time, the move enabled him to graduate from the Count Basie band (who he was with at the time) without burning any bridges with his Basie comrades. Büchmann-Møller emphasizes Young's desire to avoid hurting any feelings in the Basie band as "definitely the most important thing."[76] Büchmann-Møller's estimation follows the pattern of privileging Young's sensitivity and emotional appeal over his shrewd business move and ambition.[77] Young himself has not commented extensively on the move, simply saying he received a telegram from Henderson, and

[74] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 48.
[75] Ibid, 49.
[76] Ibid.
[77] This is not to say that Young did not value his friendships in the Basie band: he most certainly did, and personal connections are very important in music making. In fact, when Postif later attempted to clarify the details about Young's departure from Basie during their interview, Young declined to respond, saying, "That's some deep shit." Young obviously did not want his personal relationships dissected in the media.

was "all excited, you know, about this big time shit."[78] Young's description does indicate that he asked Basie for what seems to be combination of advice and permission before making the decision: "'What shall I do, Count, about it?' He said: 'Ain't nothing I can do,' and I split..."[79]

A second factor of this story is an intense and damaging anxiety that has been psychoanalytically ascribed onto Young's move to New York by critics and biographers. Though Young had still not produced any recordings by 1934, he had been receiving favorable reviews. The press at the time was already framing Young's replacement of Hawkins as a symbolic event, and thus constructing a site of anxiety for Young. According to an account by Basie band members Jo Jones, Buddy Tate, and Dan Minor, Young was unsure about going to New York, knowing that the Henderson band would not adapt well to both his personality and his sound. The group of friends sat up all night drinking, trying to convince Young to take the job. Buddy Tate remembers Young as saying, "I think I could make it, but I understand the band is full of cliques and I just don't know how they'll treat me." Jo Jones recalls he had to "put a pistol on" Lester to accept the offer, despite the major increase in salary and prestige the Henderson band would afford him. Tate indicates that Lester's real aversion to the risks of trying out with the Henderson band was the prospect of having to return to Kansas City defeated: "He said, 'Yes, but the part that hurts is to go and be a failure and come back and face your friends."[80] From this third party information, critics have inflated the psychological significance that Young's fears ended up being justified when his employment with the band did not go well. Gelly explicitly places Young into a psychoanalytical position of lack, surmising, "This kind of attention [from the press] would have only served to increase his nervousness… no one could fault Lester's sight-reading or general musicianship, but there just wasn't enough of him. His light, agile tone simply would not fill the space previously occupied by Hawkins."[81] Further, biographers without fail make the comparison between this incident and Young's ejection from his father's band on pain of learning to sight-read. Whitney Balliett considers this early incident a precursor to the psychological damage incurred by Young's turn in the army, calling it the first "experience in his

[78] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 49.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

life that he never got over."[82] Gelly similarly looks to root Young's apprehension in his youth, presenting a romanticized psychoanalysis of the incident:

> The prospect of being cast out, of facing coldness, hostility, rejection, terrified him. The fall from grace when he had been excluded from the family band had, as we know, affected him deeply. Among friends and colleagues who knew and admired him, Lester's personality blossomed and he became the lovable, eccentric genius. In a hostile environment he shrank within himself and became once again a frightened child, snatched from the mother he adored.[83]

Gelly's compassionate language is strikingly coded, painting Young as fragile and highly sensitive, placing him back into a feminized camp despite his (arguably "masculine") aggressive pursuit of this opportunity. Gelly's description almost implies that Young's 'feminine' traits are sabotaging his 'masculine' advances. These narratives slant Young's move to New York as a purely emotional landmark rather than a career milestone.

Young was not accepted as a sonic replacement for Hawkins, nor did he jive socially with the Henderson group. As Young did not know anyone in New York, Henderson took pity on the "strange young tenor man" and invited him to stay in his home, setting the stage for Young's notorious conflict with his wife Leora.[84] During his stay, Mrs. Henderson purportedly forced Young to listen to recordings of Coleman Hawkins in a corrective effort to get him to emulate Hawkins's style. Young's account of the incident is dismissive, reflecting his annoyance at "that bitch" that woke him up early, while Büchmann-Møller digs out a more emotional interpretation:

> On the surface Lester was polite enough, but deep down he was really hurt by Leora's attitude and the saxophone players' rejection of him. Nobody could find fault with his musical genius, his skill as a soloist, or his ability to read music, but he just couldn't take anyone telling him how he ought to play. "I had in mind what I wanted to play," he has explained, "and I was going to play that way. That's the only time that ever happened, someone telling me to play differently from the way I wanted to."[85]

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[82] Balliett, "Pres," 236.
[83] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 29-30. Gelly's psychoanalysis returns later in his text, to describe a letter Young's wife Mary wrote contesting a statement published in *Down Beat* that Young had been fired from the Basie band: "Presumably the old horror of being seen as an outcast had arisen again; Lester had brooded over the report and become so agitated that Mary had written to the paper in an effort to relieve the tension at home." 71.
[84] Fletcher Henderson, quoted in John Hammond, "Lester Young," in Porter, *Reader,* 27.
[85] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 50.

Young remained with the Henderson band for a few months, a decision influenced, according to Büchmann-Møller, by "a stubborn determination to prove to them all that he could make out."[86] This recalls the celebration of Young's competitiveness from the earlier legends, but marks a perceived deterioration, the beginnings of the narrative of Young's tragic failure to comply with contemporary masculine norms that would later be solidified in the detention barracks.

In the course of this chronicle, Young's apparent inability to establish a platonic camaraderie with his male Henderson band colleagues is coupled with his inability (or lack of desire) to move beyond a platonic camaraderie with Billie Holiday. The historical details are fuzzy, but Young and Holiday are reported to have met during Young's initial stay in New York and begun their famous friendship. In describing this relationship, each biographer feels compelled to address questions they anticipate about the nature of Holiday and Young's rapport, and each seems to come up stumped by the historical evidence that the relationship was platonic. Gelly once again turns psychoanalytic, implying with his description that it was only through some failing on Young's part that a romance never occurred: "Everyone…agrees on one thing: the relationship was entirely platonic. Billie went for dominant, masterful men, which Lester certainly wasn't. As we have seen, he was shy and unassertive, whereas she was street-wise, quick-tempered, and open-hearted. By all accounts, she treated him rather like a younger brother, although he was six years her senior."[87] Clearly, Gelly feels Young was not "man enough" for Holiday.

Up until this point in the story, the gendered terms of Young's description communicate either thinly veiled suspicions about Young's sexuality (as in the case of Balliett and Gelly) or an indignant defense against the tarnish of those suspicions (as in the case of Porter and Blesh). It is only at the point of describing Young's relationship with Billie Holiday that writers must address the elephant in the room directly. Young was close enough with Holiday to have moved in with her and her mother, which, according to Gelly, sounded the gossip alarm:

> …A faint but persistent rumor began to circulate, hinting that Lester was homosexual. He was quiet and mild-mannered, he walked with a stealthy, tiptoe gait, his voice as a young man was soft, light in texture and fairly high pitched, and he was the only man regularly seen around with Billie who wasn't forever putting his hands on her. When the rumor finally came to his notice, his only comment was, "I never even auditioned!" Quite soon, indeed, he formed a

[86] Ibid*,* 51.
[87]Gelly, *Being Pres,* 31.

> relationship with a white woman, a nurse named Mary Dale, and they eventually set up home together.[88]

Gelly concedes the factual evidence of Young's marriage to a woman, but the structure of his writing demonstrates his belief that Young married Mary Dale out of a response to his knowledge of the rumors. Again, the productive interest here is not to weigh evidence and speculate about Young's sexual activities, but rather in what this narrative conjecture says about the gendered constructions of not only Young's but also of Holiday's identity. Holiday had been solidly sexually objectified by her own gendered narrative construction as a tragic 'fallen woman' figure. As such, Young's investment in Holiday as a friend and "creative soulmate," as Farah Jasmine Griffin put it, did not compute for critics and biographers invested in a virile image of black masculinity. Discursive masculine norms dictate that in order for Young to have been able to avoid "forever putting his hands on her," was to have been homosexual.[89]

Holiday and Young's relationship transgressed normative collaborative musical relationships as well. As Lara Pellegrinelli established, jazz singing is coded as feminine due to its emotional associations and the perceived naturalness of the voice as an instrument, and has been positioned as inferior (artistically and technically) to its masculine counterpart, instrumental virtuosity.[90] Young is known to have taken some inspiration for his signature cool sound from such unacceptable sources as white female pop singers. Balliett quotes Basie singer Sylvia Sims, referencing the correlation between singing, lyricism, and emotion, and the mutual understanding Young had with vocalists: "He phrased words in his playing. He has had a great influence on my singing, and through the years a lot of singers have picked up on him."[91] Young's more equitable artistic exchange with singers disrupted what Sherrie Tucker has identified as the singer's subjugated position as ornament or muse for the male band. The interaction between Lester Young and Billie Holiday redefined gender organization in the traditional jazz band format.[92] According to Holiday, Young did not try to "drown the singer" like some instrumentalists. Young considered Holiday an artistic peer rather than a decoration, and met her on an even musical playing field. This musical relationship confounded gender expectations just as much as their friendship did.

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[88] Ibid, 47.
[89] Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday,* 149.
[90] See Pellegrinelli, "Separated at Birth," 31-47.
[91] Balliett, "Pres," 237.
[92] Tucker, *Swing Shift,* 213.

As Nichole T. Rustin and others show, expectations about black masculine performance have spurred white critics' investment in certain types of musical production. Rustin's psychoanalytical approach suggests this is driven by a white desiring gaze toward a black other, which produces fetishized expectations of racial difference. Ferguson contends that white controls on black gender and sexual formations became important to state goals of regulating a universal citizenry. These pressures led to the articulation of various stylistic elements such as strength of tone, rhythmic drive, melodic speed, and virtuosic technical innovation as expressions of masculinity and markers of racial authenticity in music. Critics' feminized language suggests their perception of Lester Young as outside the version of black masculinity and sexuality that was heteronormative to this period and community in jazz history. At the same time, their search to draw out established hegemonic values in Young's life such as his competitive, sporting spirit; confident ambition; and innovative stylistic complexities reveal recuperative efforts to align Young as closely as possible to their projected image of the jazz man.

Chapter 2: Private Young's 'Mad Nightmare:' Difference and the Construction of Tragedy

> *Lester Young is no longer the President. The mantle of honor has slipped from his shoulders, and his greatness lives only in the past…Let us face it. Lester Young is out of office. Onstage he is a big empty shell of a man.*
> Mike Nevard, *Melody Maker,* March 21, 1953

> *Lester was free again, but was a physically and morally shaken individual. From that moment on Lester defined his position as defensive – one of passive defense. To wage the war, he withdrew into his shell, going down with survival rations that consisted of music, alcohol, drugs, and hermetic speech, all designed to hold of at still greater distance that which had surrounded and threatened him from the outset. The battle, of course, was lost from the start.*
> Luc Delannoy, *Pres: The Story of Lester Young*

Lester Young's disastrous stint as a U.S. army recruit in 1945 is a well known piece of jazz trivia. The incidence looms large in tales of Young's life and legacy, framed as a life-altering trauma that dealt a fatal blow to Young's creative powers. Biographers treat this experience as a great injustice, decrying Young's sentence at the detention barracks as unusually harsh punishment; a cover up for the personal vendettas of racist military personnel. Yet, the discursive formation of this event seems to be larger than life. In his recent volume, biographer Douglas Henry Daniels has suggested that Young's story may not have been so unique, noting that many other men did not fit the military mold, and many were victims of racial persecution.[93] Why then, did Young's story become so noted?

During World War II, American culture was steeped in militaristic sentiment, which dictated that success as a soldier was the ultimate proof of masculinity. As I have detailed in chapter one, Young's masculinity was already suspect in popular media and among some of his peers, due to perceived differences both in his personality and his musicality. As a further complication, rumors had begun to circulate about Young's sexuality, and some questioned his authenticity as a black jazz musician due to his open admiration for white mainstream jazz saxophonists and pop singers. In the assimilative militaristic political climate of the Second World War, these sites of gender and racial difference were heightened, cementing Young outside the bounds of acceptable mainstream manhood.

In the following chapter, I will detail the complexities that combined to exaggerate the significance of this event. Though undoubtedly traumatic for Young (as WWII was for many), Young's induction was not the sole source of his 'tragic decline' as some have claimed. Rather, I

[93] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 253-254.

contend that public perception of Young's value as a man changed when Young failed to prove his masculinity through conforming to army training. This project will identify and historicize two sites of discursive influence. First, I consider the heteronormative formations of race, gender, and sexuality and their articulations to nation and citizenship under the militaristic culture of World War II. These restrictions ultimately determined Young's failure. Second, I discover the ways in which Young's posthumous biographies recover his masculinity and disavow the critical dismissal of his musical quality after 1945 through contemporary ideals of manhood. I trace these influences through an analysis of the work of Young's biographers and critics. In the historical moment of World War II, these intersected categories were particularly potent sites of conflict and anxiety due to their articulation to militarism, patriotism, and racial politics in America. Following Roderick A. Ferguson, I hypothesize that the migration, economic diversification, and civil rights politics catalyzed by World War II blurred social categories of race and gender, causing widespread anxiety. In response to this anxiety, "the state worked to regulate the gender and sexual non-normativity of these racialized groups in a variety of ways. In doing so, it produced discourses that pathologized nonheteronormative U.S. racial formations."[94] As a result, heteronormativity became more strictly policed. While many biographers position Young's conscription as the beginning of a tragic decline in both his personal life and his musical output, my analysis looks beyond the event itself to focus instead on its significance as a transgression of the dominant normative subject positions in wartime America. The biographies of Lester Young contain the 'nonfiction' of the detention barracks incident, but their telling of the story and the force of its impact is influenced by the surrounding social constructions. As literary critic Kathy J. Philips has shown in her readings of war memoirs, letters, and newspapers, "'nonfiction' also participates in elaborating and perpetuating artificial social constructions."[95] The facts of Young's army trial became enlarged as legend because it culminated all the ways in which Lester Young existed outside or transgressed the dominant subject position in each of these discourses of sexuality, race, and manhood.

[94] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 14.
[95] Kathy J. Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

Wartime Civil Rights: New Images of Black Masculinity

Lester Young's military story begins with an extended period spent dodging his draft papers. After successfully "staying out" for most of the war, Young was finally drafted in what his biographers report as a quite a dramatic and vindictive fashion.[96] In September of 1944, a plainclothes F.B.I. agent courted Young and his band members at a high profile engagement at Club Plantation in California, before presenting he and (drummer) Jo Jones with a summons to appear before the Draft Board by 9:00 am the following morning.

Evaluating Young's motivation for dodging the draft requires an understanding of the ways racial identity and opposition to oppression were navigated during WWII. At the center of the lore surrounding World War II in America is the rosy image that Americans of all colors, creeds, and classes pulled up their bootstraps and banded together to form a united front against the threat of fascism. Though any quick glance at history will reveal a more complicated reality, this utopian memory still prevails, using the force of powerful nostalgia that glosses over the inequality rampant both within defense industries and on the home front during wartime.[97] As Nikhil Pal Singh shows, this nostalgia dramatically oversimplifies the nature of race relations in America. Wartime nostalgia is rooted in contemporary ideas of America as a post-racial society and contains the assumption that during wartime, *race* and *ethnicity* were eclipsed by *nation*.[98] As Singh notes, "the prevailing common sense of the post-civil rights era is that race is the provenance of an unjust, irrational ascription and prejudice, while nation is the necessary horizon of our hopes for color-blind justice, equality, and fair play."[99]

Yet this fable obscures the realities of the struggle for racial equality during this period.[100] African American leaders latched on to the rhetoric of nation to underscore their efforts for equality during WWII.[101] As historian Jane Dailey writes, "the sudden rise to power of National

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[96] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 254.

[97] Thomas A. Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War: How World War II Taught Americans to Get Along* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010). This volume credits the military experience with greater ethnic tolerance in postwar America, even suggesting that if the army had been desegregated perhaps it could have greatly diminished postwar racism.

[98] And I would add, to some extent, gender.

[99] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*: *Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy,* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 11.

[100] Absorbed into this myth, too, was the work of Martin Luther King Junior. Singh explains that an idealized version of King "allowed Americans not only to celebrate their progress into a more inclusive and tolerant people, but also to tell themselves that this is who they always were." Singh, *Black is a Country,* 4.

[101] Debates remain among black history scholars about the precise origins and length of what has been termed the "long civil rights movement," and certainly this time period is not the origin of all resistance to racism. Yet it is clear

Socialism in Germany after 1933 created ideological and rhetorical space for critics of American politics and society, critics who labored to make fascism synonymous with racism – and vice versa – and to tie democracy to non-discrimination."[102] Everywhere parallels began to be drawn between Third Reich oppression and segregation, while the black press stated frequently that Hitler had "copied" and "adopted" from Jim Crow strategies.[103] Incited by the power of these parallels, black leaders formulated the "Double V" campaign, representing a dual struggle for freedom from racist oppression at home and from fascist oppression abroad. Leaders took advantage of the international spotlight against racism to demand action from the American government for civil rights progress.[104] Most notably, A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington movement successfully prompted federal legislation against discrimination in the military workforce, instituting a Fair Employment Practices Committee. Historians Stephen Tuck and Kevin M. Kruse laud this advance as the "most meaningful federal intervention in the realm of black civil rights since Reconstruction."[105]

Following a "race raising" strategy, Double V ideology encouraged black men to enlist and prove their equal worth as fighting men. According to scholar Stephen Tuck, black leaders recognized that a redefinition of the *image* of the black man was a key priority for racial equality campaigns during WWII: "the fevered patriotism of war allowed black leaders to wrap positive black stereotypes in the flag. The fact that the recruitment of black soldiers coincided with the rise of truly mass media seemed particularly opportune."[106] As Tuck describes, black leaders attempted to dispel the negative stereotypes of the "brute" and the "fool" and proliferate positive images of black soldiers with propaganda films such as Frank Capra's *The Negro Soldier.* This dignified black soldier became the mascot of the "Double V" campaign. Given that the image of the successful black soldier was so important to the mainstream civil rights movement at the time, it is understandable that Young's initial refusal, and subsequent failure of this duty would be looked on with scorn by the proponents of the Double V campaign.

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that the time of World War II was heavily turbulent for race issues in America – if not the singular "moment when the structures of Jim Crow began to crack and crumble," then a moment of acceleration towards their dissolution. See Kevin Michael, Kruse and Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Fog of War: the Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

[102] Jane Dailey, "The Sexual Politics of Race in World War II America," in Kruse and Tuck, *Fog of War,* 147.

[103] Ibid, 148.

[104] Kruse and Tuck, *Fog of War,* 3-5.

[105] Ibid, 3.

[106] Stephen Tuck, "'You Can Sing and Punch…but You Can't be a Soldier or a Man': African American Struggles for a New Place in Popular Culture," in Kruse and Tuck, *Fog of War,* 109.

At first glance, Young's rejection of his draft papers may seem to fit into a second image of black masculinity that became dominant during the war period: the rebellious hipster. The patriotic and "raise raising" tactics of the Double V campaign were not universal among African Americans, particularly among members of what Robin D.G Kelley calls a "culture of opposition."[107] Eric Lott (and many others) have written of the avoidance or fervent resistance to the war by beboppers and other musicians, reflecting a common view that the white American was their enemy, not Hitler. Kelley notes the palpability of this defiant spirit: "…one could not walk the streets of Harlem and not notice a profound change. 'Listen to the way Negroes are talking these days!…[B]lack men have become noisy, aggressive, and sometimes defiant.'"[108]This attitude extended to youth of colour across the nation that made up the "zoot suit" or "hipster" group, and certainly factored into the Harlem and Los Angeles "zoot suit" race riots in 1943.[109] Kelley and Lott relate the oppositional strategies bebop musicians and hipsters employed to communicate their hostility to wartime patriotic sentiment and openly protest the hypocrisy they recognized in the cause of the war. Dizzy Gillespie famously threatened to "get a case of mistaken identity" and shoot white men if the draft board placed him in active service. Kelley notes that Malcolm X used a similar tactic, requesting draft officers to send him to the South in order to "Organize them nigger soldiers, you dig? Steal us some guns and kill crackers [sic]!"[110] Many others feigned mental or physical illness by combining Benzedrine and Coca Cola to evade the draft.[111] Kelley argues that these tactics reflected a large number of African American men's opposition to the war.

Protest took place on a more symbolic level as well, informing the stylings of hipster masculinity. Kelley explains that the zoot itself defied fabric-rationing laws and allowed disadvantaged black and Latino youth to project a luxurious image that defied their societal subordination, calling it the "right uniform in this emerging bebop army."[112] Lott locates protest against the war and against racial subordination within the music of bebop: "Bebop was the war come home…brilliantly outside, bebop was intimately if indirectly related to the militancy of its moment. Militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts; the music attempted to

[107] Kelley, "Riddle of the Zoot," 232.
[108] Ibid, 233.
[109] Lott, "Double V, Double Time," 244-245. Clashes between white servicemen and youth of colour were the heart of these riots.
[110] Kelley, "Riddle of the Zoot," 240.
[111] Ibid. See also Lott, "Double V, Double Time," 243-246.
[112] Kelley, "Riddle of the Zoot," 235.

resolve at the level of style what the militancy fought out in the streets. If bebop did not offer a call to arms…it at least acknowledged that the call had been made."[113] While Lott's formulations are poetic, historiographical narratives of bebop as revolution have frequently been disputed. As Scott DeVeaux details, critics have reassessed bebop's revolutionary characterizations, locating it within evolutionary genealogies of style.[114] However bebop has been repurposed in the course of constructing coherent narratives of jazz history, it is clear that participants in the scene associated the music with rebellion and social upheaval.[115] Kelly argues that the stylistic trappings of the hipster youth of colour who identified with bebop were rooted in a quest for alternative expressions of masculine identity.[116] Perhaps the aggression Lott finds in bebop represented the struggle to embody alternative expressions of manhood other than the dominant model of the soldier.[117]

Yet, though Young has often been cited as an influential ancestor of bebop, he was not part of the bebop generation. His music arguably cannot be said to contain the militant, rebellious aggression that Lott finds in bop. He did not put up a violent protest when appearing before the draft board, as Gillespie and Malcolm X famously did. While Young's avoidance of the draft certainly contains evidence of his opposition to racial oppression, Daniels notes that draft-dodging was common among working black musicians, and not necessarily based in racial ideology, though Gelly reports it was "widely regarded as a victory over the system."[118] The practical considerations of a constantly travelling musician's lifestyle facilitated the excuse of having missed the notice in the post. Further, new space in the market opened by the entertainment tours of white bands meant black musicians relished the chance for more lucrative opportunities.[119] Gelly seconds this point in his biography, quoting Buddy Tate: "we were all trying to stay out because we were making too much money, and there were so many lonely ladies."[120]

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[113] Lott, "Double V, Double Time," 246.
[114] DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 540-542
[115] Ibid, 542.
[116] Kelley, "Riddle of the Zoot," 233.
[117] Bebop's stylistic strategies of militancy (discipline, training, coded aggression) can be read as expressions of masculinity. Much like Kathy J. Philips has noted that soldiers' motivation to fight exists at a more personal level than a crusade against fascism, I suggest that musical expression happens at a more individual level and can't be attributed fully to a grand social cause.
[118] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 99.
[119] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 252.
[120] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 99.

In contrast to these more defiant approaches, biographers frame the manifestation of Young's resistance to racism as sensitivity and avoidance.[121] For example, in recounting Lester's reaction after being served draft papers, Daniels emphasizes his sensitivity with a quote from Buddy Tate: "It really got Pres…he was kind of sensitive, and man that high voice came out."[122] Tate's memory cites Young's chief disappointment as the broken trust of his new friend: "little guy gained my confidence…I liked the little son of a bitch."[123] After apparently being reassured by others that he would be disqualified from service, Young reported to the draft board under the assumption that he would be sent away.[124] He submitted to a medical examination, during which he openly informed the board of his drug and alcohol use. According to various accounts, in addition to his substance dependence, medical examination revealed that Young suffered from bouts of epilepsy, syphilis, and was, in Gelly's words, "spectacularly unfit."[125] Despite these obstacles, the army persisted, and when Young realized his induction was imminent, he became, by Gelly's estimation, "utterly desperate and did what he had always done when faced with intolerable situations: he ran away."[126] When Young turned up at his brother Lee's gig that evening, Lee Young returned Lester to the base to avoid further conflict.

Once returned, Young was ordered to have a spinal tap based on the findings of the medical exam. Young vehemently resisted this order: biographers conclude he was afraid of the painful procedure. According to Gelly, "the prospect terrified him and he became so agitated that he was put in a padded cell overnight."[127] Young's own recollection indicated that his detainment was due to his intoxicated state at the time of the interview:

> And when I laid down, I was completely knocked out and they put me in jail. Seeing as I was really knocked out, they took away the whiskey that I had and chose to put me in a padded cell instead. While I was in there they searched my clothes. I was there that day, and the next day they put me upstairs, and it was already the fifth army post I had passed through…[128]

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[121] My narrative in this section is constructed from the corroborated details that are consistent across the biographies I have surveyed. Details on what happened next vary across the biographies, but all agree on a few basic facts.
[122] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 252.
[123] Ibid, 253.
[124] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 100. Gelly notes that several people, including Lee Young and Norman Granz, had tried to intervene on Young's behalf.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid. All reports, including Young's own testimony on the transcript of his later court martial, indicate he was put in a padded cell, but Gelly's account seems to use extra dramatic license.
[128] Delannoy, *Pres,* 142

Daniels's account claims Young tried to reason with the judge to avoid the spinal tap, claiming it would interfere with his ability to play.[129] The inclusion of this detail is somewhat telling. In Gelly's version, Young comes out as fearful of pain, even paranoid and mentally unstable, where Daniels account makes less comment on Young's character, implying this was a last minute tactic to avoid the inevitable. The stark contrast between these accounts and the violent aggression toward military authorities shown by Gillespie and Little suggests that Young did not fit the mold of the rebellious hipster.

As mentioned above, during this period, establishing images of black masculine identity that confounded racist stereotypes was an important project of civil rights activists. Historian Stephen Tuck argues that the most important contribution to changing black masculine image was the parallel rise of black men as sports and music stars, an image that still holds today.[130] Giving as examples the high profile patriotism of Duke Ellington and Joe Louis, Tuck concludes that though the "the stubborn reality" of negative stereotypes and subordination of course remained, these image shifts did make progress in humanizing and dignifying black men by giving them rights to a new and admirable category of identity.[131] Young can certainly be seen as exemplary of the image of the cool musician. His music was universally described as sophisticated and advanced, belying negative brutish stereotypes of the black male. While this association did gain some ground by including Young in one dominant category of black masculinity – the virtuosic, sophisticated black musician– his identity is dogged by markers of difference that exclude him from other formations of race and gender, such as the rebellious hipster, the race man, or the heroic soldier. Here again, Young is variously excluded from the dominant modes of masculine identity available to black men at the time. As the discursive weight of militarism privileged the soldier identity, perhaps Young's failure to take on this role outweighed his contribution to the image of the sophisticated black jazz musician.

Though these diverging images adopted different strategies, both contained the desire for black males to be recognized as *men.*[132] Despite the ideals of enlisting for the greater good of the Double V campaign, black men sought to prove their masculinity, much like their white

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[129] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 253.
[130] Tuck, "You Can Sing and Punch," 116.
[131] Ibid, 117.
[132] Issues of militarism at this time referred specifically to concepts of manhood, though I do not wish to erase women from civil rights struggles. See Maureen Honey, *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

comrades. As Philips has argued, very few soldiers across the board enlisted in quest of the grand cause of patriotism: only 5% of soldiers active in WWII even knew anything about fascism or the extermination of the Jews. Rather, the author identifies the motivation for enlisting as more personal: boredom, unfulfilling work, personal relationship problems, or, the most prevalent incentive – to avoid seeming a coward. Drawing on her readings of literary accounts of World War II, Philips concludes: "The ringing rhetoric of Freedom from 'want and fear' or Freedom for 'speech and religion' lost out to an inner clamor to meet an elusive standard of masculinity."[133] For black soldiers, this "inner clamor" was a fundamental and personal motivation to fight that resonated with the vision of the Double V campaign – which was, at its core, about being accepted as a man, through "full" equality – civil and social.[134] This movement labored to counter racist rhetoric that black males could simply not reach the manhood available to white males.

Private Young: Masculinity and the Military

As the details of Young's training and court martial reveal, he was not considered capable of embodying the rigid image of manhood that military life projected – the image of hegemonic masculinity. In writer John Hopton's definition, hegemonic masculinity demands the "interrelationship of stoicism, phallocentricity and the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness and heroic achievement."[135] At the time of the Second World War, these hegemonic ideals were widely taken at face value and trumpeted by propagandists. Psychologists were still defining gender in Freudian terms and assuming that these traits were innate in male bodied people. Yet Hopton's formulation does not consider the added complexities of these formulations when race and sexuality come into play. Hegemonic masculinity assumes that the male body in question is white. While these norms were restrictive and reductive for white men, they were doubly restrictive for black men and other minorities. According to Ferguson's hypotheses, minority racial formations are subjected to more rigid policing of heteronormative ideals of gender and sexuality. Ferguson argues that these controls were exercised by the state in

[133] Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity,* 4.
[134] This principle can be no better represented than by one of the most iconic images of the civil rights movement: striking sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968 bearing signs that read simply "I Am a Man." See Herbert L. Sussman, "I Am a Man: African-American Masculine Identities," in *Masculine Identities: the History and Meanings of Manliness* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2012), 99.
[135] John Hopton, "The State and Masculinity," in Paul Higate, ed., *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003), 112.

response to diversity: in order to create a universalizing discourse of the citizen, difference must be eliminated or minimized. Thus, in order to control racial difference, the state eliminates tolerance of gender and sexual difference.[136] In 1944, however, the requirements of hegemonic masculinity were rigid, most readily available to white males that achieved success as soldiers. As Young clearly did not value or try to embody these traits, his masculinity did not meet the standards of the day.

Young was assigned to basic training and quickly transferred to one of the largest training centers of World War II, Fort McClellan, Alabama.[137] Biographers at this point in the story adopt an apologist strategy, emphasizing that in addition to his physical and medical disadvantages, there was no way Young could have become a good soldier. Gelly suggested that it was "hard to believe that any army in the world would want Lester Young as a recruit. Quite apart from the undeniable facts of his alcoholism, his epilepsy, and his generally deplorable physical condition, at thirty-five he had reached the age limit for being drafted."[138] Young's incompatibility with military structure reflects his alienation from the dominant culture of militarism in wartime America, particularly in the microcosm of the Southern military base. Militarism, which Hopton defines as "the celebration of military culture in national politics and popular culture," promotes a crystallization of the shifting and plural expressions of masculinity into the reductive ideal of hegemonic masculinity.[139] Men who attempt to gain hegemonic badges of masculinity have historically been rewarded with social acceptance, but militarism further glorifies hegemonic masculinity, presenting military discipline and patriotic violence as the ultimate way to prove masculine worth. On the other side, as Hopton points out, "men who reject militarism have often been portrayed as effeminate, naïve, untrustworthy, or even politically dangerous."[140] Violence, as many theorists of masculinity have discovered, is symbolically central to the "secret process of becoming" concealed by the supposed naturalness of hegemonic masculinity.[141]

In an effort to positively reclaim Young's incompatibility with hegemonic ideals, Daniels reframes Young's aversion to violence, quoting bass/tuba player Red Callendar's observation

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[136] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black,* 12-14.
[137] Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 253.
[138] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 100.
[139] Hopton, "The State and Military Masculinity," 119.
[140] Ibid. This was certainly the case with Young – perhaps the seemingly vindictive insistence on his induction despite the facts he was clearly not fit for service speaks to this dynamic.
[141] Christopher Forth, quoted in Rainer Emig, and Antony Rowland, *Performing Masculinity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

that Young was "'the most nonviolent person you ever met.'"[142] Daniels argues that Young's rejection of this ideology "revealed his uncompromising character and refusal to give in."[143] For all Daniels' insightful efforts to create space for Young's personal expressions of masculinity, the reigning norm of hegemonic masculinity insisted that violence was requisite to becoming a man. Thus, Young's firm resistance of this ideal manifested as a transgression. The goal of manhood, then, contains an unattainable paradox: it must be inherently natural, yet it must be passed into by way of a violent and painful process. The military institutionalizes this process, imposing the masochistic rituals of boot camp training and conflating violence with citizenship and manhood.[144] The military demands, "Are you a man or a mouse?" reinforcing gender polarization through the berating of drill sergeants.[145] Joshua S. Goldstein concludes military training rituals "left no doubt that not becoming a soldier meant not becoming a man."[146]

At the most direct level, militarism and institutionalized violence is imparted into American men in the space of the army base itself. The fact that Young was sent to a base in the Deep South, an area he had willfully shunned for most of his life, is significant. According to Daniels, Lee Young believed that the military purposefully sent black northerners to the South to be "broken."[147] Many other writers have commented on the seemingly vindictive insistence of the military's induction of Young, noting that the effort of sending an undercover F.B.I. agent to entrap him, and the draft board's persistence despite Young's obvious physical ailments seem unusual, especially as late into the war as 1944. Even stranger, Young seems to be the only one of his peers not to have simply been assigned to a military band. The great majority of musicians of Young's caliber were not expected to be trained up as soldiers, and spent their military time fairly innocuously, from within band appointments. Young and his bandmate, Jo Jones, were drafted on the same day, and even posed for publicity photos playing together on base. Yet Jones received an appointment with a military band, while Young did not. Daniels suggests it may

[142] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 256.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Rainer Emig and Antony Rowland note that Theodor Adorno and Christopher Forth have found performances of symbolic violence in search of masculinity to be masochistic: forms of self-harm through drinking, cigars, boxing, athletic training, wilderness survival, etc. See Emig and Rowland, *Performing Masculinity,* 3.
[145] "Are you a man or a mouse?" is the formulative question posed by Homi Bhabha's father, in his reflective essay "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" The "compulsive interrogation" posed by Bhabha's father reduces masculine identity to an either/or polarization – either a man; big, bold and combative, or a mouse; timid, small, and soft. See Homi Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?," in Berger et al, *Constructing Masculinity,* 58.
[146] Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 265.
[147] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 255.

have been a lack of initiative on Young's part, explaining that he "was not capable of ascertaining the proper procedure by which to make a request to get into a band unit."[148] Porter, likewise, cites Lee Young's judgment that Lester "wasn't the type to research his options."[149] Another theory suggests Young declined to play out of bitter protest, "deeply hurt" that popular white bands were permitted to remain intact and promoted on international tours, while he and his colleagues were scattered to the wind.[150] A final compelling theory suggests Young was barred from playing due to prejudice – this time not from a white official, but from a "short, flightish black man with a background in college teaching."[151] Luc Delannoy claims Young was "victimized by the arbitrary attacks" of this individual, who apparently targeted Young's "difficult character."[152] Büchmann-Møller writes that this man, a warrant officer, "belonged to the black upper middle class" and discriminated against Young, looking down on his lack of classical music education. Trombone player Jimmy Cheatham, who was a member of this officer's band, characterized the friction as "snobbery. This social thing that existed…"[153] This officer clearly subscribed to the 'race man' ideal of racial advancement. Perhaps his dislike for Young arose less from classism than from a rejection of Young's non-conformity to his particular vision of racialized masculine duty. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, Young was sent to basic training, but would not respond to its designs.

The military base provided a site where state controls on heteronormativity could be directly and often violently enforced on the individual in the form of the disciplines of military training. As Jeff Hearn observes, "mundane military processes, such as military training, have major impacts upon individuals and groups. Military organizations provide social and psychological resources for the reproduction and changing of individual psychologies, often around violence, sometimes not."[154] Young's downfall at the military base ultimately stemmed from his ineffectiveness in training. During routine activities, Young apparently fell and injured himself, necessitating a hospital stay and the prescription narcotics that would later be used as evidence against him. Daniels relays that the transcripts of Young's court martial described his "previous military service as poor." His unit had rated him as the "worst sort and very unsuited

[148] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 253.
[149] Porter, *Lester Young,* 24.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid, 23.
[152] Delannoy, *Pres,* 135.
[153] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 120.
[154] Paul Higate, *Military Masculinities,* xiii.

for the military."[155] Captain William C. Stevenson, the captain who arrested Young, had originally singled him out because of his training shortcomings. Stevenson testified at the trial that he had "suspicioned [Young] when he first came in the company," due to his "color…and he didn't react to his training as he should."[156] Stevenson's comment reveals the gravity of Young's failure to respond to the military processes of the making of a hegemonic man within the microcosm of the army base.

The base itself acted as a greenhouse: the space intensified the permeating militarism that dictated hegemonic statutes of (white) masculinity to the American population as a whole, while heightening attendant anxiety for those, like Young, who did not conform to these standards. Military historian Alexander Macaulay speaks of the army base in abstraction as symbolic of unchanging American values, particularly the traditionalism of the South. According to writer Susan Faludi, army bases and military colleges are "commonly pictured in the public imagination as static, unchanging abstractions, impervious to the ebb and flow of current events."[157] Despite this imaginary refuge for tradition, Faludi notes that army bases instead function as a "barometer of national anxieties."[158] This was surely the case at Fort McClellan. Jane Hailey and Jason Morgan have both noted that military bases and garrison towns became the sites of bitter conflict in terms of civil rights and sexual politics. Tension at these sites was heightened, particularly in the South, by differing definitions of Americanism. As Hailey and Morgan have both argued, for conservative Southerners, Americanism meant preserving tradition by preventing class and racial mobility, while for more liberal Northerners, Americanism strove toward a melting pot mentality of exceptional multiculturalism. The army base was theater to a clash between the unflinching traditions of the Southern way of life and inherent racism; government orders from the North ordering equal treatment of black soldiers; and traditional military ideals that a recruit who successfully passed through the base's training regimen deserved recognition as a man and as an American citizen. Concerns of citizenship further alienated Young from hegemonic norms: in addition to being unmanly, he was also now un-American, a factor made more potent by widespread wartime nationalism. Young's exclusion from norms of gender, race, sexuality, and nation meant he embodied multiple sites of anxiety

[155] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 257.
[156] Ibid, 257-258.
[157] Alexander Macaulay, *Marching in Step: Masculinity, Citizenship, and the Citadel in Post-World War II America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 2.
[158] Ibid.

that the processes of the military base attempted to neutralize. In the world of the army base, Young's identity translated to several unforgiveable transgressions: the multiplicity of Young's difference enhanced the severity of his punishment.

Court Martial: Weighed and Found Wanting

Writing on the details of Young's trial, biographers have surmised various theories about these transgressions and which was the deciding factor in Young's sentencing. The cause is most broadly concluded to be racism: particularly, the personal prejudices of individual Southern officers. Writers have put forth stories of various spiteful racist superiors who picked on Young, his trial an unfortunate casualty of their discrimination.[159] Büchmann-Møller notes that Captain Stevenson, was "from Louisiana, who had thus grown up with a special attitude toward blacks, one that was to prove fateful for the unfortunate Lester."[160] Daniels has suggested that an additional factor in the backlash against Young could have been "the aftermath of the antimarijuana shocker *Reefer Madness.*" According to Daniels this propaganda film had produced a widespread sentiment that pot smokers were "perverts and fiends."[161] David Brackett concurs that drug use at this time contributed to the creation of a 'delinquent' persona, suggesting that government and mass media promoted the "issue of 'drugs' as a moral one and to see drug users as 'others.'"[162] Brackett has shown that Billie Holiday was similarly stigmatized for her drug use, as "this attitude towards drugs encourages us to see her as an exotic 'other,' a suffering, tortured figure, whose art is merely a natural reflection of her experience."[163] Much like Young, her substance abuse is written into the tragic narrative of her life and the interpretation of her music. Daniels similarly argues that during this time, Young's unabashed admittance to recreational marijuana use would have been received as evidence of depravity, justifying the need for military correction.

However, as Daniels and Porter have shown, Young was forthcoming about his drug use from his induction onwards: he even arrived at his draft hearing high and drunk, under the

[159] Prior to the 1980s the transcripts of Young's court martial had not been published, so writers contributing theories prior to this are naturally very inaccurate, though their conclusions are still revealing. See Horn, "Book Review," 117.
[160] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 121.
[161] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 258.
[162] David Brackett, "Family Values in Music? Billie Holiday's and Bing Crosby's 'I'll Be Seeing You,'" in *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 46.
[163] Ibid.

assumption that his addictions would preclude him from service. The details of the court martial transcript prove that the military was well aware of Young's addictions, and Young freely affirmed he was using drugs whenever questioned by military authorities. The transcript also reveals that the majority of the drugs in Young's possession were barbiturates, the same drugs administered to Young by military doctors, though these particular pills had been allegedly obtained without a prescription. The injury on the obstacle course required a "minor rectal operation," keeping Young in hospital for three weeks. Young's testimony to the investigating officer in charge of his case reveals that he believed that the length of his hospital stay was a corrective measure for his drug addiction: "he says that if it hadn't been for dope he would not have been in the hospital and guesses they were trying to break him of the habit."[164] Whether the hospital stay was contrived or not, Young was obviously suffering physically. Captain Stevenson initially questioned Young because he was unable to continue his training. According to the defense's cross-examination, Stevenson had placed Young immediately back on duty straight after his release from hospital. Büchmann-Møller notes that Stevenson required Young to complete strenuous routine training exercises without allowing him time to convalesce, despite receiving an unfavorable psychological profile report expressing the concern of the hospital's chief neurologist Luis Perelman. The report stated "His diagnosis on discharge is Constitutional Psychopathic State, manifested by drug addition (marijuana, barbiturates), chronic alcoholism and nomadism…It is felt he is purely a disciplinary problem and that disposition should be effected through administrative channels."[165] Noticing Young struggling with the exercises, Captain Stevenson questioned him as to why he could not perform. Following his pattern of total transparency about his drug use, Young replied he was "high" on barbiturates for the pain, and "when pressed by Stevenson showed him some pills."[166] This prompted Stevenson and company commander Lieutenant Hutton to immediately go to search Young's locker. What they found inside was officially reported to be "One and one half cigarettes which were marijuana. Three capsules which contained barbiturates. Eleven tablets which were barbiturates."[167]

Some of Young's biographers have speculated on one other piece of incriminating evidence that was rumored to have been found by Captain Stevenson in Young's locker: a

[164] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 122.
[165] Ibid, 121. This diagnosis clearly reflects the military training ideology of man-making through discipline.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid,122.

photograph of Young's white wife, Mary Dale.[168] Writing in 1972 before official documentation of the trial was uncovered, jazz writer Rudi Blesh states confidently that the picture was Young's undoing: "He found the pills as well as a picture of Lester's white wife. That did it."[169] Daniels cites Young's colleagues and close friends, who believed that Mary Dale was a major factor in his punishment: "Gene Ramey stated that Young had actually brought Mary Dale down south with him, while Jo Jones was under the impression that the discovery of her photo during the search of Young's belongings had enraged one of the officers involved."[170] Dave Gelly surmises that a very brief mention at the trial of Young's "common-law wife" may be the origin of the rumor, "although what business it was of the army's is anyone's guess."[171]

According to writer Jane Dailey's research, during this time it would have very much been the Army's business, particularly in a Southern base. Though wartime brought incremental progress toward some culturally masculine rights such as access to paid work to support a family, and the freedom to fight, the last vestige of masculinity unequivocally denied to black men was sexual and marriage equality. Dailey notes that progressive Southern white liberals enthusiastically advocated for black Americans to receive every civil liberty except marriage rights. These supporters based their resistance to marriage equality and integration on the belief that black Southerners reciprocated their aversion to the intermarrying and cohabiting of races. This became a significant and highly public issue. Dailey recounts that German restrictions on the marriage rights of Jewish citizens forced parallels and brought conversation about equal sex and marriage rights: "While white reformers continued to insist that African Americans wanted government jobs and voting rights but spurned social equality, the black press identified restrictive marriage laws as a hallmark of fascism and by the middle of the war counted freedom of marriage as an essential democratic right."[172]

Even further, Dailey asserts that these sexual politics were central to the debate on desegregation in the military and discrimination against black soldiers. When Roosevelt pressured the navy to find an occupation other than messman for black G.I.s, "secretary of the Navy Frank Knox finally abandoned lesser arguments and explained that as long as 'the white

[168] See Gelly, *Being Pres,* 101; Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 263.
[169] Blesh, *Combo U.S.A.,* 102.
[170] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 263. According to Daniels: "Jones further claimed that a major had framed Young, and that the original sentence had been five years, at hard labor. 'Later on, when the truth came out,' he explain, 'to save face for the major, they didn't reverse the decision entirely, but reduced it to one year.'"
[171] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 101. The race of Young's wife is not mentioned at the trial according to the transcript.
[172] Dailey, "Sexual Politics of Race," 146.

man refuses to admit the negro to intimate family relationships leading to marriage' the navy was under no compulsion to breach its own racial barriers of intimacy."[173] Matters of marriage and sex were the last strongholds of racist civil policy that could not be budged, preventing what equal marriage activists called "full" equality – the last barrier between black males and "full" masculinity. The old stereotype of black males as sexually dangerous, particularly to white women, remained malignant.

With this in mind, the conversation shifts from perceived deviance in Young's masculinity to perceived deviance in his sexuality. Young's sexuality was seen as deviant in two ways. First, he married and procreated with white women. As Dailey observes, interracial sex was an area of great tension on Southern military bases: both the established institutions and the new temporary bases "became a chief site for the violent reassertion of white supremacy."[174] Pointing to widespread race violence, especially between military police and black recruits, Dailey notes that "much of the violence in and around Southern military bases was triggered by perceived competition over women."[175] One race riot was rumored to have started at Camp Stewart, Georgia, because a black serviceman's white wife came for a visit. At this time, interracial sex was defined as "synonymous with rape and therefore punishable by death under military law."[176] Under these circumstances, if the picture was indeed found, or if Young's wife had come to visit as one rumor recalled, it would undoubtedly have been a source of very serious contention.

Secondly, as shown in chapter one, differences found in Young's comportment, dress, and vocality difference had been interpreted in the past as queer. Supposedly originating with suspicions about his undeniably platonic relationship with Billie Holiday, rumors about Young's sexuality were compounded by his manner of playing, commonly described in feminized language – "soft," "beautiful," "floating" – that emphasized his difference and sensitivity. Further fueled by certain aspects of his comportment, such as his preoccupation with style, his speaking voice, and even the way he walked, rumors had plagued Young for many years prior to his induction.[177] Though I don't mean to suggest that the military suspected Young of homosexuality, the similarity between the Army's treatment of homosexual men and the ways in

[173] Ibid, 152.
[174] Ibid, 153.
[175] Ibid, 154.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 47. Gelly suggests Young's refusal or failure to have sex with Billie Holiday was inexplicable to some people, who concluded this must have meant he was homosexual.

which Young was stigmatized by his superiors (and by observers after his dishonorable discharge) speaks to historical trends in reactions to gender and sexual difference. According to Philips, during wartime there were a number of changes in the perception and punishment of homosexuality.[178] Homosexual acts at this time were deemed "crimes," while psychologists had started to classify homosexuals as "mentally ill." Using a Freudian model, psychologists of the day diagnosed homosexuals as "immature" and "effeminate." For the military, this meant that anyone perceived as homosexual was assumed to be weak and likely to fail in battle.[179] Over the course of World War II, the military dishonorably discharged nearly 10,000 members as punishment for homosexuality.[180] Philips notes that at this time a dishonorable discharge had far reaching consequences, and "seriously hindered civilian employment."[181] Young was also diagnosed as mentally ill and physically inadequate for soldiering. Though his dishonorable discharge was based officially on the charge of possession of habit-forming drugs and undoubtedly driven by racism, Young's deviance with respect to heteronormative gender identity informed his treatment in the military. Further, this deviance continued to inform the judgments of fans, critics, and historians until the end of his life. A posthumous article by Robert Reisner takes great care to definitively disavow this rumor:

> One thing that irritated Pres more than anything else was allegations by certain people who did not know him that he was a junkie or an invert. Neither charge nor rumor was true…Lester was vehement when he referred to the charges of homosexuality. 'I wish people didn't fool with me, if they do I can fool them right out of their minds.' He liked to affect the mincing walk and mannerisms of the invert, but it was a sort of stylistic joke or parody, like his love for the pork pie hat. Dr. Cloud substantiated the fact that Pres was straight on both counts.[182]

Reisner's effort claims these affectations as a joke, but clearly Young was consistently plagued by interpretations of his behavior as queer. Even if the military officials were not familiar with Young's eccentric reputation and the rumors of queerness attached to it, it stands to reason that in an age of homosexual panic, the aspects of Young's comportment that had caused the original rumors would have raised red flags with military personnel.[183] The charged atmosphere of

[178] Philips, *Manipulating Masculinities,* 96-97.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Robert Reisner, "The Last, Sad Days, of Lester Young" in Porter, *Reader,* 91.
[183] Kelley also notes that in general, hipsters and jazz musicians were ridiculed as "dandies" for refusing service. See Kelley, "Riddle of the Zoot," 241.

hegemonic man-making in the space of the army training facility would only have enhanced homophobia. Though these two discourses of Young's sexual difference may appear to contradict each other, it is my contention that Young's attachment to two categories of sexual identity thought to be mutually exclusive had an estranging effect. To borrow Ferguson's formulation, Young "embodies the intersections of formations thought to be discrete and transparent, a confusion of that which distinguishes the heterosexual [in this case, a threatening source of competition for white women's attention]…from the homosexual."[184] These confusions about Young's sexuality provoked suspicion and discipline from heteronormative authorities.

Young would also have aroused suspicion simply as a musician. Military historian Leo Braudy suggests that ever since the trials of Oscar Wilde, "the physicality of the artistic male was considered particularly suspect. Being cultured was just a step away from being effeminate. Poets, painters, and writers thus often went out of their way to prove their robustness."[185] This was certainly the case among other leading jazz musicians of the age, particularly among those associated with bebop, as the work of Hazel Carby and Nicole Rustin demonstrates.[186] Discussing the masculine identity of Charles Mingus, Rustin concludes that, "ultimately…an essential aspect of masculinity is the will to self-determination."[187] Further, Hazel Carby argues that this will to self-determination held particular racial importance, configured in the image of the "Race Man."[188] The race man worked to contribute to racial pride through "an aggressive demonstration of their superiority in some field of achievement, either individually or collectively."[189] Carby suggests that the notion of the race man posited a "rarely questioned notion of masculinity as it is connected to race and nation."[190] This notion is evident in the Double V campaign's championing of black soldiers. As Young's conduct during his army experience demonstrates, he declined to engage with the "race man" challenge forced on him. In doing so, he excluded himself from this particularly masculine identity, as well as from the trope

[184] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black,* 4.
[185] Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism,* 396.
[186] See Carby, "Playing the Changes," and Nichole T. Rustin, *Mingus Fingers*
[187] Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 37
[188] Hazel Carby, *Race Men,* 4.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid*,* 5.

of military culture that celebrated the underdog's triumph over adversity.[191] The 1971 anthology *The Black Soldier* commemorates accounts of black men using their army experiences for personal racial and masculine triumph. Entertainer Sammy Davis Jr.'s account provides an interesting parallel. During Davis's training, a white bully insisted on demeaning him and calling him "boy." As Herbert L. Sussman writes, the epithet of "boy" marked a discursive attempt to maintain the idea that black males could never fully reach manhood.[192] After standing up to the bully in a physical fight, Davis recalls, "The difference they see is so much more than color. I'm a whole other brand of being to them."[193] Realizing that he was considered less than a man, Davis fought to claim equal rights to that title. While Davis and others retaliated against the emasculating racism imposed on them, Young did not engage. Therefore when Young showed no interested in proving his robustness, raising the race, or demonstrating his "will to self-determination," he had effectively fallen short of two important goals: he had shirked the wartime anti-racist strategies discussed above, and had failed to override rumors of his homosexuality by demonstrating physical strength and aggression.

The transcripts show that during the course of the trial Young showed no resistance to his indictment. Describing the trial, Daniels remarked, "the inordinate attention paid to particular details of evidence, the complete disregard of other important matters, and Young's total cooperation with the authorities combined to lend a surreal quality to the trial."[194] Daniels further proposes that the trial documents "suggest that the proceedings were a sham, that the decision had already been made about his fate, and the prosecution and defense were simply going through the motions."[195] Daniels suggests that Young was a victim of military dogma, a view shared across biographies of Young. Büchmann-Møller is so disgusted by the proceedings that he spends several paragraphs pronouncing shame on the U.S. Army for having perpetrated such an injustice.[196] Throughout Büchmann-Møller's account of the trial, he implies that the whole

[191] This is in keeping with the idea that military training facilitates recruits' realization of their full masculine potential.
[192] Sussman, "I Am a Man," 108.
[193] Jay David and Elaine Forman Crane, *The Black Soldier: from the American Revolution to Vietnam* (New York: Morrow, 1971), 145.
[194] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 257.
[195] Ibid, 262. Daniels also proposes an alternate reading of Young's victimhood, imagining that Young could have strategically orchestrated the whole trial to evade ever reaching the front, choosing short-term imprisonment over the risks and horrors of active duty.
[196] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 118. Büchmann-Møller firmly states: "There is no doubt that Lester's call-up was on false premises and that the U.S. Army made an unfortunate mistake on this occasion."

affair amounted to a cover-up, concluding with a '*j'accuse'* statement directed at the military, discrediting them for the outrage of Young's trial:

> The U.S. Army would not admit that it had made a mistake and had retained him in its ranks despite the blatant irrationality of the whole situation. The human aspects of Lester's case were completely ignored, and the old number was trotted out that everything could be righted simply by using disciplinary measures. One would have thought that those officers responsible for judging the suitability of conscripts to be soldiers would, after so much contact with people, have gained enough psychological insight into their work to know what they were doing. It can scarcely be a matter of pride for the U.S. Army that it committed so many errors in succession in Lester's case.[197]

In place of the righteous anger of Büchmann-Møller, Gelly's description of the events of Young's military career contains a familial attitude of pity for poor pathetic Lester: "one can only imagine what torture it was for him, a soft, slow-moving man, condemned to a world where everyone shouted and all movement had to be at the double."[198] Gelly also remarks on the unfairness of the trial, but chalks this up to the particularities of the military justice system. Gelly argues that a proper trial "would have brought the judicial process into conflict with military discipline."[199]

Gelly's observation points to what I believe to be the core of the trial proceedings. The circumstances of the trial were undoubtedly unfairly weighed against Young, and the refusal of the jury to consider the defense's reasonable argument points to a more complex goal than a simple eradication of habit-forming drugs. As Brackett argues, the prohibition of drugs was used by authorities as a vehicle to "brand" deviants in order to justify subjecting them to discipline.[200] The various pronouncements on Young's character, and the very fact that he was inducted despite being clearly physically and mentally unfit for the rigors of training, point to the military's determination to discipline Young's masculinity. Returning to the pronouncement of Young's mental state by the hospital neurologist, it is clear that it is not Young's substance use, but the very material of his racialized gender identity that the Army deemed unacceptable: "It is felt he is purely a disciplinary problem and that disposition should be effected through

[197] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 126-127.
[198] Gelly *Being Pres,* 103.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Brackett, "Family Values in Music," 46.

administrative channels."[201] Büchmann-Møller noted that Young received the maximum sentence possible for his offense, a fact both he and Daniels protest as too harsh.[202] Yet the military's justification for meting out this sentence is perfectly consistent with all the previous attempts to discipline Young's masculinity. The court documents list the official sentence as follows: "It is noted that accused has never been subjected to disciplinary training and evidence of his continued use of drugs is based largely on his own statements. In view of these facts together with the possibility that his undesirable traits may be corrected by proper treatment and disciplinary training it is recommended that the sentence be approved…"[203] As Hopton theorizes, the deep connection between the military and masculinity is reflected in its penal system. Hopton argues that the goal of corrective punishment "seems to be to deny the possibility that the young men's "crimes" may represent a political protest or reaction to social disadvantage and, instead, to view their antisocial behavior as arising from destructive biological urges, which military style discipline will enable them to control."[204] The destructive urges here are drug abuse and less-than-hegemonic gender identity and sexuality. Young's sentence was handed down because the U.S. Army judged that its training methods could mold him into a hegemonic man.

Yet, after Young had served his sentence and returned to his life, his difference only became more apparent. For the remainder of his career, critics and peers saw him as a broken man: John Hammond defined the affair as "a disaster from start to finish…He came back to civilian life more suspicious and less communicative than ever…"[205] This same conception of brokenness became attached to his music. Martin Williams asserted that "the Lester Young who returned from army service late in 1945 was a very different player and man…Beyond question, his creative energy descended as he descended the range of his horn, and his rhythmic sense gradually became that of a tired and finally exhausted man." [206] Critic Mike Nevard, in a review for *Melody Maker* in 1953, inscribed his ideas of Young's personal tragedy onto his music, dismissing his contemporary work as a "pathetic parody of the "cool" style he inspired," a

[201] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 121.
[202] Ibid, 122. Young was officially charged "according to the 96th Article of War with 'on or about 30 January 1945, wrongfully having in his possession habit-forming drugs…said drugs not having been ordered by a medical officer of the camp."
[203] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 126.
[204] Hopton, "The State and Military Masculinity," 115.
[205] Hammond, "Lester Young," 29.
[206] Martin Williams, "Lester Young: Style Beyond Swing," in Porter, *Reader,* 201. Williams refers here to changes from Young's earlier style of playing tenor, which emphasized the notes of an alto range.

"lackluster" effort that was the "culmination of years of deterioration."[207] Louis Gottlieb, reflecting on Young's late records, hears an "unspeakable sadness" in Young's expressions. In a 1963 article for *Down Beat*, critic Don Heckman definitively pronounced, "Young's truly productive period ended with his induction into the army in 1944. Although there is some critical opinion to the contrary, his playing after the way seems unusually listless and soft."[208]

By contrast, Young's posthumous biographers and critics in the 1980's came armed with meticulous transcriptions to contest these earlier critical dismissals.[209] These critics searched for valuable moments in Young's later work, reclaiming Young's work in 1949 and 1950 as a fruitful period.[210] While these discourses acknowledged the undeniable effects of Young's physical deterioration, they sought to prove his continued claim to the title of artist. Alongside these recuperative claims, critics and biographers sought to revise and refine misguided narratives of Young's life and career. As shown above, a large part of this project involved disavowing the disruption of 1945 in Young's creative efforts, while emphasizing it as the most important personal event of his life, or as Gelly called it, the "brink of his personal abyss."[211]

The strong language used by Young's biographers describing the injustices of Young's trial is warranted by the fact that the entirety of Young's time with the military, from induction to discharge, was clearly a very inhumane ordeal. Throughout the rest of Young's life he refused to talk about the episode. The deepest glimpse into Young's feeling of his time in the army was confided to a close group of friends, and even then he did not go into detail. Young recalled the army as "'a nightmare man, one mad nightmare….they sent me down South, Georgia. That was enough to make me blow my top. It was a drag, Jack.' He could not or would not recall details; 'all he remembers,' an interviewer noted, 'was hating the army with a furious intensity, hating the brass, reveille, injustice to Negroes and the caste system in the South…[The disciplinary center in Savannah [*sic*]…was sheer hell.'"[212]

The strategies that Young's biographers have used in order to try and account for this experience reflects a desire to reconfigure Young's masculine identity according to ideals

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[207] Mike Nevard, "I'll Take Flip Any Time!," in Porter, *Reader,* 44-45.
[208] Don Heckman, "Pres and Hawk: Saxophone Fountainheads," in Porter, *Reader,* 262.
[209] As mentioned above, this renewed scholarly interest followed researcher John McDonough's publication of Young's court martial details in 1980.
[210] See Loren Schoenberg, "East of the Sun: the Changes of Lester Young;" Lawrence Gushee, "Lester Young's 'Shoe Shine Boy,'" in Porter, *Reader*; Porter, *Lester Young.*
[211] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 99.
[212] Allan Morrison, "You Got to Be Original, Man," in Porter, *Reader,* 135.

contemporary to the time of their writing. Writing in 1990, Büchmann-Møller asserts that Young's incompatibility with army life was a product of a strong will and "extremely original character:"[213] "Lester also wanted to be his own boss as far as possible, and therefore…he could not stand being pushed around. He was also of a lazy disposition physically; he wanted to do things at his own speed, without hurrying. This relaxed nature of his, which so clearly can be felt in his playing, was simply part of his personality."[214] Unfettered by the stricter controls on gender normativity imposed by 1940s militaristic discourse, Büchmann-Møller can place a higher importance on those of Young's traits – strong will, independence, individuality, relaxed nature – that conform to contemporary normative definitions of masculinity. Daniels similarly offered alternative readings of Young's masculinity writing a decade later. Daniels emphasizes Young's honesty throughout the ordeal, praising his integrity and his rejection of violence. Though Young's biographers have attempted to reframe Young and remove some of the tarnish from his masculinity, hegemonic ideals of masculinity still maintain their stubborn influence, evident in the tone of pity that can be read in many commentators' descriptions of Young.

[213] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 118.
[214] Ibid, 119.

Chapter 3: "Saying Something;" Gender and Orality

> *He'd invented his own language in which words were just a tune, speech a kind of singing – a syrup language that sweetened the world but which was powerless to keep it at bay. The harder the world appeared, the softer his language became, until his words were like beautifully cadenced nonsense, a gorgeous song only Lady had ears to hear.*
> Geoff Dyer, *But Beautiful*[215]

Geoff Dyer's imagining of Lester Young in his book of fictionalized jazz portraits, *But Beautiful,* poetically intertwines Young's words and music, combining his two legacies into one expressive whole. Yet, despite the lore that has developed around his speech, very little archival record of Young in his own words exists. Notoriously reticent, Young participated in very few interviews. As all his biographies have been published decades after his death, Young's biographers likewise did not have first hand accounts. Nevertheless, Young's reputation hinges on two important aspects of his orality. First, any mention of Young customarily includes a nod to his cryptic personal slang. He is famously attributed with the coining and popularizing of some of the defining hipster jargon still used today: such as "hip," "cool," and even "motherfucker." Some commentators further allude to a curious vocal tone. Young's unique style of speech, described as enigmatic, rhythmic, poetic, deep, and coded, is a heritage almost equal to his music. Second, of the sparse direct quotes we have of Young, many concern his insistence on the correlation between words and music; he was adamant that a soloist should be "telling stories," and "saying something."[216] Further, Young unabashedly proclaimed a very unhip love of vocal music and frequently expressed his desire to transmit lyrical and vocal qualities through his horn.

But what do Young's own voice, his words, tell us? Young's biographers have worked tirelessly to uncover data about his life and work, but due perhaps to the limits of portable recording technology at the time, only two audio recordings of Young's few interviews remain. As Monica Hairston O'Connell and Sherrie Tucker have pointed out in their groundbreaking work on Melba Liston, aurality, and orality, there is a wealth of information available to researchers through an audio recording that is not discernible from a transcript, or even less, in

[215] Geoff Dyer, *But Beautiful: a Book About Jazz* (New York: North Point Press, 1996), 20.
[216] Young's musical and physical voices were also often conflated. According to John Hammond's description of Young, he "knew only how to talk through his horn." See Hammond, "Lester Young," 29.

an edited, published interview.[217] Following them, I draw on the main source of accessible audio of Young's voice: the 1959 interview with François Postif for *Jazz Hot* in Paris, given on February 6, at 6:00 p.m., some five weeks before Young's eventual death on March 15th of that year. This interview has been a crucial resource for Young's biographers, among those the meticulous Frank Büchmann-Møller, who calls it the "best and longest" of Young's few career interviews, in which he "deals very thoroughly with what he is and stands for."[218] Douglas Henry Daniels notes in the appendix of his biography on Young that he played the audio recording of this interview for his own interview subjects, taking their reactions into account.[219] A survey of biological literature reveals that this interview is used almost exclusively as the source of Young's authority on the legends of his life. Thus this text has been vital in shaping the tone of those incidents.

In this chapter, I will analyze the contextual variables of this essential interview in order to illuminate deeper meaning behind the words that have been so thoroughly mined as a biographical resource. My project will explore several issues: first, inspired by Hairston O'Connell and Tucker's analysis of Melba Liston's recorded interviews, I will appraise the actual sound of Young's voice. Using the aural evidence archived in Postif's tape, I dissect claims that Young's voice was abnormally high in pitch and soft in tone. Drawing on Vershawn Ashanti Young's reflections on voice and the performance of black masculinity, I argue that orality is a large part of these formations, and thus an important site of difference.[220] Young's voice, while not distinctively soft or high to my ears, was interpreted as outside norms of black male vocality. Second, I consider the content of Young's orality: claims of his unique vocabulary and his jive talk legacy. I suggest that the weighty emphasis on Young's verbal idioms and their influence on the jazz/hipster lexicon at large can be seen as a recuperative attempt to reinscribe Young's eccentricities as hipness, thereby situating him as an insider in the jazz community and endowing him with an added claim to the title of hipster jazz legend. For his own part, I propose that Young used his orality strategically in response to external pressures, constructing and performing a detached version of himself that reflected his keen awareness of popular expectations of his identity. Finally, I analyze the frequent discursive conflation of Young's

[217] Monica Hairston O'Connell and Sherrie Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn(?): Melba Liston's Oral Histories and Classroom Presentations," *Black Music Research Journal* 34.1 (2014): 121-158.
[218] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 217.
[219] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 389.
[220] Reference to heteronormative black masculinity here implies heterosexuality as requisite.

saxophone sound and his vocality, as well as frequent comparisons of his musical voice with singers – in particular, Billie Holiday – and the gendered implications of those associations.

Despite the exhaustive quotation of Postif's interview, layers of meaning present in this text complicate its use as a source of pure, objective biographical facts. As Hairston O'Connell and Tucker emphasize, the role of the setting and tone of the interview, as well as the subject's rapport with the interviewer, are important variables to consider when interpreting the meaning behind the words on the transcript. Characterizing the interview as a collaborative performance, Hairston O'Connell and Tucker assert that if researchers only listen to the "solo" of the interviewee, the wealth of meaning inscribed by the interpersonal dynamic and external pressures of the interview will be overlooked.[221] An important further consideration is the varying authority that Young's own words have been given. Daniels asserts that Young's voice has not been taken very seriously.[222] One of the cornerstones of the tragic narrative of Young's life is his drinking habit, and as a result many interviewers have felt the need to qualify their interviews with Young, reassuring readers his answers were thought out and "lucid," a concern that would not generally be specified among other research subjects.[223] For example, Porter published a complete transcript of the interview in his book *The Lester Young Reader* with a disclaimer that Young's "freewheeling and uninhibited discourse" was a product of his drinking: "Perhaps 'freewheeling' is putting it lightly. Young was clearly drunk at the time…"[224] This is certainly accurate, yet the frequent inclusion of excerpts of the interview in Young's biographies is accompanied by no such disclaimer, and instead is presented as unmediated truth. Undoubtedly, Young's occasional slurred words and mild confusion in the interview suggest speech impairment due to alcohol, but I contend that much of the confusion arose from a language barrier: Postif has difficulty expressing his questions clearly in English. Whether the miscommunication was due to alcohol or loss in translation, Young's responses to Postif's questions should not be simply discredited as an inaccurate representation of his feeling on the subjects he addressed, many of which it is clear from his tone he cared deeply about.

Porter's correspondence with Postif yields some valuable context on the setting of this interview. Introducing the interview's complete transcript in his reader, Porter sets the record

[221] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn,"123.
[222] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 5.
[223] See Nat Hentoff, "Pres," in Porter, *Reader,*158.
[224] Porter, *Reader,* 173.

straight about the date: the interview had long been mistakenly understood as happening a few days before Young's death, due to a simple lapse in Postif's memory, and his oversight in not marking down the date of the interview as a young reporter.[225] Perhaps this hypothesis gained traction by adding an extra layer of doom and poignant significance to Young's words. This rumor certainly follows the pattern of fetishizing and exaggerating the tragic circumstances in Young's life. As Porter confirms, the interview took place on February 6, 1959, on a Friday afternoon at 6:00 p.m. The setting was "very informal," taking place Young's room at the Hôtel D'Angleterre, comfortable surroundings for him. Young had come to Paris to accept an offer from Le Blue Note to star as the club's resident soloist. Büchmann-Møller's description of Young's time in Paris starts out as a happy one: he seemingly meshed with the musicians he was playing with and was enjoying a reunion with Billie Holiday, who was also in town for several weeks. As Büchmann-Møller does not attach specific dates to the events he recounts, it is difficult to pinpoint where in the serious decline in Young's health the interview took place. According to Postif, the interview took place at the Hôtel D'Angleterre, where Büchmann-Møller reports Young had to move because he had become so weak "he had to be helped downstairs to a taxi to get to the jazz club."[226] Young himself states in the interview that he had been in Paris for two weeks. Considering this, it is reasonable to conclude that Young's health was poor at the time and he was unhappy in Paris. The latter point is corroborated by Young's remark during the interview that he would have left Paris if he had the funds to do so.[227]

The interviewer himself, François Postif, was an inexperienced journalist at the time, "a young man with a portable reel-to-reel tape recorder," as Porter described him.[228] His inexperience is evident in the tapes – he is very eager, and Young almost seems to be indulging his interest, sometimes explaining things as if to a child. Postif was apparently a regular at Le Blue Note, and recalls being on friendly terms with Young: "I used to meet him at the club, and we had some nice discussions and talking, and one day I asked him: 'Can I make an interview with you for *Jazz Hot?'* and he said: 'Okay, no problems. Come tomorrow at 6 p.m. at my

[225] Porter, *Reader,* 174.
[226] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 216.
[227] François Postif, "An Interview," in Porter, *Reader,* 181.
[228] Porter, *Reader,* 173.

hotel.'"[229] The fact that Young evidently had established a rapport with the young interviewer prior to the event gives more insight into the tone of the tapes.

The interview occurred at 6 p.m., which would have been the late afternoon lull before Young made his way to Le Blue Note to play until the wee hours. Young would likely have wakened only a short while earlier, and, according to Postif, was "lying quite nude on his bed, unshaved and ill-looking. He was drinking port wine, and I think he was not quite in his normal attitude. Otherwise he wouldn't have been so free and 'nasty' – and the interview would have been more conventional."[230] On a separate occasion Postif recalled, "I remember it was a very cold day, and when I came to his hotel the window was open and it was very cold. Lester was lying in bed. He was drinking port and listening to the record player. I remember it was Count Basie at Newport with 'Lester Leaps In.'…He was very relaxed and pleased to talk."[231]

The setting of the interview provides helpful context, but as Hairston O'Connell and Tucker demonstrate, extremely valuable insight can be harvested from close attention to a subject's oral fingerprint. Hairston O'Connell and Tucker emphasize the subject's orality – "the fact and concept of verbal communication," – as a reservoir of highly personal information unique to the individual, "carrying within it the influence of age, gender, cultural origin...in addition to an individual's particular speech patterns, mannerisms, vocabulary, volume, pace, habits… a very distinct vocal-print."[232] For Roland Barthes, the human voice is the ultimate expression of difference, "a site which escapes all science, for there is no science (physiology, history, aesthetics, psychoanalysis) which exhausts the voice: no matter how much you classify and comment on music historically, sociologically, aesthetically, technically, there will always be a remainder, a supplement, a lapse, something non-spoken which designates itself: the voice."[233] The voice, then, contributes meaning to the text of the transcript that cannot be found anywhere else. As is very evident in Hairston O'Connell and Tucker's readings of Liston's interviews, often "vocal inflections sound a different story than the verbal narrative she

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[229] François Postif, interviewed by Norman Saks, Paris, Summer 1985, quoted in Büchmann-Møller, *Fight For Your Life,* 217.
[230] Porter, *Reader,* 174. An earlier interview with Leonard Feather recounts a similar scenario where the interviewer is on familiar terms and is invited to Young's hotel room – arriving in the late afternoon as Young has just woken up. See Leonard Feather, "Here's Pres!" in Porter, *Reader,* 141.
[231] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 217.
[232] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 123.
[233] Roland Barthes, "Music, Voice, Language," in Martin Clayton, ed., *Music, Words and Voice: a Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press published in association with The Open University, 2008), 80.

speaks."[234] Further, Hairston O'Connell and Tucker show that analyzing aurality, or "the acoustic landscape…and the innately intimate way we absorb it," can be just as productive. Hairston O'Connell and Tucker listen to "silences, pauses, refusals, not merely as spaces between words, but knowing that they shape the meanings that emerge between participants in an oral presentation event."[235] Cues in the voices and silences of Young and Postif illuminate and in some cases completely alter the meanings of the seemingly mundane formalities of the interview. It is with this in mind that I turn to the audio recording of Young and Postif's famous encounter.[236]

On the tape, Postif begins rather conventionally, inquiring after the truth of Young's birthplace, a detail that had been somewhat obscured by Young's previous interviews. Responding to Postif's request for the accurate location, Young takes a tantalizing pause, and then replies in a mischievous tone, "Should I really tell you?" Young's drawl is slow, sly, and drifts into laughter, chuckling as Postif, a bit confused, tries to play along and coax the answer. Young teases, "I could tell you a lie…" and stalls by checking up on the tape recorder, before delivering his answer – "I was born in Woodville, Mississippi."[237] Throughout the following exchange with Postif, Young adopts a kindly, patient tone and explains his origins slowly, but not condescendingly, like a grandfather recounting a favorite story for the hundredth time. This gracious tone could have been due to the reporter's young age, or the fact he was obviously struggling to express himself in English, or simply because Young had taken a liking to him. For his part, Postif is enthusiastically attentive, chiming in with an "Oh yeah" quite frequently, but expresses slight impatience at Young's methodical and repetitive explanation.

Given the additional insight into the setting of the interview, the detail provided here about Young's birth is more revealing. Lewis Porter has collected all of Young's significant interviews in *A Lester Young Reader.* Analyzing the settings of these various interviews and comparing them with the apparently no-holds-barred interview with Postif can illuminate the discrepancies in the details of these various interviews. Introducing the collection, Porter calls Young an "honest storyteller": indeed, Young's honesty has been widely noted, particularly in the case of his court martial hearing, where transcripts show he made no attempts to conceal his

[234] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 123.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Audio recording at *President of Beauty: The Life and Times of Lester Young,* "Postif Interview w/Lester Young," post by Henry Ferrini, November 5, 2013, http://lesterlives.wordpress.com/lester-interview/.
[237] Porter, *Reader*, 175

substance use at any point throughout the induction process and his stay at the base.[238] Yet, Young is quoted as listing his birthplace as New Orleans in several interview settings — why? As Hairston O'Connell and Tucker so compellingly theorize, "If the way a jazz musician references the melodic contours of a standard says much about their artistic priorities, process and style, we can similarly learn from the ways in which [Melba] Liston riffs across presentations and oral histories on the contours of professional guideposts that appear across narrative events."[239] If I may attempt the same parallel between Young's performance of words and his performance of music, I suggest that he had, by this point in his career, established a "standard" telling of the legends of his life.[240] This standard was produced by Young's keen awareness of the pressures placed on him by media assumptions and subsequent expectations of his identity. In the interview situations where Young did not feel comfortable, he simply ran through the head straight. Pat Harris, for example, in relating the circumstances of her 1949 interview with Young for *Down Beat*, notes her awareness that Young was censoring himself. Harris reckons this was due to the fact she was "an anomaly in the field" as a young female jazz writer, but perhaps Young used this oversimplified story to distance himself from personal invasion.[241] Even with Leonard Feather, who no doubt would have been a familiar face, Young seems to dole out a stock answer concerning his early life: "Lester began to unfold the story of his life in the laconic manner that can only be understood by those who have met him."[242] Young's tale was certainly abridged in this instance, and he does not give Feather the intimate details that he divulged elsewhere. Perhaps, as Farah Jasmine Griffin concludes of William Dufty's dubious 'autobiography' of Billie Holiday, the autobiographical standard that Young trots out for untrustworthy interviewers is simply an "autobiography of the stage persona."[243]

Close reading of Feather's interview reveals a disconnect between the two men that would have caused Young to close off: a note of condescension is clearly detectable in Feather's narrative. Feather describes Young's surroundings with, if not disgust, bewilderment, remarking on the dirty dishes, and Young's "sleepy, disheveled" appearance. Young evidently was not under any pretense that this was a formal interview, making absent minded small talk with

[238] Porter, *Reader,* 129.
[239] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 122-123.
[240] Geoff Dyer refers to the facts forming the basis of his fictionalized jazz accounts in *But Beautiful* as "standards" that he brings his own versions of. See Dyer, *But Beautiful,* vii-viii.
[241] Porter, *Reader,* 136.
[242] Feather, "Here's Pres!," in Porter, *Reader,* 142.
[243] Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, 46.

Feather about a clarinet he wanted to get fixed, as well as putting on a recording that Feather clearly looks down on – Kay Kyser's popular hit, "Slow Boat to China." Feather notes peevishly that Young didn't even bother to change this tasteless selection, content to let it repeat until he "finally decided to make a change by putting on some of his favorite Dick Haymes [another popular white singer] records."[244] Feather's disdain for these sentimental mainstream records is clear, as he "leafed through three boxes of records, found many popular singers, little jazz, and only one section of old Basie sides," evidently looking for something more to his liking and coming up short.[245] Feather was not alone in his bewilderment over Young's love of vocal records – his attitude reflects a longstanding investment of white critics into a particular brand of black masculine identity for jazz musicians, which I will discuss further below. As Young's reserve on this occasion suggests, this disconnect would not have fostered an environment where he could be open.

By contrast, when Young is at ease, he is able to "riff" on his narrative 'standard.'[246] Allan Morrison's eloquent 1946 piece, "You Got to Be Original, Man," takes the form of observations during a casual and intimate conversation among jazz musician friends. Porter notes that Morrison's piece appears to be the first full-length article about Young, and "almost certainly the first anywhere to include interview excerpts."[247] Porter also notes that Young would have been more comfortable with Morrison, one of the few black jazz writers, than he would be with a white critic. From Morrison's evocative description of the settings, this interview was more conducive to openness, as it took place "under the best possible circumstances for such talk – a smoky hotel room lighted by a single pale-green bulb."[248] Indeed, the piece can hardly even be called an interview, as the questions do not seem to be directed at Young by Morrison himself, but rather from the peers present in the room. It would seem that here, then, Young's words were not tempered by an awareness of being called on to construct a narrative of his life – the 'standard,'– as he would be in more formal interviews.

It is this setting where Young reveals his true birthplace – a small detail, yes, but Morrison's observance of the importance of vocal tone in the meaning of words has fortunately given a clue that it meant more to Young. Morrison notes a change in Young's tone when

[244] Feather, "Here's Pres!," 141.
[245] Ibid, 141-142.
[246] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 123.
[247] Porter, *Reader,* 131.
[248] Allan Morrison, "You Got to Be Original, Man," in Porter, *Reader,* 132.

describing his origins: he detects "a tinge of embarrassment" when Young clarifies that he was born in Mississippi and "real pride in his tone" when he emphasizes, "But I was raised in the carnivals [of New Orleans]."[249] Morrison gives his readers more clues by observing Young's body language while talking about his youth with his family in the Young band: "his eyes opened wider as he spoke, and he gestured slightly with his hands."[250] These discoveries are the reason why Hairston O'Connell and Tucker cautioned, "if we don't attend to the sociality of the interview, we cannot really make sense of the "solo."[251]

Returning to Postif's interview ten years later, Young's voice does not register any sense of embarrassment at his Woodville origins, but the joy of his childhood memories of New Orleans is still very audible. In recounting the career as a handbill boy that sparked his passion for music, Young's tone is very revealing. Describing his happy memories, Young's 'solo' is strong, rich, and rhythmic. When prompted for memories of his New Orleans boyhood, Young unearthed more difficult memories of his family. Young mused vaguely, "[I didn't] meet my father until ten years old. I didn't know I had one."[252] Young's voice at this point on the tape sounds hazy and somewhat blank, while Postif's response of "Oh." is tangibly, painfully awkward. Young replies flatly, drily intoning in a slow rhythmic phrasing, "Just me, my mother, my sister, and my brother, that's all," before swiftly moving on: "That type of stuff, but the music got me."[253] Young's response seems to be a mix of demonstrating to Postif that this was simply reality for them, and trying to make him feel a little less uncomfortable. Young's tone immediately lightens and he makes Postif laugh with jovial descriptions of childhood, even joking about the coincidence of his interest in music while his unknown father was a musician, until arriving at a particularly difficult incident: "Then my father came, and he was" – Young's narrative had been rhythmically proceeding at a swinging pace until this sentence, where his voice caught. A little sharp intake of breath is audible on the tape, followed by a labored pause before Young finally says "…takin' us away from the family, and all…" The feeling in Young's voice here is subtle enough that Postif can push past it to continue with his questions, but the emotion of that situation is very clear, "archived" in the voice.

[249] Morrison, "You Got to Be Original, Man," 132.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One Toot Her Own Horn," 132.
[252] Postif, "Interview," in Porter, *Reader,* 176.
[253] Ibid.

The "archive of feeling," a concept adopted from Ann Cvetkovich by Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, calls for "an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception."[254] Cvetkovich's ideas, as followed from Hairston O'Connell and Tucker's model, provide fruitful ways of responding to emotional cues in the voice and placing them in the context of trauma. Considerations of trauma, for Cvetkovich, lead the researcher to search for evidence in unorthodox "archives" of the private sphere, such as photographs, or audio recordings, as Hairston O'Connell and Tucker have done. Cvetkovich defines trauma as "the hinge between systemic structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of them."[255] Pointing to race in America as a major source of trauma, Cvetkovich notes the complex difficulties of reading this history, since it is "buried more deeply in the past than the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and other geopolitical sites of trauma where there are living survivors, and thus they require different theoretical and memorial strategies…"[256] Racial traumas are often minimized or dismissed, but remain embedded, manifesting in commonplace emotional experiences. Cvetkovich finds that "the demands of thinking about race in relation to trauma converge with those of thinking about sexuality because both require a method that is alert to the idiosyncrasies of emotional life."[257] While I can't hope to definitively decipher Young's emotional life, Cvetkovich's approach is useful for disrupting the discursive constructions of tragic decline by evaluating the added meaning found in context of this audio "archive" of his voice. In turn, this approach contextualizes the excerpts from the tape that Young's biographers so heavily relied on to construct his identity in their texts.

Identifying feeling in Young's speech is a fascinating process, especially when doing so under the impression of him as extremely sensitive that is insisted on by all accounts. There are many moments, when reading through Young's biography and his limited direct quotations, where he openly states his emotions. One such example occurs in Postif's interview when Young describes his ejection from his father's band. Young recalls: "Now you know my heart was broke, you dig? I went and cried, and give up my little teardrops and shit, I said, 'Well, I'll come

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[254] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7, qtd. in Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 126.
[255] Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*,12.
[256] Ibid, 6.
[257] Ibid.

back and catch these motherfuckers if that's the way they *want* it.'"[258] Despite the fact that Young's words in this instance explicitly describe emotion, examination of the tape reveals that his voice does not match the description. Rather, when recounting his "little teardrops" Young's voice takes on a noticeably brighter tone, and he drawls rhythmically, as if making light of his younger self. The entire story is covered in a veil of humour, which Young persistently draws over his voice. Where the emotion in Young's voice is strikingly audible is in his imitations of his father and the other members of his band. Relating his father's words – "He say, 'Get up' – you know, he don't curse like I do (different) – 'get up and get your fuckin' ass and work you some scales. Get out!'" – a dark bitterness stains Young's humour, particularly chilling in his flat and harsh enunciation of "Get out!"[259] Young quickly returns to his wry overtone to relate the rest of the story as a comic tale:

> The rest of them went rehearsing. Now you know my heart was broke, you dig? I went and cried, and give up my little teardrops and shit, I said, "Well, I'll come back and catch these motherfuckers if that's the way they *want* it. [Here he pauses] Like that you know? So I went away and learned how to read the music, *still* by myself, y'dig, and I came back in the band [another pause – a dreamy, dull, bitter tone enters his voice] played this music and shit [dreamy tone dissipates] and all the time I was copyin' on the records also with the music, so I could fuck these motherfuckers *completely* up. So I went in the band, and they threw the goddamn marches out, and I read the music and shit, and everything was great. But what was in *my* heart, why all the motherfuckers laughed when they put me out, when I *couldn't* read, (and) come up and say, "Won't you show me how this goes? You play like that?" Yeah sure, I'll show you shit, you rusty motherfucker! [Snort of laughter] so that's the way that went down.[260]

Young's bitterness emerges again in the simpering, high tone he imparts to his colleagues' plea for help, and his anger is audible in his impression of his own response, before his laughter breaks the tension. Postif quietly responds, "Um hm," before Young jovially but firmly moves on with "Now, I made that score: I don't like to read music." This answer was final – the archive is now shut.

Upon careful listening to this audio recording, something of a strategy in Young's vocalizations starts to emerge. As mentioned in chapter one, Young's voice has often been referred to as "high" and "soft." Lester's younger brother Lee Young recalled his wonderment at

[258] Postif, "Interview," 183.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.

the pitch of his older sibling's voice upon their meeting when Lee was a little boy, only to realize later that his own voice sounded much the same.[261] Gelly uses the quality of Young's voice as partial explanation of the rumors that Young was homosexual, calling it "soft, light in texture and fairly high pitched."[262] Büchmann-Møller reports Young's voice as "high and boyish."[263] Young's voice was described as "soft" on various occasions, an adjective just as frequently used to describe the tone of his saxophone. For my own part, the taped recording of Young's voice in 1959 does not sound noticeably higher pitched than an average tenor speaking voice. Rather, Young's voice has a rather theatrical range, at times growling low out of the throat and chest, at times hazy and airy, at times an easy drawl, an occasional high nasal hoot for emphasis. Softness is unquestionably audible in Young's voice, but I identify that quality as a covering Young uses when he withdraws into reserved politeness. Outside of that circumstance I would characterize more of a warm lilt or subtle honeyed quality to Young's voice – something I as an outside, Canadian listener identify simply as typical of a Southern American accent. Daniels situates the content of Young's oral particularities as part of a rural Southern black vernacular tradition, noting that his vocabulary "reflected a country aura."[264] Daniels identifies many of Young's expressions considered cryptic in the North as reflecting his Louisiana roots through ideas of home, family and Southern values.[265] As one example, "have another helping" encouraged a fellow musician to take a solo.[266] Daniels further argues that West Africans and black Americans in general share the "love of verbal contests, their punning, their lengthy toasts and boasts, and the delight they take in the spontaneity of creative humour."[267] Likewise, Porter quotes pianist John Lewis's testimony, connecting Young's "special language" to a hip way of talking found in Kansas City and the Southwest during the 1920s and 1930s.[268] For Daniels, the various currents

[261] Young with Willard, "Lester's Style," 35.
[262] Gelly, *Being Pres,* 47.
[263] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 27.
[264] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 31.
[265] Further research could be done on the impact of tensions between city and country as a site of difference in Young's vocabulary. In his interview with Chris Albertson, Young expresses awareness of city snobbery from "the New York clique," and attributes the disapproval of his Fletcher Henderson to bandmates' disdain for the Kansas City background of he and two other players that were dismissed from the band. See Chris Albertson, "Interview with Lester Young," in Porter, *Reader,* 166-167. See also Robin D.G. Kelley's discussion of Malcolm X's anxieties navigating the transition from rural to urban black identity, a struggle no doubt shared by the many migrants of the 1930s and 1940s, in "Riddle of the Zoot," 235-237.
[266] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 31
[267] Ibid.
[268] Porter, *Lester Young,* 2.

of black American vernacular tradition contextualize Young, debunking pronouncements of his jargon as bizarre and isolating, unique to only him.

I contend that there are two reasons that Young's speaking voice has consistently been characterized as soft and high. The first can be found in the patterns of Young's vocal tone I have observed through the audio recording of the Postif interview. Providing that this sample can be taken as a representation of Young's speaking habits, I conclude that when speaking about things that he enjoys or that are important to him in some way, Young's voice becomes strong, deeper, richer, and more rhythmic. When touching on subjects he finds difficult or is reluctant to discuss, Young backs off the voice considerably, and his tone becomes not higher necessarily in pitch, but lighter, quieter, softer, that is, less air expelled through the vocal cords, less engagement between voice and body. For example, when Postif asks Young to comment on newer sax players like John Coltrane or Sonny Rollins, or to explain why he initially left the Basie band, Young's voice retreats into a haze: he is slow to answer, he doesn't bother to enunciate or incorporate his typical rhythmic phrasing, and his voice is barely audible.

Considering that Young was by all accounts a shy and reserved individual, perhaps his soft and high voice signified the barrier between himself and the outside world, a protective performative cover that he applied to camouflage the authentic feeling archived in his voice. Accounts of those who knew him well refer to his humour and expression, and focus more on the things that he said than on his voice. As Thad Jones, who became friendly with Young during the Count Basie Birdland engagement of 1956 recounted:

> I got a chance to talk with Lester and I found him to be an exceptionally warm and human person and very thoughtful, extremely thoughtful and considerate of everyone, a very gentle man. When you talked to him the things he would say always seemed to have strong roots and seemed to be very human. They were simple things, but very powerful and sometimes quite funny. You found yourself being amused by him until the impact of what was said sort of reached in and grabbed you, and then you realized it was a very deep and moving thing that had been said. And it was something to be listened to and to be thought about and possibly to be used as a word of advice or guidance. And he was quite humorous, very humorous.
>
> But his humor was like true humor. He didn't say things that struck you as humor just to be funny. It was a statement of life that's been made and he said it in such a wonderful way that it turned out to be a form of humor, but it was his own special brand of humor, and he used special phrases to describe everything that nobody else used, nobody. They were all of Lester Young. It was oblique language, you know. It could be referred to as double-talk in a way. It was coded,

> but in his own special form, but if you listened to it for a while you got the meaning of it….
> I was drinking quite a bit in those days myself, so Lester and I were more or less companions in that respect. Perhaps it was one of the things that made us compatible with one another, plus the fact that we both liked to talk, and that's when I found out how much a profound philosopher Lester was. In a ten minute conversation with Lester you could get enough philosophy, wisdom and truth to keep you busy and thinking about it for two weeks. He was a very deep man, and I think he was totally committed and dedicated to his art.[269]

Dr. Luther Cloud, a physician who had befriended Young in the 1950s, also commented on the richness of Young's speech: "It was poetry, it was so beautiful…[consisting of] very *complicated* rhymes, sometimes …double rhymes within rhymes…and they had rhythm and his obscenities had a rhythm."[270] It seems those who entered Young's inner circle had a different experience of his voice.

A second factor in the interpretation of Young's voice as soft and high (or the isolation of and disproportionate emphasis on those elements) relates to Young's difference. As mentioned above, Hairston O'Connell and Tucker hold the voice as "as unique as an individual's fingerprint."[271] Barthes insists the human voice is an "always different object" that acts as the ultimate "privileged (eidetic) site of difference."[272] Indeed, references to Young's vocal quality usually form part of a list of ways he was eccentric, "unique," or "individual" (or "homosexual") – in a word, different. Thus, unable to necessarily pinpoint it, commentators categorize the difference they find in Young's voice as either "high" or "soft" and place it with one of the common assumptions made about Young: he was "shy" (soft voice); or he was "homosexual" or a "dandy" (high voice). Both of these qualities also imply a discrepancy between Young's voice and the voice associated with hegemonic masculinity – a deep, loud, strong voice. Interestingly, David Ake notes that a particular vocality was associated with the persona of the black hipster jazz musician. Ake argues that the appeal of heroin for bop musicians was partially its effect on the voice:

> As Ben Sidran notes, heroin 'was a shortcut to the presentation of a masculine 'front': the drug caused a 'drag' in the user's voice.' Sidran describes the junkie demeanor as a 'deceptive passivity,' cloaking a 'growing sense of community

[269] Büchmann-Møller, *Fight for Your Life,* 180-181.
[270] Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 353.
[271] Tucker and Hairston, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn," 123.
[272] Barthes, "Words, Voice, Language," 80.

> within black culture around the notion of masculine assertion.' Thus, prevailing identities of the jazzman in the bop world were closely tied to notions of physical endurance and intellectual rigor (intricate lines, dense harmonic structures) and also to an implacable demeanor.[273]

Ake's context here sets up a specific expectation for the voice within the already restrictive bounds of the black jazzman's persona, another expectation that Young did not meet.

While the quality of Young's voice excluded him from formations of black masculinity in the jazz community, the contents of his speech establish his right to inclusion. As an opposition to the knowing shrugs about Young's high voice, his notorious hip jargon and profanity is celebrated, which can be read as an act of reclaiming the masculinity of Young's speech.[274] Upon hearing my recitation of quotations from the Postif interview, one reviewer wondered if the profanities that laced Young's speech might have been his own attempt to project a macho, aggressive image in order to counter suspicion about his masculinity.[275] In his autobiographical book on race and language, Vershawn Ashanti Young argues that race – and masculinity – is performed in language. Examining the black masculine space of the barbershop and his own experiences, Young finds a "burden of racial performance" that must be negotiated through speech. This burden "leaves blacks in the impossible position of either having to try to be white or forever struggling to prove we're black enough, which is also configured for males as a struggle to prove we're man enough."[276] Young argues that language became important in enactments of black (and gender) identity as the distinctions of Jim Crow dissolved. This shift germinated a modern evolution of the "Negro Problem": "Although the problem remains, the question has changed. It's no longer a question of what should be done with the race but who comprises it… In other words, whether or not you're black becomes more irrelevant as performing the kind of black person you are becomes more crucial."[277] Though Young pinpoints the end of Jim Crow as the beginning of language's role in racial and masculine identity, it is clear that a similar question was arising from the new civil rights victories in the 1940s, particularly with the integration of black men into the masculine hallows of the military. As

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[273] Ake, "Remasculating Jazz," 68.
[274] Much the same way that Young's competitiveness has been emphasized, this can be seen as reclamation of masculinity in his personality and behavior.
[275] This can perhaps be attributed to contemporary associations of aggressive posturing of the word "motherfucker" with gangster rap.
[276] Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 6.
[277] Ibid, 6-7.

social categories in America began to blur, those panicked about the clarity of the straight lines of American tradition started to become very suspicious of anyone coloring outside those lines. For Lester Young, his voice became evidence of his place outside the lines of straight, black, and man.

While I do not believe that Young used his speech and profanity to intentionally project a macho image, it is evident that biographers claim Young's jive talk legacy as a way of including him in the black masculine hipness established in the 1940s.[278] The uncensored profanity in Postif's interview – Young's "nasty" talk – is a favorite talking point for biographers seeking to paint an 'authentic' picture of Young. Leonard Feather introduced Young as "one of the few musicians whose vocabulary corresponds with the popular magazine and radio conception of a jazz musician's jargon."[279] As mentioned, Young is consistently lauded as the originator of many ubiquitous hipster terms. Though it seems unlikely that a single person could have been responsible for popularizing those terms, attributing Young with that legacy creates a place for him, and corresponds with the "tendency…to relegate him to the position of a historical 'influence'" that Pat Harris noticed as early as 1949.[280] In establishing this legacy, Young's masculine "nasty" talk has been used to balance out the feminized aspects of his character.

Most of the "nasty" talk Young delivers is found in his bitter tirades against common (mis)constructions of his identity. These moments also reveal the strongest feeling in his voice. There are three instances where Young's amiability gives way to an almost aggressive defensiveness: his tone loses its rhythmic lilt and takes on a dark severity that indicates very deep feeling. Interestingly, none of these instances are prompted by specific questions from Postif, but rather are Young's pre-emptive responses to any of Postif's fairly innocuous questions that he anticipates will lead in a direction he does not like. In these instances, Young seems to take advantage of the unclear phrasing of Postif's English to hijack the interview, making long firm statements about the issues that bother him. The first sign of trouble comes when Postif inquires as to the personnel of the King Oliver band when Young was playing with them. Declining to respond, the joviality and warmth audible at the beginning of the interview subtly fades, as Young responds:

[278] Young's vocabulary certainly does not come across as macho display in the audiotape of Postif's interview.
[279] Feather, "Here's Pres!," 142.
[280] As Harris observed, this arose from a general misunderstanding of Young.

> You see, that's where the people get fucked at, you dig? They want me to come up – I get all kinds of insults about, "You don't play like you played when you were with Count Basie." Here's a man getting older and things, and he's got to look for young things (and shit, the) young boys fucking with him, shit like that. I say, "No, I don't remember no shit with Count Basie," you know, unless I have eyes – right?[281] So I've developed my saxophone to play it, make it sound just like a alto, make it sound like a tenor, make it sound like a *bass,* and everything, and I'm not through working on it yet. That's why they get all trapped up, they go, "Goddamn, I never heard him play like this!" That's the way I *want* (things), that's *modern,* dig? Fuck what you played back in forty-nine, what the fuck you gonna play today, you dig? So a lot of them get lost, a lot of them walk out, you know. They say, "Shit, he ain't playing like he used to play." Well, what the fuck– do you play the same thing every day?[282]

Young's tone here remains mainly cordial, but his frustration with the topic is audible. Postif had not asked Young about changes to his style or about Count Basie, but Young clearly saw Postif's reference to King Oliver as part of a discursive focus that privileged his early period as his glory days. Young's response commandeers the question in order to immediately disavow this idea.

Postif's supportive response moves the interview along, but their rapport is disrupted when the topic turns to race. Reflecting on Postif's request for anecdotes about his "independent mind," Young offers his intolerance of the "bull*shit*" of racism. When Postif responds in disbelief, "Not here, you know, not in France." Young reacts hotly, adamantly shattering Postif's illusions: "Shi-i-it! Are you kidding? I've been here two weeks, I've been pickin' up on that!" His tone is suddenly harsh, and when Postif, after an uncomfortable pause, gingerly protests, "(I) don't think so," Young's response is bitterly combative:

> Right here. Seeing is believing, and hearin' is a bitch – that's a sound. Right here in Gay Paree. Maybe it wouldn't happen to you, you dig –you're not a coloured person like I am, you dig? They'll take advantage of me. But all I can do is tell you what happened. And I'm not gonna tell you that part of it – but it did happen. By somebody you wouldn't believe, too – great person…[283]

The recording of this passage is notable for Young's somber and deliberate intonation, and for the seemingly infinite pauses Young takes between each of his sentences. Though not noted in the transcript, in the earlier parts of the interview, Postif gives affirmative vocal responses almost

[281] In Young's dictionary, to "have eyes" means to like something. Here he means he only maintains techniques from those days that he likes and decided to keep.
[282] Postif, "Interview," 179.
[283] Ibid, 181.

constantly, peppering Young's statements with an eager "Oh, yeah!" or "Mmhmm!"[284] In this passage, the intensity of Young's tone obviously reduced Postif to silence, and the pauses are agonizing in contrast to their earlier exchanges. But, yet again, as if redrawing a curtain, Young resumes his softly pleasant, rhythmic parlance, closing the matter with, "But it's the same way all over, you dig. It's fight for your life, that's all. Until death do we part, you got it made. But it's the same way…"[285]

The final moment of friction comes when Postif approaches the subject of Billie Holiday. Once again Young looks through Postif's standard question and moves to shut down the discourse surrounding it. The shift in Young's tone is clear – when Postif quietly asks, "Billie gave you the name of 'Pres'?," Young's voice drops darkly, stiffly offering a barely audible "Um hm." At first Young indulges Postif, explaining that he lived at Holiday's house. Young barely speaks, making his response in a hazy, far off tone, and drifting into rhyme: "She was teaching me about the city, you know, which way to go, you know, where everything is shitty."[286] Young's tone here is quite distinct from the rest of the interview, but following the other instances of his rhyming practice, it seems this response was constructed as a sort of barrier between himself and his interviewer's question. When Postif attempts to continue past this vague answer with more small talk about Holiday, Young stonily arrests any further discussion: "What people do, man, is so obvious, you know. If you want to speak like that, what the fuck I give a fuck what you do. What he do – what he does – what nobody do – is nobody's business!" Here Young's slow, forbidding intonation returns. Postif immediately tries to diffuse the situation by reassuring Young, "No, it's your own business," but Young immediately snaps:

> So why you gonna get into it and say: "Oh, he's a old [*mumbles*]." Goddamn, I'd go crazy thinking about that shit. [*Laughs, then puts on a hoarse voice.*] "He's a old junky, he's a old funky, he's a old fucky," and all that shit. That's not nice, you know? Whatever they do, let them do that, and enjoy themselves – and get your kicks yourself. Why you envy them because they enjoyin' themselves? Fuck it, you dig? All I do is smoke some New Orleans cigarettes, that's perfect (arms).

[284] No doubt this was necessary to de-clutter the transcript. If Porter had transcribed all of Postif's vocalized responses the transcript would be twice as long and very disjointed.
[285] Postif, "Interview," 181. The recording I have access to splits at this point to the next topic ("Who was the tenor player who made an influence on you?"), giving the impression of an immediate subject change by Postif – however it's not clear whether or not this is the way the issue passed.
[286] Postif, "Interview," 185.

> [*Shows his arms to prove there are no needle marks.*] No sniff, no shit in my nose, nothing. Still, I drink and I smoke, and that's all that –…[287]

Postif again tries to contain Young's antagonistic reaction, cutting him off to repeat, "Anyway, it's your business." Young, though somewhat assuaged, drives his point home firmly "Um hm. But a lot of people think I'm this…I don't like that. I resent it like a bitch. If I ever find the motherfucker, (I) would….ivey-divey, shit, I'd go crazy! Don't put that weight on me; I know what I do."[288] Postif attempts to exonerate himself from Young's accusations, this time successfully convincing Young that his intent was only "the musical thing," and moving past the incident. For Young to have had such a strong reaction when Postif not only did not ask, but also repeatedly tried to steer away from personal matters, shows Young's resentment of the weight placed on him by rumors.

The discursive connection between Young and Billie Holiday illuminates another aspect of the reception of Young's vocality. Descriptions of Young and Holiday's special rapport often establish an uncanny similarity between their individual musical voices. Critic Whitney Balliett imagined they were "a single voice split in two."[289] Young himself confirmed their musical connection in an interview with Chris Albertson in 1958. In response to Albertson's suggestion that Holiday's singing was "formed after [his] style on tenor sax," Young mused: "Well, I think you *can* hear that one some of the old records, you know. Some time I'd sit down and listen to 'em myself, and it sound like two of the same voices, if you don't be careful, you know, or the same mind, or something like that."[290] For both Young and Holiday, their individual expressive voices have been imbued with meaning carried over from the tragic narrative constructions of their biographies. Similarities in their life stories –tragedy, substance abuse, early death – have been symbolically coded as similarities in their musical expression.[291]

Further, Young's musical sound has often been associated with singing. Young himself famously insisted on drawing expression from the lyrical content of standard tunes, according to

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[287] Ibid, 187.
[288] Young seems to be referring here to rumors about his (homo)sexuality – this is a similar description to what is found in Robert Reisner's piece. See Robert Reisner, "The Last Sad Days of Lester Young," in Porter, *Reader.*
[289] Balliett, "Pres," 237.
[290] Chris Albertson, "Interview with Lester Young," 167.
[291] Scott DeVeaux has noted that narratives of tragedy have been a popular choice among writers since the beginnings of jazz historiography. See DeVeaux, *Constructing the Jazz Tradition,* 533-534.

Gunther Schuller.[292] Singers likewise drew from him, according to vocalist Sylvia Syms: "His conversation, with all its made-up phrases, was hard to follow, but his playing never was. He phrased words in his playing. He has had a great influence on my singing, and through the years a lot of singers have picked up on him."[293] Young himself openly admired vocal music and even professed his enjoyment of white pop singers, a deeply un-hip interest that mystified white jazz critics, as Leonard Feather's reaction above shows. Critic Chris Albertson was similarly dumbfounded Young's choice of music in a 1958 interview:

> Young: (You) know, I can tell you this really – my favorite singer is Kay Starr. No, that's the wrong name. What's that other lady's name. Her husband has a band –
> Albertson: It's not Jo Stafford?
> Young: There you are! Yeah, I'll go there.
> Albertson [*incredulous*]: Jo Stafford is your favorite singer?
> Young: Yeah. And Lady Day. And I'm through.
> Albertson: "But Jo Stafford doesn't sing jazz, does she?
> Young: No, but I hear her voice and the *sound* and the way she puts her songs on.
> Albertson: You like them, huh. That's amazing.[294]

Bill Coss closes his 1955 interview by pointing to Young's love of white pop singers as one of his most bizarre idiosyncrasies, an exception to his hipness: "the coolness disappeared for just a moment during the afternoon of this interview. Bob Crosby's show was over, and Prez, a jazz immortal, paid instant, enthusiastic tribute: "That Bob Crosby – he's still wailing.' And so, of course, is Prez."[295] As John Gennari has noted,

> Male critics have buttressed their masculinist authority by distancing themselves from sentimental attachments to the popular music of their youth. This feeds a larger pattern in which jazz's reputed high art autonomy and profundity are complemented by a concept of criticism that stressed taut discipline, rationality, judiciousness — qualities assumed to be a part of a masculine intellectual seriousness set off from the infantilized and feminized emotional realm of mass popular culture.[296]

Young's unapologetic enjoyment of unintellectual pop music and his ties to singing transgressed established norms of the racialized masculinity of the jazz man through the codification of

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[292] "Schuller Selects," Interview by Henry Ferrini, *President of Beauty: The Life and Times of Lester Young,* published on February 25, 2014, http://lesterlives.wordpress.com/lester-interview/.
[293] Balliett, "Pres," 237.
[294] Albertson, "Interview with Lester Young," 169.
[295] Bill Coss, "Lester Young," in Porter, *Reader,* 156.
[296] Gennari, "A Few Words About Jazz," 17.

singing as feminine, commercial, and white. As Lara Pellegrinelli has shown, jazz historiography disowned blues singing as its stylistic 'mother,' devaluing the art for its feminine associations with the body and raw emotion while privileging technical virtuosity and complexity as the future of jazz. I contend that Young's admiration of singing; collaborative equality with Billie Holiday; lyrical expression; and emphasis on the emotive ballad later in his career associated his music with a feminine aspect that estranged him from the masculinist progress of jazz in the 1950s. This association contributed to the critical discrediting of his musical output.

One particular accusation against Young's music later in his career was a purported weakness in his tone and loss of phrasing. Critic Mike Nevard blasted Young's later style, lamenting, "The individual personality that had sparked his playing paled, an the bright fluency of ideas that he translated so subtly became dreary and lifeless."[297] If I may draw explanation from a parallel phenomenon in Young's speaking voice, I believe what is heard as weakness does not arise necessarily from a lack of interpretive ability on Young's part, but is the result of a conscious disengagement from the music he is producing.[298] In analyzing the patterns of Young's speaking voice, I have observed that Young's tone is much more rhythmic and "musical" when talking about subjects he enjoys: he rhymes, he uses dynamic effects, his sentences flow in cadenced, melodious waves. It is when pressed about things he does not like or care about that his verbal "phrasing" disappears, followed by slurring, mumbling, or a dark, flat, barely audible intonation. I believe that this is not necessarily due to alcohol, but is a reflection of Young's subjective relation to the words being spoken. For someone that placed such a high priority on "saying something" through music, Young's unclear articulation suggests a rejection of the content of the music, or perhaps a refusal to communicate his emotions or to "speak to" the outside world.

[297] Mike Nevard, "I'll Take Flip Any Time!" 44-45.
[298] Physical weakness caused by Young's debilitated health was certainly a factor at times.

Conclusion: Detention Barracks Blues

Accounts of Young's army tale never fail to mention the piece of Young's modest oeuvre that was born out of his struggles in the detention barracks: "D.B. Blues." Recorded in 1947 on the Aladdin label, the piece is generally mentioned only in passing. "D.B. Blues," has not been analyzed with any depth nor is it included among the pieces considered to be Young's best output. For a composition explicitly inspired by the supposedly life shattering trauma of Young's army experience, the piece is a surprisingly cool and easy blues, containing none of the angst that could be anticipated based on its backstory. How is it possible to make sense of a piece that is seemingly so disjointed from the lore surrounding its conception?

In Robert Reisner's posthumous reflection on Young, he associated "D.B. Blues" not with the struggles Young endured during his sentence, but with the substance that lead to his conviction. Reisner claims the tune was "based on Lester's only experiment with a strong drug," even suggesting that the recording spawned the "junky" rumors that so offended Young. If this is true, the absence of tragic affect is justified. The tune itself features a sly, cheeky melody, a complex and unpredictable melodic contour over a very traditional blues form. Young opens "D.B. Blues" with a casual upward pickup, hopping onto the steady, straightforward swing groove of the Henry Tucker Green's minimal drums, Red Callendar's walking bass, and Dodo Marmarosa's unadorned chordal piano accompaniment. Young takes two choruses, or "heads," a bridge, and a repeat of the head before passing the torch to Vic Dickenson, on trombone. Dickenson and Marmarosa then share another reiteration of the form for their solos. The piece climaxes with a gleeful, crowing call-and-response between Young and Dickenson. Young identified this small combo setup as the support he most liked for his expressive ventures, and his musical wit is in fine form here: his tone in the recording is relaxed, approaching a lazy, almost smug coolness.[299]

Jazz critic Alan Morrison closes his 1949 piece on Young by painting a more intimate picture of Young's connection to the piece. Observing the scene in a smoky hotel room among musician friends, Morrison describes the conversation's turn toward Young's army experience:

> What was the army like?' asked the drummer, who had just come in. 'A nightmare, man, one mad nightmare." Lester murmured, shaking his head sadly.

[299] Robert Reisner, "The Last, Sad Days of Lester Young," 91.

> 'They sent me down South, Georgia. That was enough to make me blow my top. It was a drag, Jack.' He found it hard to reconstruct the nightmare. All he remembers was hating the army with a furious intensity, hating the brass, reveille, injustice to Negroes, and the caste system in the South. He ended up in a disciplinary center in Savannah [actually near Augusta]. That was sheer hell, he said. Someone shut the window. Lester sat down on the bed, looked up at the drummer who had just changed the record, and smiled. The record was "D.B. Blues," a Lester original.

Young's description here of his army experience as "one mad nightmare" is invariably privileged as the one instance where he admitted his true feeling on the situation. Morrison's elegant description of this moment brings a new context to the intimacy of the admission. Seeming to cast a solemn or perhaps uncomfortable silence – perhaps the others were at a loss of what to say – Young's reaction to the drummer's choice of "D.B. Blues" is an interesting one: he simply sits down on the bed and smiles up at him, almost suggesting an unspoken exchange of empathy, or an attempt to understand.

My goal in including these considerations is to suggest that despite the discursive contexts I have established above, Young's subjective access remains out of reach. Young's critics and biographers have configured and reconfigured his identity during his life and after, according to the individual goals of their intellectual projects. First, popular media polarized Young's musical identity by positioning him as the feminine antithesis to Coleman Hawkins's phallically coded style. Then, at the hands of the strict heteronormative controls of the World War II military, Young's multiply determined sites of difference – his performance of racialized gender and sexuality – resulted in state punishment that sought to discipline those differences. As a result of public anxieties attached to Young's difference, both his identity and his musical expression of that identity were rejected after the war. Finally, Young's biographers posthumously re-inscribed his identity according to contemporary articulations of race and masculinity.

If I can finally concede to my own fictional version of Young, I conclude that "D.B. Blues" symbolizes the distance between Young and critical interpretations of his persona. Young riffs on the tale of his "D.B. Blues" to create a stock blues that blocks any attempts to interpret subjectivity. I hear this blues as shaking off those interpretations, the musical equivalent to Young's statements in Postif's interview that cleared the air after his firm declarations on the realities of racism: "But it's the same way all over, you dig. It's fight for your life, that's all.

Until death do we part, you got it made."[300] In final response to Young's question, "How can you know anything about me?" I resolve that I cannot: the depth of my knowledge is limited to these contexts that constructed the legends of his life.

[300] Postif, "Interview," 181.

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