

**JASMIN ELAINE TAYLOR**

**BILLIE HOLIDAY AND THE GENDERED POLITICS**  
**OF JAZZ CREATIVITY**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO**  
**GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## ***Signed Declaration***

To Whom It May Concern

This signed declaration provides confirmation that (1) this thesis is my own work and (2) any work from other authors is duly referenced and acknowledged.

Jasmin Taylor

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## ***Abstract***

This thesis investigates little-explored aspects of the creative work of the jazz vocalist Billie Holiday (1915-1959): specifically, it examines the creative processes surrounding more than twenty songs she wrote herself or co-wrote with friends and colleagues, some of which were published posthumously and others which have never been published, although credited to her. Using gender as a mode of analysis, the study tracks her musical writing across the artist's life, providing an alternative reading of extant Holiday material in order to differently illustrate and interpret her agency in general.

Throughout, “creativity” is used as a term to encompass songwriting, performance and the collaborative assembly of individuals in the service of music making.

The thesis begins with a sketch of Holiday's life and music, and an analysis of transformations which have occurred in critical appraisals of her career. Subsequent chapters present the concepts of gender, standpoint theory and intersectionality that underpin the thesis's interdisciplinary methodological approach; a discussion of Holiday's distinctive performance style and musical aesthetics in the context of gender inequalities within the jazz community; an investigation of the creative processes surrounding the songs Holiday wrote herself; and finally, an in-depth case study that discusses problems surrounding the attribution to Holiday of the song “Strange Fruit.”

The thesis demonstrates that Holiday did not perceive her songwriting as being distinct from the activity she entered into every time she recorded or performed. It is argued that Holiday's perspectives on her own songwriting helped shape her distinctive performance style, and that, even though the jazz community could be a challenging environment for women, its masculine hegemony was not total: some women, like Holiday, occupied and managed spaces as active, creative and even political agents.

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**Part 1: Situating Billie Holiday in a Women's History of Jazz**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Literature Review

*“Don’t forget, though. I just want to be straight with people, not have their sympathy.”* Billie Holiday.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate little-explored aspects of the creative work of the jazz vocalist Billie Holiday (1915-1959): specifically, it examines the creative processes surrounding more than twenty songs she wrote herself or co-wrote with friends and colleagues, some of which were published posthumously, others of which have never been published, although credited to her. Using gender as a mode of analysis, I am tracking her musical writing across her life, providing an alternative reading of extant Holiday material (particularly her autobiography and biographies that foreground composition) because it allows me to differently illustrate and interpret her agency in general. Throughout, I am using ‘creativity’ as a term to encompass songwriting, performance and the collaborative assembly of individuals in the service of music making.

My main research questions are as follows: Applying gender as a critical category to the existing Holiday documentary material, is it possible 1) to provide alternative interpretations of her work as an artist and thus of her creative agency in general; 2) to discover more about Holiday’s songwriting methodologies; and 3) to ascertain how far Holiday’s creative agency was affected by gender dynamics and inequalities within the jazz community? I seek to establish how Holiday’s creative agency can be interpreted in the context of traditional discourses around performance, songwriting and composition; finally, I want to establish how, despite her enduring renown, conceptions of Holiday’s life and work have been shaped by the interpretive “invisibility” of women within the orthodox discourse of jazz history.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Levin, “Don’t Blame Show Biz! – Billie: Daily Press Taking Usual Rap at Trade with Holiday Case,” *Down Beat*, June 4, 1947, 6.

Comprising five chapters, this thesis includes: 1) a sketch of Holiday's life which includes her major musical childhood influences, as well as an analysis of transformations which have occurred in critical appraisals of her career and reasons for the growth in her iconic status in the context of the increasing institutionalisation of jazz; an examination of 2) the ideas underpinning the interdisciplinary methodological approach adopted in this thesis, with discussion of the function of the concepts of intersectionality and standpoint theory; 3) an examination of Holiday's distinctive performance style and musical aesthetics in the context of gender inequalities within the jazz community, and strategies adopted by her and other women to overcome these; 4) a study of the songs Holiday wrote herself, linking her work not only to gender inequalities within the jazz community but also to the theory of "subjugated knowledge" and the concept of the "organic" intellectual; and finally 5) a detailed case study that discusses problems surrounding the attribution of the song "Strange Fruit" to Holiday. The appendixes contain additional information contributing to our understanding of Holiday's life and music.

This research utilises materials such as primary and secondary books, periodicals, newspapers and government records; Holiday's radio and television interviews and appearances; her many song recordings; and archive and contemporary interviews of people who knew her personally and/or attended her performances, as well as musicians who worked with her.

The thesis demonstrates that even though the jazz community could be a challenging environment for women, and it appears as if Holiday was a victim of the appropriation of some of the musical material she created by some males she collaborated with, as an artist she did not perceive her songwriting as being distinct from the activity she entered into every time she recorded or performed in the recording studio or on stage. I will argue that Holiday's perspectives on her own songwriting helped shape her distinctive performance style, a style which resulted in her being recognised as one of the most important jazz artists of the twentieth century.

During Holiday's lifetime, the skills of composition were rarely associated with Black women; yet as this study will reveal, examination of Holiday's abilities as a composer and the circumstances surrounding her songwriting make it possible to look beyond what Sherrie Tucker has described as the "exceptional" or "always emerging" tropes attached to females in jazz, and to recognise that she was also part of a group of women that managed to negotiate and struggle to achieve an artistically viable space for women within the jazz community. This new knowledge reveals that masculine hegemony of the jazz community was not total, as some women, like Holiday, did manage to occupy and manage spaces as active agents and not merely as victims. It also suggests that in the future, within the field of jazz studies, the use of theories such as intersectionality will make it possible for the acquisition of more of this type of original knowledge.

The thesis' original contribution to knowledge is this: using gender as one of the main means of analysis, it examines and reframes what we know about Holiday's approaches to songwriting and composition in the jazz community and commercial music environment within which she worked; this leads to a new understanding of her artistic agency, as well as what was distinctive about her creative methodology.

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"You never heard singing so slow, with such a drawl – it ain't the blues – I don't know what it is, but you got to hear her!"<sup>2</sup> Viewed from a historical perspective, this 1934 description by Ralph Cooper, an M.C. at Harlem's Apollo Theatre, is telling: it contains both an explanation for the recognition of Holiday as the foremost singer in jazz history, as well as an identification of the reason why mainstream commercial success was to elude her during her lifetime. Right from the start of her career she was in possession of an original style and sound, but it was a style and sound frequently deemed indefinable and thus difficult for the American music industry to compartmentalise and market.

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<sup>2</sup> Billie Holiday and William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues*, (hereafter *LSTB*), (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 39.

An analysis of the critical material written about Holiday reveals that, as they often did with her voice, many commentators had difficulty attempting to define and elucidate the character of the woman as an individual and artist. In fact, for some contemporary commentators, it appears easier to delineate what Holiday was not, as an historical figure, rather than what she appeared to be. For example, Farah Jasmine Griffin starkly informs us that “She was not a maid, mammy or mother.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, she could not be easily shoehorned into any of the few available stereotypical clichés available to Black women of her generation and class.

If critical commentators have had difficulty describing and therefore understanding Holiday’s character and talent, the general public’s view of her has been less conflicted. For most of the twentieth century, in the febrile public imagination she was portrayed as a tragic victim, a woman damaged by her difficult childhood – which included incarceration in a reform school, lack of a formal education and rape – relationships with difficult and abusive partners, prison, an addiction to drugs and extremely messy legal tangles.

Finally, she could be conceived of as suffering defeat at the hands of the state in the guise of law enforcement officials who (in the operatic final act of her life) saw fit to arrest her on her deathbed. An unfortunate outcome of this was that the general public’s interest in her private life eventually came to overshadow its interest in her music as her troubles appeared to define her. Stuart Nicholson argues that Holiday “has been so consumed by her image that it had rendered her a victim at the expense of her music, the one thing that made her unique.”<sup>4</sup>

But recently Holiday has had a “narrative make-over”, as relatively successful attempts have been made to clean up her previously tainted image in order to reposition and rehabilitate her as a heroic, rather than as a tragic figure.<sup>5</sup> An examination of how and why this came about will be the main subject matter of this chapter. I shall investigate how Holiday’s

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<sup>3</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 154.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, (London: Victor Gollanze, 1995), 235.

<sup>5</sup> I take the phrase “narrative make-over” from Maya C. Gibson, “Alternate Takes: Billie Holiday at the Intersection of Black Cultural Studies and Historical Musicology” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 95.

transformation from low-life junkie (as she was presented in the tabloid press of her day) to an artist occupying pride of place in the American jazz pantheon is inextricably linked to the institutionalisation and legitimisation of jazz as an art form.

Many of these changes can be seen as occurring within the debate around Holiday's co-written autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*. This chapter also examines the impact of the discovery of the Linda Kuehl archive on our understanding of Holiday's career, a discussion of some purely musicological studies on Holiday's music and finally her rebirth as one of the icons of American jazz history. This chapter aims to provide explanations for her rise in status by providing a review of the major Holiday texts; discussion of the significance in America of increasing academic interest in jazz; and the impact of the "new jazz studies" and the differing perspectives on the Holiday material provided by the inclusion of writings by women and African-Americans within jazz criticism. This background and literature review provides the underpinning necessary before the construction of a new methodological approach, which is undertaken in the following chapter. Taken together, these two chapters work to build the historical and intellectual context for my main investigation (in Chapters 3, 4 and 5) which will address the research questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

### **Biographical Sketch**

The woman who was known as Eleanora Fagan before she took on the stage name of Billie Holiday was born in the Philadelphia General Hospital on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1915, the daughter of Sadie Fagan and Clarence Holiday. She was brought up in Baltimore.<sup>6</sup> For a succinct timeline of Holiday's life see Appendix 1. According to Paul Berliner:

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<sup>6</sup> Most biographers use Holiday's original name, Eleanora to cover the period of her childhood in Baltimore and Billie Holiday after she made the move to New York and I will be doing the same.

[i]t is within the soundscape of the home and its environs that children develop their early musical sensibilities...Similarly, within the confines of their music community or music culture, children learn the aesthetic boundaries that define differing realms of performance, forming impressions of the most basic attributes of musicianship.<sup>7</sup>

Baltimore was “a music-rich town” with a range of musical activities accessible to most people within the African-American community.<sup>8</sup> These included the ritual and music of the Roman Catholic, African-American Protestant and Baptist churches, as well as theatres, cinemas and block parties and carnivals, street-corner quartets harmonising minstrel and pop songs of the day (such as “Camptown Races”), dances in community halls, many tiny night clubs, as well as music lessons provided through the state education system.<sup>9</sup> The jazz researcher Linda Kuehl’s interviews with people who had known her during her childhood confirmed Eleanora’s participation in these musical activities were important for her development as a musician.<sup>10</sup> Like most African-Americans of the period, her religion was a critical vehicle for the transmission of a basic musical education. Her mother was a regular church-goer, and Eleanora also attended the privately run Frances Academy for Colored Girls from November 1920 to January 1923, and also the approved school, the House of the Good Shepherd for Colored Girls from January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1925-October 3, 1925 and again between December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1926-February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1927. Both were Catholic institutions, and it has been argued that her exposure to Catholic ritual impacted upon her singing style.<sup>11</sup> As an adolescent Eleanora would also sing in Baltimore’s little storefront Baptist churches.<sup>12</sup> Because music in the Protestant churches involved not just choirs with pianos, but also orchestras with harmonicas, trombones,

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<sup>7</sup> Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Robert O’Meally, *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 68.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; Doretta Lonnett Whalen, “A Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study of Billie Holiday and Her Music.” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1999), 155-238.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Blackburn, *With Billie* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 33-34, 39, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 39; Donald Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon: The Life and Times of Billie Holiday* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Group, 1994), 23; Whalen, “Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study,” 213-219.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 34; Blackburn, *With Billie*, 39.

guitars and drums, Eleanora had an early introduction to how instrumental ensembles were used to accompany singing. In addition, the state school system in Baltimore provided elements of a music education.<sup>13</sup>

Eleanora also had access to music in Baltimore's theatres which staged various forms of musical entertainment, including musical comedies and minstrel shows.<sup>14</sup> She was an avid film fan and therefore would be able to observe how in the film theatres, pianists would improvise tunes and figures to accompany the changing frames in the silent films.<sup>15</sup> When Eleanora grew older she began to go to dances and clubs with her friends.<sup>16</sup>

Theatres in Baltimore also featured amateur singing and dancing competitions. Eleanora and her girlfriends sang at the Star Theatre and Old Custer Theatre in Baltimore.<sup>17</sup> She also began going to parties and singing in tiny clubs in the city, such as Georgies.<sup>18</sup> Eleanora even began to build up a local reputation and gain some recognition as a singer.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, despite all this apparent early confidence, it is clear from remarks Holiday made later in life that she regretted the lack of a formal musical education, even though this was not uncommon for a jazz musician of the period.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Interviews cited in Whalen, "Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study," 221.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Whitcomb, *After the Ball: Pop Music from Rag to Rock* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Whalen, "Sociological and Ethnomusicology Study," 155-189.

<sup>16</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 43; Holiday, *LSTB*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 34; O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ella Fitzgerald probably only had a few piano lessons arranged by her mother, but Betty Carter received some piano lessons from the Detroit Conservatory when she was fifteen. Carter was good at sight reading, but both acquired a substantial amount of their musical knowledge by ear. Stuart Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), 19 and 20 and William R. Bauer, *Open the Door: The Life and Music of Betty Carter*, (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2002). 17. Holiday's own views on her voice can be heard on *The Complete Billie Holiday on Verve 1945-1959* (PolyGram Records Inc., New York, 1992), Disc 4, Track 32 "Discussion" and Siegel and Phil Schaap, "Musical and Discographical Commentary," 121-122; and her accompanist Bobby Tucker's comments on her inferiority complex in John Chilton's, *Billie's Blues: A Survey of Billie Holiday's Career, 1933-1959*. (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 126.

As Lucy Green points out, Black women did not only excel as musicians in religious environments, they also made use of their homes as informal creative spaces.<sup>21</sup> In her autobiography Holiday informs us that she used her portable instrument constantly wherever she went and whatever she was doing: “whether I was riding a bike or scrubbing somebody’s dirty bathroom floor I used to love to sing all the time.”<sup>22</sup> William Hill, an ex-partner of Sadie’s, told Kuehl that Eleanora was always singing around the house, that they had a family radio and record player and she would sing along with these.<sup>23</sup> A radio was still quite a luxury item for many Black families.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1920’s recordings were a major influence in the spread of Black music across almost all previous geographical and social barriers and Holiday’s autobiography reveals that she used recordings to develop her own techniques and personal style.<sup>25</sup> Freddie Green, a childhood friend said that Eleanora would listen to Bessie Smith records and try to match her tone for tone.<sup>26</sup> Also, in *LSTB* Holiday famously describes listening to records on a Victrola in Alice Dean’s brothel in lieu of payment for cleaning and running errands, pointing out that “[a] Victrola was a big deal in those days.”<sup>27</sup> Thus recordings enabled Eleanora to follow a path familiar to other jazz musicians of her generation and beyond, by enabling her to start the process of what as

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<sup>21</sup> Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>22</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> O’Meally, *Lady Day*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Ira de Augustine Reid’s research conducted during the early 1930s discovered that whereas 59 per cent of native white and 43 per cent of foreign-born white families in the city owned a radio, only 15 per cent of the black community did so.<sup>24</sup> Ira de Augustine Reid, *The Negro Community of Baltimore: A Summary Report of a Social Study Conducted for the Baltimore Urban League* (Baltimore, Maryland: 1935), 27-28.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Sidran, *Black Talk: How the Music of Black America Created a Radical Alternative to the Values of Western Literary Tradition*, (New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 65; Holiday, *LSTB*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> O’Meally, *Lady Day*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 10. See also Phil Schaap and Lester Young on the price of recordings in “Young Lester Young,” in *A Lester Young Reader*, ed. Lewis Porter, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 14.

been described by the jazz pianist Walter Bishop Jr. (1927-1998) as a method of “imitation to assimilation to innovation”, all necessary prerequisites for individuals wishing to develop their own style and techniques.<sup>28</sup> Listening to her musical idols for enjoyment, especially Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong enabled Holiday to begin learning music by ear, a valuable aid in the development of her musical memory.<sup>29</sup> A childhood friend, Freddie Green, recalled how Eleanora would “sing along and could pick up a tune just like that,” and that even then “it was the sad songs that Billie liked best.”<sup>30</sup>

The music-making opportunities most immediately available to Eleanora from a young age were the musical games she would have participated in with the children in her school playgrounds or local area. Historically, musical games have been a feature of African-American culture since slavery and beyond.<sup>31</sup> Yet Kyra D. Gaunt’s research reveals that despite the fact that musical games have historically been a valuable part of the experience of music-making for many African-American girls, these games are a commonly overlooked part of the Black musical landscape – even though they often consist of relatively complex hand clapping game-songs, cheers, double-dutch and jump skipping.<sup>32</sup> Gaunt places issues to do with gender at the core of the reasons for the invisibility and lack of value attributed to these games in constructs of Black musical culture, and using the ideas of Tejumola Olaniyan argues that it is often the case that Black cultural identities are generally assumed to be male.<sup>33</sup> Freddie Green told

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<sup>28</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 120. See also Thomas J. Hennessey, *From Jazz to Swing: African-American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890-1935*, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1994), 33.

<sup>29</sup> On Louis Armstrong’s phenomenal memory see Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 28 and the trombonist and bandleader Edward “Kid” Ory (1886-1973) in Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, eds. *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told By The Men Who Made It*. (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1966), 49.

<sup>30</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> James Hungerford, in *The Old Plantation and What I Gathered There in an Autumn Month*, (Franklin Square: Harper and Brothers, Publishers: 1859), 195-199.

<sup>32</sup> Kyra D. Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Gaunt, *Games Black Girls Play*, 9. According to Olaniyan, “the gender of black cultural identity...is male, though presented as nongendered: “black” or “African,” “African-American,” “Caribbean.” Tejumola Olaniyan *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The*

Linda Kuehl that Eleanora would play with her baseball friends or the girls she knew would “scrape together” money in order to see films at the nearby Dunbar Theatre.<sup>34</sup> Yet we are lacking testimonies from him or other witnesses about the musical street games she must have participated in as a child and which would have formed part of the underpinning of her socialisation as a musician. Bearing this in mind it is still possible to extract some concepts from Gaunt’s approach, the most important being that music making and its principles are often learned and taught in contexts that do not seem like music making at all. And so Gaunt spends an entire chapter discussing “Miss Mary Mack” – the most common handclapping game in the English speaking world, and the most familiar in the Black repertoire – which is the sort of game that Eleanora may have been familiar with.<sup>35</sup>

By 1928, just before the Great Depression, Holiday had joined her mother in Harlem, which had become a magnet for African-Americans throughout the United States. As well as being an important economic centre, this area became the centre of African-American artistic, musical and literary work in America.<sup>36</sup>

By 1930, Holiday was singing at a small club in Brooklyn, and during 1930 and 1931, her reputation as a singer gradually spread throughout the musical community in Harlem, so much so that Crowther and Pinfold claim that by 1932 “Harlem’s hot musicians were virtually unanimous in their admiration for the young singer. By no stretch of the imagination was she simply a singer who sang with jazz men, she was as much a jazz musician as they were.”<sup>37</sup> In 1933, whilst working in Monette’s, a Harlem club, she encountered the producer and talent scout John Hammond (1910-1987). His

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*Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 119. On the masculinisation of Black identity, see also Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>34</sup> O’Meally, *Lady Day*, 64-65.

<sup>35</sup> Gaunt, *Games Black Girls Play*, 63; Roger D. Abrahams, ed., *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*, The American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, vol.20, (Austin and London: The University of Texas Press, 1969). 120.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1971), 184; Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 56-58.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold. *Singing Jazz: The Singers and their Styles*. London: Blandford, 1997), 70.

patronage made it possible for her to be heard outside of Harlem and he immediately arranged recording sessions and found engagements for her in New York clubs. And so in 1935, Holiday began recording regularly for the Brunswick label with small studio bands under the direction of Teddy Wilson, which included many of the finest musicians of her day. As I have begun to describe, within the jazz literature Holiday’s career is generally divided into three phases, and these are commonly linked to perceived changes in the quality of her vocal apparatus and performance styles as well as to the recording labels she was signed to.

### **Holiday’s Recording Companies**

American Record Company/Columbia/Brunswick Records	1933 - 1942
Commodore Records	1939 - 1944
The Decca Recording Company	1944 - 1950
Aladdin Records	1951 - 1951
The Verve Recording Company	1952 - 1958

This approach, although convenient, masks an inevitably more complex situation, but does provide a basic contextual framework which can be used to describe major transitions her career. The first phase is generally described as occurring between 1933-1942, when she crystallized her style and became established as a singer and songwriter. Making recordings for the Brunswick label, which was aimed primarily at the urban African-American population, Gunther Schuller writes that this was the period when Holiday’s horn-like approach to singing endeared her to musicians allowing her to fit seamlessly into an overall performance: “she was an *ensemble* singer/instrumentalist, not a concerto soloist. That is why so many of her early recordings are so superb – virtually ‘collective ensemble’ creations.”<sup>38</sup>

It is perhaps possible to relate Holiday’s approach to the collectivist/communal musical activities in Baltimore mentioned earlier.

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<sup>38</sup> Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 536.

After the success of her recording of “Strange Fruit” in 1939, Holiday began to take herself more seriously as an artist, and chose to turn away from the performance of the largely happy, up-tempo numbers of her earlier period to concentrate on singing slow to medium-slow songs with a sad and tragic deep emotional content. Whitney Balliett’s views are similar to those of many critics. He describes how during the 1940’s, her voice grew heavier and she began to use dramatic dying notes. “She lost some of her rhythmic agility. She still sang very well – better, indeed, than anyone else – but the joy and the quick stepping intensity were less apparent. This new seriousness...was underlined by the strings and bouncy big bands she was given as accompaniment”<sup>39</sup> There occurred a shift away from the idea of the singer as an integral part of a jazz group, towards that of the featured artist with a jazz accompaniment. This particular transition was reflected in the recordings she made for the Commodore label from 1939-1942. Although in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s there were still opportunities for solos with instrumentalists, in time, the instrumentalists were edged into the background. As Gary Giddins has written, “[s]he was now a diva, and they were gentlemen in waiting...The music is definitive: the obbligato is respectful, which is to say unequal.”<sup>40</sup> This change in her performance style was sometimes viewed negatively by critics, who regarded it as being less authentically true to the jazz tradition.<sup>41</sup> However, the pianist Teddy Wilson told an interviewer that in 1941 Holiday had said to him that, “[s]he was singing very much to her personal satisfaction in 1941. She was beginning to hear herself.”<sup>42</sup>

After being dropped by Decca in 1951, and spending a short period with the Aladdin label, Holiday was signed with the Verve recording label between 1952 and 1958. By the 1950s – a period when she was in poor health – her voice had altered significantly, although it is still a matter of dispute within the jazz literature whether she had actually diminished as an artist.

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<sup>39</sup> Whitney Balliett, “Lady Day,” *New Yorker*, November 4, 1991, 100.

<sup>40</sup> Gary Giddins, “The Complete Lady” in *The Billie Holiday Companion: Seven Decades of Commentary*, ed. Leslie Gourse (London: Omnibus Press, 1997), 97.

<sup>41</sup> Crowther and Pinfold, *Singing Jazz*, 179; Schuller, *Swing Era*, 536.

<sup>42</sup> O’Meally, *Lady Day*, 152.

Schuller notes that her vocal range shrank, shifting downwards to a lower register with arrangements now having to be transposed down a tone or a third.<sup>43</sup> Balliett however has provided us with a poignant description of her supposed artistic decline, claiming that by the mid-fifties, only the outlines of her original style remained in place as her voice would come and go, and she took to using a gravelly parlando – but that “[s]he refused to let on that anything had changed, and this bravery gave her a confusing majesty.”<sup>44</sup>

Recently, critics have leaped to Holiday’s defence and interpreted changes in her performance style more positively. Robert O’Meally in particular regards as overstated the view that the quality of Holiday’s voice declined as she grew older. He argues that during the 1950’s “her style was entirely her own and her musical techniques – her playful sense of timing, her subtly nuanced phrasing, her control of tonal colour, her capacity to reinvent songs – were more advanced than ever.”<sup>45</sup>

The critic Martin Williams’ analysis of Holiday’s 1952 remake of “These Foolish Things”, a song she had originally recorded in 1936, supports this view. According to Williams: “[Holiday] retains the original song’s best melodic phrases, but instinctively rejects its inferior ones, filling in with new melodic lines of her own that are more interesting and more appropriate.”<sup>46</sup> Williams also recognised the increase in her emotional range as a mature woman. In his contribution to the collection of memoirs *Billie Holiday Remembered*, he wrote,

[i]t seems to me that the Billie Holiday of the Fifties was not only a great dramatic performer, but an even greater jazz singer because she became a greater musician. Her voice? It may well be that it deteriorated, but for me the dishevelled edge of her sound comes from deeply suppressed tears, tears which she simply could not let go without the deeper self-pity she denied herself, suppressed tears upon which every emotion she undertook – from gaiety even to sadness – was imposed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 546.

<sup>44</sup> Balliett, “Lady Day,” 100.

<sup>45</sup> O’Meally, *Lady Day* 157.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Williams, *Where’s the Melody? A Listener’s Introduction to Jazz*, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1969, 161.

<sup>47</sup>Linda Kuehl and Ellie Schocket eds. assisted by Dan Morgenstern, *Billie Holiday Remembered*. Reprinted in *Billie Holiday Companion*, 181-190. Martin William’s contribution is taken from Williams, *Where’s the Melody?* 159 and 164-165.

On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1959, after years of ill health, Holiday collapsed, went into a coma and was admitted to hospital. She was later arrested on her death bed for possessing drugs, had mug shots taken, was fingerprinted without “permission, knowledge or consent”, had armed guards posted outside her hospital room, and had her radio, flowers and telephone taken away from her. In addition, the hospital was picketed by demonstrators with placards from Reverend Callender’s Committee which – with the Harlem churches – were involved in the setting up of clinics to give medical help to drug addicts.<sup>48</sup> Holiday died at 3.10 a.m. on Friday July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1959 aged forty-four.

The rest of this chapter shows how Holiday’s construction as an artist has changed over time, and has been affected by multiple factors, including the growth of an academic jazz culture, the consolidation of jazz’s mainstream cultural-historical status outside of academia, and the inclusion of the writings of African-American critics within the arena of Holiday scholarship.

### **A Critical Review of the Major Texts**

From the first mention of Holiday in an article written in 1933 by the record producer John Hammond, who described her as “a real find”, there has been more than eighty years of commentary which include Holiday’s autobiography, first published in 1956, more than forty biographies in English French and Italian, as well as articles in the jazz and popular press, poems and films, record reviews, liner notes and essays.<sup>49</sup> In addition, as an artist, Holiday has been the muse of numerous musicians, poets and writers, appearing for example in Gil Scott Heron’s “Lady Day and John Coltrane”

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<sup>48</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 195; Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 439-440.

<sup>49</sup> John Hammond, “More Places with Spike,” *Melody Maker* April 1933, 42; John Szwed, *Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth* (London: William Heinemann, 2015), 1. Also Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, 208-209.

(1971), Frank O'Hara's poem "The Day Lady Died" (1959) and "The Lady" (1987) by Amiri Baraka.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Auto/biography in Historical Context***

*Lady Sings the Blues* (hereafter *LSTB*) is the primary literary source on Holiday's life, and is central to any understanding of her as a musician and artist. Published in 1956 and co-written with the journalist William Dufty (1916-2002), it was the first substantial piece on her, and is significant not only because of the information it contains about her life and musical aesthetics, but also because of its importance in creating in the public's mind what Robert O'Meally has described as the "mythic Holiday."<sup>51</sup>

Besides the use of a ghost writer, any search for the "real" or "authentic" Billie Holiday is complicated by the narrative conventions of the autobiographical form itself, as well as ideological and political agendas which underpin it. *LSTB* is an amalgam of a range of literary conventions such as women's fiction, culturally specific models of nineteenth century romance, autobiography and even twentieth century comics – suffused with the Horatio Alger myth, which is the rags-to-riches ethos originally described in books by Horatio Alger Jr. (1832-1899). But both Gibson and Griffin also place *LSTB* within the generic and historical framework of the African-American literary tradition of ante- and post-bellum slave narratives, which are structurally derived from dominant conventions including autobiography and women's fiction. The nature of the value placed on privacy by African-Americans further complicates its status. In this regard, Arnold Rampersad

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<sup>50</sup> In addition to poems, Holiday also makes an appearance in novels, the most well-known being Alice Adams, *Listening to Billie*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), Elizabeth Hardwick, *Sleepless Nights*, (New York: Random House, 1979), and Ntozake Shange's, *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982). Holiday appears in the autobiographies of Malcolm X and Maya Angelou and as well as in the film based on her autobiography. There is also a Billie Holiday character in the films *Round Midnight* and *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*. In both films she is played by the actor, Lonette McKee.

<sup>51</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 67.

points out that “[w]ithin black America, the idea of the self as a refuge of dignity and privacy in a humiliating world has been essential.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, for many jazz critics, the major bone of contention with *LSTB* has been the role played by Dufty as the ghost writer. As Christopher Harlos has written, *LSTB* provides us with an example of why collaboration is a popular “but sometimes sticky method of getting a jazz artist’s story into book form.”<sup>53</sup> Because of the racial, gender and class differences between Holiday and Dufty, the most immediate problem is how accurate a picture we are presented with of Holiday’s identity as a Black woman.

Maya C. Gibson claims that Dufty essentially “bedevils” the research of those attempting to recover Holiday’s true life story, since,

[a]cting as a true ghost writer, Dufty remains hidden behind the text of *LSTB*, a shadowy, white, masculine figure – a true ghost – who nevertheless speaks for Holiday...It may appear to some as if he has stolen her words – or worse – forced words into her mouth...Within the text of *LSTB*, it is Holiday who appears to speak, and yet it is rumoured that she neither read nor wrote any of the book’s text.<sup>54</sup>

Dufty went to great lengths to codify his relationship with Holiday as having been friendly rather than exploitative, but as a signifier of the inequality of their relationship, Gibson sets out in the cold light of day the financial agreement between Holiday, Dufty and Doubleday the publishers, whereby Dufty received a remarkably generous 35 per cent share of the royalties.<sup>55</sup>

Arguably Dufty was operating as a mere “hack” writing to meet the short term needs of the market. The intention by Holiday and Dufty had always been not only to write a corrective to the stories in the mainstream press which merely focussed on Holiday’s addiction and period of

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<sup>52</sup> Arnold Rampersad, “Biography, Autobiography and Afro-American Culture,” *The Yale Review*, no. 73, (Autumn 1983) 14.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Harlos, “Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics” in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 146.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 43. Information on this codification comes from a series of articles Dufty published immediately after Holiday’s death entitled “The TRUE Story of Billie Holiday,” in the *New York Post*, July 19, 20, 21, 22, 1959.

imprisonment; but they also wished to create something commercial enough to be made into a Hollywood film. And indeed, there were rumours that Hollywood was interested, that the African-American actor Dorothy Dandridge would play Holiday and then later talk of casting Ava Gardner, a possibility which Holiday apparently did not approve of.<sup>56</sup>

However, I would like to argue that we would be making a mistake by dismissing *LSTB* entirely. More recently, writers have attested to the book's value. Commenting on critic Francis Davis' description of *LSTB* as being "none-too-reliable," Nicholson points out that at the time these words were written

not a voice was raised in protest, certainly not my own. Yet, to my surprise, it became clear that it [*LSTB*] hit major episodes of her life square in the face. For example, her childhood rape, an episode treated with much caution and caveats by commentators through the years and even written off in one biography as being "hard to believe" because "documentary evidence" pointed to the contrary, actually took place with consequences exactly as Billie had described.<sup>57</sup>

Information from within *LSTB* has recently been reassessed in various ways. For example by making use of the close reading technique common in feminist literary criticism, Griffin does an analysis of pages fourteen to fifteen of *LSTB*, which describe what she believes to be the fact that Holiday's mother worked as a prostitute as a young woman.<sup>58</sup> She interprets the phrase "both us working girls" as being a euphemism for prostitutes.<sup>59</sup> According to Griffin in *LSTB*, Holiday's story is communicated via inventive allusions and so, "[j]ust as her improvisations were subtle, so too are the glimpses of truth that peep through the gaps, silences and allusions."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 31 and 46; Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 395 and 400.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Davis, "The Man Who Danced with Billie Holiday," in *Outcats*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 131; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> For further discussion on this subject see Jasmina Lukić and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa, "Feminist Perspectives on Close Reading, in *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*, eds. Rosemarie Buikema, Gabriele Griffin and Nina Lykke, (New York: Routledge, 2011) 105-118.

<sup>59</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 53.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

The work of feminist literary critics has taught us women's writing is filled with gaps and silences that we must learn to read, and other contemporary Black feminist critics have noted that this is especially the case for Black women's autobiography and fiction.<sup>61</sup> Griffin contends that if one reads *LSTB* in this way, one is able to discover new dimensions of "truth-telling."

A few writers have attempted to confront the problems posed by the ghost written jazz autobiography and the identity of the artist. For Christopher Harlos, Count Basie's *Good Morning Blues* (as told to Albert Murray, 1985) or Dizzy Gillespie's *To BE, OR Not...to BOP* (with Al Fraser, 1980) have to be regarded as being more successful projects because they call attention to the collaborative process, rather than attempt to disguise it. Because *LSTB* fails to do this, Harlos believes it has to be regarded as a failure.<sup>62</sup> He regards the work as being problematic because he considers it betrays Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical contract", which argues that successful autobiographies merge the subject, author and narrator.<sup>63</sup> His favoured solution to that problem is to aim for more transparency.

However, according to Ajay Heble, what we have in *LSTB* is a situation where Holiday is given the space to tell her own story as her collaborator drops out altogether. He regards it as an example of what William Andrews has defined as "free storytelling." According to Andrews,

[t]he history of Afro-American autobiography is one of increasingly free storytelling, signalled in the ways black narratives address their readers and reconstruct personal history, ways often at variance with literary conventions and social proprieties of discourse...Autobiography became a very public way of declaring oneself free, of redefining freedom and then assigning it to oneself in defiance of one's bonds to the past or to the social, political, and sometimes even the moral exigencies of the present.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Harlos, "Jazz Autobiography," 146, 147-149.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>64</sup> William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi.

Heble focuses on Holiday's improvisation of a "narrative of origins," and argues that it is Holiday's disregard for the truth which provides her story with its "improvisational edge."<sup>65</sup> This reinvention invites "a redefinition of conventional standards of coherence and judgement."<sup>66</sup> In other words, Heble attempts a complete restructuring of the problem in order to lend support to the viability of the text. On the other hand, Kathy Ogren argues that collaborators can be likened to amanuenses, that is, literary or artistic assistants in particular who take dictations or copy manuscripts.<sup>67</sup> But if we accept this perspective, then we are still faced with the difficulty of ascertaining how much substance should be allocated to Dufty's role in the creation of *LSTB*.

For Daniel Stein, in these collaborative arrangements we are dealing with a socially constructed person wearing the mask of a celebrity. He notes that we are presented with Dufty's biography of Holiday, told from Holiday's perspective, as the information it contains has been based on a series of self-portraits Holiday had already made public in previous interviews. Thus, according to Stein, "whenever we speak of Holiday as the implied author and protagonist of *Lady Sings the Blues*, we are speaking of a textual construct influenced by Holiday herself but controlled by Dufty."<sup>68</sup>

Perchard's solution to the problems differing modes of biographical representation might create for the understanding and analysis of jazz history is the utilisation of a hermeneutical approach initially advocated by Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>69</sup> Gadamer's contention is that the act of writing history should not be thought of as being outside of the historical process itself as we are all located within historical traditions. Therefore "the abstract

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<sup>65</sup> Ajay Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz Dissonance and Critical Practice*, (New York: London: Routledge, 2000), 108-109.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Kathy Ogren, "Jazz Isn't Just Me: Autobiographies as Performance Personas," in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meaning of Jazz*, ed. Reginald Buckner and Steven Weiland (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 114.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Stein, "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, 37 (2004): 189-190.

<sup>69</sup> Tom Perchard, "Writing Jazz Biography: Race, Research and Narrative Representation," *Popular Music History* 2, no.2 (2007): 130.

antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it, must be discarded.”<sup>70</sup> Thus for historians, “[u]nderstanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition.”<sup>71</sup>

Another important issue was whether Dufty knew or was told the truth and chose to hide it within the narrative, or whether Holiday told him and earlier reporters the same story about her life. Like Stein, Griffin argues that in some instances the latter appears to be the case. In other words, it was a story she had been telling for some time, which suggests that Holiday had some role in constructing the way her story would be told.<sup>72</sup>

Holiday’s biographers all agree that the book is based on interviews Holiday had previously given to the mainstream media (such as *Downbeat*, *Metronome* and *the New York Times*), as well as the African-American press (such as *The New York Age*, *The New York Amsterdam News*, *Baltimore Afro-American* and *Ebony* magazine). Dufty pierced the story together from magazine articles and interviews, and when he met an impasse that Holiday could or would not enlighten, he “filled in the blanks in the best jazz tradition; he improvised.”<sup>73</sup>

Dufty told Doretta Lonnett Whalen, when interviewed by her in 1994, that the book had been based mainly on a four-page article originally published in the left-leaning, New Deal magazine, *PM*.<sup>74</sup> Events in *LSTB* previously described in newspaper and magazine articles include Holiday’s famous audition at the Log Cabin Club (also known as Pod’s and Jerry’s) which formed part of a *Down Beat* article by Dave Dexter Jr. in 1939, and the racial discrimination she experienced from the management of the Lincoln Hotel in New York was described by Bill Chase in *The New York Age* in

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<sup>70</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 283-283.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>72</sup> Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 206.

<sup>74</sup> Whalen, “Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study,” 7.

1939.<sup>75</sup> Thus substantial sections of the autobiography predate their appearance in *LSTB* and form the bedrock upon which Holiday and Dufty erect, organise, and embellish incidents in the book.

As Gibson argues, an important motivation for this severing of Holiday's sense of self from her own life story was the opportunity it gave critics to usurp her authorial authority, and to refashion her history and resurrect her into a more palatable and heroic image, "one that is a sanitized model of female African-American jazz genius."<sup>76</sup> Thus it can also be understood that the discussions on the value ascribed to the most important text within the Holiday material are closely linked to those moves to legitimate jazz as a genre within American culture.

This discussion on the narrative conventions of the autobiographical genre, problems associated with the collaborative nature of jazz autobiographies and the complexities underpinning Dufty's role as a ghost writer, makes it clear why *LSTB* needs to be utilised with great care when referenced in this work. However, like most recent commentators, I have chosen not to dismiss it out of hand, whatever the earlier criticisms of the book's unreliability. As already mentioned, Nicholson's research reveals that despite imperfections, the book describes the main events that occurred in Holiday's life, and the close reading techniques utilised by Griffin make it possible for reassessments to be made of the book's contents. Also, analyses of interviews Holiday conducted throughout her life make it apparent that events depicted within *LSTB* had been previously described in newspaper and magazine articles; in other words, Holiday had been telling a similar story consistently, which suggests that she had no small role in its construction. Finally, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter three, even if we need to acknowledge that within its pages Holiday is constructing her own myth of artistic individuality, it can also be argued that her autobiography presents the reader with some of her core standpoints about music and being a musician. In this context it is therefore possible to acknowledge *LSTB* as an

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<sup>75</sup> Dave Dexter Jr., "I'll Never Sing With a Dance Band Again – Holiday" *Down Beat*, November 1, 1939, 4; Bill Chase, "Billie Tells Her Story" *The New York Age*, January 21, 1939, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Gibson, "Alternate Takes," 28.

important contribution to Holiday scholarship and the genre of jazz autobiography; I argue that if we wholeheartedly reject *LSTB*, we are in danger of silencing Holiday's testimony, albeit constructed, about her life as an artist. Conflicted as it is, the work must be seen as a vehicle she utilised to present the reader with something close to her own personal standpoint.

By the early 1990s, Holiday researchers found that they were treading in the footsteps of the music writer Linda Lipnack Kuehl, whose archive created a welcome infusion of original information about the singer. In the sleeve-notes she wrote for the album *The First Verve Sessions: Billie Holiday* (1976), Kuehl explained that her book *Billie Holiday: A Biography* was due to be published by Harper and Row in 1977.<sup>77</sup> However, Kuehl's manuscript was never finished, and she died in 1979. The archive her death created consisted of almost one hundred and fifty interviews she had carried out with people who knew Holiday, such as fellow musicians, family members, neighbours, lovers, doctors and even narcotics agents. As well as the interviews, Kuehl had also collected newspaper cuttings, legal documents, hospital records, police files, the transcripts of court cases, royalty statements, as well as photographs and private letters which people she spoke to during her research were willing to let her use. Kuehl even apparently obtained a hoard of shopping lists, postcards and little drunken notes that Alice Vrbsky, Holiday's secretary and assistant during her last years, still had in her possession.<sup>78</sup> The archive is now in private hands after being brought from the Kuehl family in the 1990s, and access to it is costly. This has prevented me from consulting the materials. Not all Holiday scholars have been able to afford this access and those with publishers who could, (i.e. Robert O'Meally, Donald Clarke and Julia Blackburn) have reproduced its contents with varying degrees of transparency, which I have taken on board in my utilisation of their material.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Linda Kuehl, "Sleeve Notes," Billie Holiday, *The First Verve Sessions*, Verve Records (1976).

<sup>78</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 5-6.

<sup>79</sup> For example, Griffin points out that "Unfortunately, Kuehl's (sic) archive was not available to me because I could not afford the extravagant access fee required by its owner. I trust that

## ***Critical Studies***

The first significant publication after Holiday's death was a collection of memoirs from individuals who knew or respected Holiday entitled *Billie Holiday Remembered* (1973) which was published in the form of a booklet collated by Kuehl and Ellie Schocket, assisted by Dan Morgenstern, under the aegis of the New York Jazz Museum.<sup>80</sup>

Major biographical works followed based on interviews and archive material. The first was John Chilton's *Billie's Blues: A Survey of Billie Holiday's Career, 1933-1953* (1975). Chilton's book could arguably be said to be one of the most influential written on Holiday, because he provides a clear critical template that other writers of biographies have built upon. As a practising musician, Chilton focused on Holiday's musical milieu, presenting an almost gig-by-gig account of her life story after her arrival in New York. He provides the reader with intimations of factual inaccuracies within the autobiography – for example, Holiday's designated date of birth – but Chilton's overall objective is clear, and he writes that “[n]o useful purpose is served in dissecting Billie's story and pointing out other anomalies. Rather than present the reader with a chronicle of riddles, I have chosen to cover the great singer's career from the time she began recording (1933) until the time of her death (1959).”<sup>81</sup> Burnett James gives a succinct account of Holiday's life that reads very much like a précis of Chilton's book, as he uses material largely gleaned from that work, from the autobiography, as well as from critical writings by Leonard Feather, Nat Hentoff and Ralph Gleason.<sup>82</sup>

John White's work was innovative as it was the first to examine her life and development as a musician in the context of the social, racial and

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this lack of access has not negatively influenced the story I want to tell.” (Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, xiv).

<sup>80</sup> Kuehl, Schocket, with Morgenstern, *Billie Holiday Remembered*. Reproduced in *Billie Holiday Companion*, 181-190.

<sup>81</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Burnett James, *Billie Holiday*, (Tunbridge Wells/New York: Spellmount Books/Hippocrene Books, 1984), 69.

economic background she was born and raised in. He begins charting her life story before her arrival in New York in 1928, and therefore provides us with useful information on the type of social and cultural environment she experienced whilst growing up in Baltimore, which was important for the development of her performance style and songwriting.<sup>83</sup>

Robert O'Meally was the first of the jazz writers based at Columbia University to launch a new type of criticism on Holiday. His work must also be considered a watershed, as it was also the first work to make extensive use of the Linda Kuehl archive.<sup>84</sup> O'Meally's work was followed by those of Angela Y. Davis and Farah Jasmine Griffin, who also sought to develop innovative critical stances towards Holiday and her work.<sup>85</sup> Other important texts have been published since O'Meally's, such as those by Donald Clarke, Stuart Nicholson and more recently, Julia Blackburn. Nevertheless, it is the work of O'Meally, Davis and Griffin that has been responsible for initiating a major shift in perspective in the field of Holiday scholarship.<sup>86</sup>

The central point of O'Meally's work is that Holiday "was able to invent for herself a shining identity as an artist." O'Meally foregrounds the suggestion that Holiday had perhaps neither read nor wrote *LSTB*. He argues that we should consider *LSTB* to be "a dream book...a collection of wishes and lies." He is also critical of earlier writers who he contends lack a "careful exploration of her role as an artist", and choose to focus instead on "her powerless condition" as a poor Black female. Thus, for O'Meally, the major concern is that Holiday was perceived as being a tragic victim in the public imagination, a portrayal which ultimately came to overshadow the quality of the work she produced.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> John White, *Billie Holiday: Her Life and Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (London: Omnibus Press, 1988).

<sup>84</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 206.

<sup>85</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998; Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*; Blackburn, *With Billie*.

<sup>87</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 10, 21 and 167.

Because it was the first of the modern biographies to make use of the Kuehl archive, O'Meally's work revealed important new information about Holiday's early life. Kuehl's archive contained Holiday's passport, which revealed her birthplace as Philadelphia, not Baltimore, as was previously thought. (Two major biographers, Clarke and Nicholson, whose works were published almost at the same time managed to verify Holiday's place of birth by locating her birth certificate). Nevertheless, despite the fact that O'Meally has made use of the archive material, Kuehl's interviews are not demarcated in the text and it is not until we reach the "Acknowledgement" pages at the end of his work that his debt to the archive is discussed.<sup>88</sup>

Like O'Meally, Clarke borrowed heavily from the Kuehl archive as well as available material in previous biographies and the clippings file of John Jeremy, the producer of the documentary *The Long Night of Lady Day* (1984).<sup>89</sup> Clarke uses large chunks of interviews from the Kuehl archive, which are delineated by being inset from the rest of the text, interspersed with his own, sometimes paternalistic opinions on Holiday and her life. For example, extracts of the interview Kuehl had with the singer and dancer Mae Barnes (1907-1996), a lifelong friend of Holiday are clearly set out on pages 47, 49-52.

Clarke focuses on what he describes as Holiday's "addictive personality," and the violent nature of her relationships.<sup>90</sup> In his final chapter, he muses on Holiday as a devout Catholic and the growth of her iconic status. When initially published the biography was well received by reviewers,<sup>91</sup> but as other critical work on Holiday has developed, many of Clarke's personal views now appear somewhat hackneyed. For example, he

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>89</sup> *The Long Night of Lady Day*. Director John Jeremy. A TCB Releasing Ltd. Production in cooperation with BBC-TV. 1984.

<sup>90</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 174.

<sup>91</sup> For example Patrick Skene Catling "That's Why the Lady was Dysfunctional," *The Spectator*, January 29, 1994, 46 and Paul Jones, "Review: Lady Day, Lady Night: *Wishing on the Moon: The Life and Times of Billie Holiday* – Donald Clarke." *Independent Newspaper*, January 23, 1994. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review-lady-night-lady-day-wishing-on-the-moon-the-life-and-times-of-billie-holiday-donald-1408806.html>.

spends time railing against one-parent families in his early chapters when discussing Holiday's family life in Baltimore, because he believes that they are abetted by a "paternalistic welfare state."<sup>92</sup>

Of the recent critics, Griffin is the most critical of Clarke's work. Clarke, writes Griffin, "is particularly invested in providing a voyeuristic glance into her sexual habits and her drug addiction at the expense of her musical legacy."<sup>93</sup>

Like Griffin, it appears that Nicholson did not have access to the Kuehl archive. Much of his text is supported by his independent research, such as information gleaned from his own interviews with family members, musical colleagues of Holiday and jazz archives, such as the John Jeremy Archive at the British Library and the Jazz Oral History Project at the Institute of Jazz Studies at the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers New Jersey.

Nevertheless, his book is the best single appraisal of Holiday's life and career. Of special interest is the information he provides from the files which monitored Holiday's incarceration at Alderson Reformatory, as well as testimony from the court cases she was involved in. Also of use are the tempo analyses of Holiday's recordings, the data concerning the number of times she recorded popular titles from 1948 to 1959, and a list of the eighteen titles for which Holiday received credit as composer or co-composer. A comprehensive discography for the book was compiled by Phil Schaap.

Nicholson also provides intelligent commentaries on many of Holiday's recordings. For example, he contends that her first two recordings, "Your Mother's Son-in-Law" and "Riffin' the Scotch" clearly reveal that her vocal style was fully formed in 1933 when she was just eighteen years old.<sup>94</sup> Nicholson's basic argument is that Holiday created a stage persona of the beautiful woman unlucky in life and love, who told her stories through slow-burning torch songs. Discussing her November 10<sup>th</sup> 1956 concert at the Carnegie Hall in New York, he writes that "[a]s was usual with her repertoire, she used 'I' songs but changed the 'I' from positive to negative...Persona and

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<sup>92</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 93.

<sup>94</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 50.

person were now interchangeable, and now, more than ever, she had become dominated by her own legend.”<sup>95</sup>

Angela Davis echoes O’Meally’s concerns with Holiday’s portrayal as a tragic victim. However, she chooses to counter this by staging a Black feminist reclamation of Holiday, who she places alongside Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith in her analyses. Davis is concerned to discuss how the recorded performances of Rainey, Smith and Holiday can be understood to reveal generally unacknowledged traditions of feminist consciousness in working-class Black communities. She has two useful chapters on Holiday who, she argues, has suffered from the almost universal neglect of the politics inherent within her music. Davis claims that Holiday’s work functions as an effort to transform social relations aesthetically beyond the shallow notions of love contained in the popular songs she successfully reworked. For Davis, Holiday’s work helped illuminate the ideological constructs of gender and the ways they insinuate themselves into women’s emotional lives.<sup>96</sup> Like O’Meally, she is concerned that earlier critics and writers have focussed on “highlight[ing] drug addiction, alcoholism, feminine weakness, depression, lack of formal education and other difficulties unrelated to [Holiday’s] contributions as an artist.”<sup>97</sup>

Griffin builds on the work of O’Meally and Davis. Her focus is on the multitude of myths which have grown up around Holiday and which can now influence the prism through which we view her historical persona. Even though she disagrees with some of the assertions Davis makes about the feminist implications of Holiday’s performances, Griffin shares with her the Black feminist reclamation of Holiday.<sup>98</sup> Central to Griffin’s work is the idea that these myths reveal more about their creators and the audiences that consume them than about the “real” or “authentic” Holiday, particularly as

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>96</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>98</sup> Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, 130.

she believes that now “[t]here is no getting back to the genuine, ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ woman.”<sup>99</sup>

Griffin comes close to the hermeneutical approach to historical studies discussed by Perchard and advocated by Gadamer, by acknowledging that she is a “devoted fan” who is “deeply fearful of the implications of some of the Holiday myths for other black women and girls.” She also argues that she has chosen to study the myths surrounding Holiday from the perspective of “what they reveal about their creators and the audiences who consume them”.<sup>100</sup> Thus Griffin makes clear historical linkages between a Black woman from the past (i.e. Holiday) and Black women of today.

For Griffin, the myths around Holiday exist because her complex and multi-dimensional personality were at odds with the few stereotypes available to Black women in the 1930s. Because of racial stereotyping it was simply more convenient for the media to boil down her artistic image into that of the simple manufacture of “the tragic victim,” which is why Griffin informs us that,

[e]ventually, the stories of her arrests and drug addiction joined with her stage persona of the torch singer to create a new image that of the tragic, ever-suffering black woman singer who simply stands center stage and naturally sings of her woes...this figure is a natural; she has no person or artistic history, she has no musical skills. She feels but does not think. She has insatiable appetites for food, sex, alcohol and drugs.<sup>101</sup>

Thus almost in unison, the writings of Davis, O’Meally and Griffin express the aim of moderating Holiday’s fetishized victimhood.

Julia Blackburn’s book is another unconventional biography. It is based almost solely on the Kuehl archive, and thus on extracts from transcriptions of the almost one hundred and fifty interviews that Kuehl carried out. Arguably, Blackburn has been the writer the most transparent in her use of the archive. She devotes an entire chapter to it and is open about how its contents were presented to her:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 31.

I was shown bundles of files filled with loose sheets of paper. Everything had been jumbled haphazardly together, either by Linda Kuehl herself or by someone else. Fragments of unfinished chapters, almost obliterated by handwritten revision notes, lay alongside the transcripts of Billie's court appearances and her medical reports. Formal letters from publishers and record companies rubbed shoulders with very informal letters from friends and lovers. There were lists of addresses and several lists of important dates and events in Billie's life, but each list was uncertain and incomplete and covered with question marks.<sup>102</sup>

Blackburn also informs us that additionally she was given a cardboard box filled with typewritten transcripts of the interviews Kuehl had recorded.<sup>103</sup>

Like Clarke, Blackburn clearly signals for the reader the difference between her own material and the interview transcripts, which are inset in the text of her book. The majority of her chapters are named after the interviewees given pride of place within them. In addition, Blackburn provides us with some background knowledge about interviewees, such as their relationship to Holiday, personal information about the date of the interviews, where they took place and even how they got on with Kuehl herself. Blackburn always clearly signals when the interview material is going to commence. For example, in chapter twenty-one she introduces Kuehl's interview with the comedian and dancer James 'Stump' Cross (1919-1981) with the words "this is Stump talking" and the rest of the chapter consists wholly of the transcript of his interview.<sup>104</sup>

Faced with the cacophony of different voices within the archive, Blackburn uses a documentary format, and is particularly concerned to ensure that the material is presented in such a way that those interviewed are "free to tell their own stories about Billie and it doesn't matter if the stories don't fit together, or even if sometimes they seem to be talking about a completely different woman."<sup>105</sup> Like Griffin, she feels it is impossible to disentangle an absolute truth about Holiday, to find out "who Billie was or

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<sup>102</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Kuehl interviewed Stump in January and June 1972. They met according to Kuehl, "in my pad" and appear to have got on very well.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

how she lived” but that “at least we can listen with our own ears to the voices of the people who knew her, and then we can make our own decisions about who to believe and what not to believe.”<sup>106</sup>

The most recent work on Holiday to emanate from what could be described as the Columbia School is by John Szwed, and was published in 2015 to coincide with the centenary of Holiday’s birth. Like O’Meally, Szwed stresses that the emphasis for biographers should be on Holiday’s art rather than her turbulent life. Interestingly, he uses material from the H. Dennis Fairchild archive which contains letters from Dufty to Doubleday’s lawyers, in support of Holiday in her copyright dispute with Abel Meeropol over the song “Strange Fruit”. This will be discussed in chapter five.<sup>107</sup>

Analyses have been carried out on the music and style of Holiday in works which discuss her performances alongside the cultural productions of other singers. Stacy Holman Jones (2007) discusses Holiday’s music alongside singers such as Edith Piaf and k. d. Lang, and argues that torch singers perform critiques of the very lyrics they are singing, thus giving expression not only to desire, but also to a determination to resist and change.<sup>108</sup> Melanie E. Bratcher (2007) also explores selected song performances of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone through the cultural perspective of African aesthetics.<sup>109</sup> Her work is guided by an intense interest in oral compositions that promote Black consciousness in general, and Black female social consciousness in particular.

From the above it is possible to understand how, during a period when attempts have been made to further legitimate jazz as a genre through increasing institutionalisation, work on Holiday by writers mainly originating from within academic environments – rather than the commercial world of earlier jazz critics – reflects this changing cultural status. Thus these writers

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> John Szwed, *Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth* (London: William Heineman, 2015), 7, 215-219.

<sup>108</sup> Stacy Holman Jones, *Torch Singing: Performing Resistance and Desire from Billie Holiday to Edith Piaf*, (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Melanie E. Bratcher, *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone: Sound Motion, Blues Spirit and African Memory*. (New York/London: Routledge, 2007).

have sought to dig deeper than the tabloid version of Holiday in the popular imagination in order to ensure her inclusion amongst the canon of jazz greats. But to accomplish this incorporation, they have employed what arguably would have been considered previously “outsider” stances and theories: Davis and Griffin have used feminist and/or womanist perspectives, and O’Meally ideas derived from African-American studies and race theories. In the following section I will discuss further the growth and implications of this for Holiday scholarship.

### ***Musicological Studies***

An important aspect of jazz’s cultural legitimation has been a growing academic jazz studies culture, which historically has been regarded as the holy-grail by those concerned to improve the status of jazz as a genre within society. According to Paul Lopes,

[u]ltimately the modernist agenda was driven by the desire to locate jazz in more “legitimate” cultural spaces and achieve the high art status and high art appreciation considered still unattainable within the urban jazz scene of nightclubs. It was also driven by the knowledge that linking jazz to a major cultural institution like education would provide for its future in terms of audiences and artists.<sup>110</sup>

Significant academic interest in jazz did not begin to develop until the 1950s and 1960s when, due to the inter-disciplinary organisation of humanities subjects in American universities, most of its academic participants were based outside the field of musicology.<sup>111</sup>

As well as the development of special concerts and workshops, during this period, programmes and conservatoires for the study of jazz were also being established. Influenced by the multi-disciplinary teaching methods of

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<sup>110</sup> Paul Lopes, *The Rise of the Jazz Art World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 240.

<sup>111</sup> Mark Tucker, “Review: Musicology and the New Jazz Studies,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. 51, no.1, (Spring, 1998): 133.

Marshall Stearns, jazz studies also grew up around the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University (and its jazz studies journal, *The Journal of Jazz Studies*, published from 1973 to 1979, and the *Annual Review of Jazz Studies*, which began publication in 1991).<sup>112</sup> The current mission statement of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia, originally set up by the musicologist Mark Tucker and Robert O’Meally, provides an example of the multidisciplinary ethos of jazz studies as it has developed in the U.S. It asserts that the centre conceives of jazz as being “music without borders,” and views “the interdisciplinary expansion of the intellectual conversation surrounding jazz, and especially its lifeblood practice, improvisation, as tracing a path toward the development of new knowledge that illuminates the human condition.”<sup>113</sup>

Outside academia, jazz’s mainstream cultural-historical status was finally consolidated with Ken Burns’s *Jazz* series in 2001.<sup>114</sup> As Perchard notes, this process of acceptance became symbolically represented in the person of Wynton Marsalis in his high profile as “the administrator, programmer and acknowledged legitimiser of an official (and now Burns-borne) jazz history.”<sup>115</sup>

In the mid 1990s, new approaches to the study of gender and jazz music were heralded by two works edited by Krin Gabbard, *Representing Jazz* (1995) and *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995), which explored jazz’s “other history” and provided a contrast to the use of the text-focused New

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<sup>112</sup> See Lewis Porter and John Howland, “From “Perspectives in Jazz” to *Jazz Perspectives*,” *Jazz Perspectives*, 1, no.1 (May 2007): 1-3 for a detailed account of Stearn’s creation of the Institute of Jazz Studies.

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.jazz.columbia.edu/mission-statement>. For further discussion on the importance of the interdisciplinary approach in jazz studies in American universities see also Karin Lipson, “Interdisciplinary Study: Festival Explores Jazz and its Intersection with Other Arts,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2008, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, L112.

<sup>114</sup> *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns*. Director: Ken Burns, PBS Video, 2001.

<sup>115</sup> Tom Perchard, *Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture* (London: Equinox, 2006), 268. On this subject see also Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz: African American Musicians as Artists, critics, and Activists*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 287.

Critical methods – heavily influenced by literary criticism – utilised by critics such as Schuller.<sup>116</sup>

This “new jazz studies” arose in dovetail with the rise of the “new musicology,” with which it shared a similarly expansive interdisciplinary methodology.<sup>117</sup> This inter-disciplinary ethos encouraged the development of a panoply of theories from “outsider” disciplines, such as feminist theory, queer theory, gender studies, African-American studies and literary criticism, among many other channels of influence.<sup>118</sup> These perspectives helped to open up theoretical possibilities for the examination of gender perspectives which – explored in depth in the next chapter – are reflected in the work of writers such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Eric Porter, Hazel Carby, Ingrid Monson and Krin Gabbard.

Within jazz studies it thus became possible to begin asking different sets of questions about existing jazz history and literature, including one articulated by Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker that is of crucial importance to this thesis: “[h]ow could we begin marshalling the disparate works on gender, race, and nation in jazz in such a way that the voices of the black musicians and their representations of the culture and the music held equal authority with those of the white authors who had predominated [in] the written record?”<sup>119</sup>

Despite the interdisciplinary ethos of much of jazz studies, musicology has played a relatively limited role in its development. The nature of the gulf still existing between musicology and jazz studies is symbolised acutely by the first sentences of Griffin’s preface, wherein she states emphatically, but almost apologetically, “[t]his is not a biography of Billie Holiday. Nor is it a musicological study. I am neither musicologist nor musician”<sup>120</sup> Mark Tucker

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<sup>116</sup> Krin Gabbard, ed., *Representing Jazz* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>117</sup> Porter and Howland, From “Perspectives in Jazz”, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,”9.

<sup>119</sup> Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 17.

<sup>120</sup> Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, xiii.

points out in his analysis of the growth of jazz studies as a discipline that “[b]efore the mid 1970s it was rare to find music scholars writing on the subject,” but that “[s]ince then more musicologists, ethnomusicologists and theorists have contributed to the literature on jazz, though their work makes up only a small portion of the whole.”<sup>121</sup> However, a few writers with musicological and ethno-musicological backgrounds have addressed Holiday’s music.

Hao Huang and Rachel V. Huang examine the mystery of how Holiday is often described as being one of the most off-the-beat singers on record, and yet her musical colleagues described her sense of timing to be metronomically accurate. They utilise a mechanism they describe as “duel-track time” to resolve this contradiction, and argue that she was both on *and* off the beat, as there were two different independent frameworks regulating the passage of time, which functioned simultaneously to govern the accompaniment and vocal line.<sup>122</sup> In a more recent essay, the authors discuss why they believe Holiday to be one of the supreme practitioners of the art of interweaving speech and song, and conclude that the emotional inflections which imbued her use of speech are “definitive, not cosmetic.”<sup>123</sup> William R. Bauer’s 1993 musicological study compares Holiday’s and Betty Carter’s renditions of the Richard Rogers and Lorenzo Hart song, “I Didn’t Know What Time It Was.”<sup>124</sup> Bauer argues that this type of exercise is useful, as it enables us to gain a better understanding of how the specific meanings of words interact with musical expression to shape individual style.

Meanwhile, David Brackett (1987) compared spectrum photographs of Holiday’s singing with that those of Bing Crosby’s; and Lori Burns (2005) explores the analytic potential of Holiday’s self-proclaimed performance

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<sup>121</sup> Mark Tucker, “Review: Musicology and the New Jazz Studies,” in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51, no. 1, (Spring, 1998), 131-148 at 133.

<sup>122</sup> Hao Huang and Rachel V. Huang, “Billie Holiday and *Tempo Rubato*: Understanding Rhythmic Expressivity,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 7, (1994-95): pp.181-199.

<sup>123</sup> Hao Huang and Rachel Huang, “She Sang as She Spoke: Billie Holiday and Aspects of Speech Intonation and Diction,” *Jazz Perspectives* 7, no.3: 287-302.

<sup>124</sup> William R. Bauer, “Billie Holiday and Betty Carter: Emotion and Style in the Jazz Vocal Line” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 6, (1993): 9-152.

goals – that is, the integration of the “style” of Louis Armstrong and the “feeling” of Bessie Smith – by interpreting vocal gesture in her versions of two songs also recorded by Armstrong and Smith, “Tain’t Nobody’s Biz-ness If I Do” and “I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues.” Burns argues that Holiday succeeded in creating a tribute to Smith and Armstrong through specific strategies of vocal content and gesture, while still forging an innovative style and feeling in her own musical expression.<sup>125</sup>

Two further authors emphasise structural environmental and cultural issues. The ethnomusicologist Doretta Lonnett Whalen argues that “the key to understanding Holiday’s style lies not in comparison with Western European models, but in understanding her sociocultural background as well as the particulars of her unique personality.”<sup>126</sup> She uses this perspective to; for example, examine the influence of the Gregorian chant Holiday sang in her childhood on her adult singing style. Through numerous interviews and extensive genealogical research, Whalen painstakingly and accurately traces and discusses Holiday’s family tree. Her collated data also clarifies misinformation about dates in Holiday’s life and thus contradicts Holiday and Dufty, Chilton, O’Meally, Clarke and Nicholson.

Combining the analytical perspectives of historical musicology and Black cultural studies, Maya C. Gibson attempts to surmount the task of integrating the two typecasts of tragic victim and triumphant heroine. In her own examination of Holiday’s reconfiguration by contemporary and recent jazz critics and biographers, Gibson also highlights the fact that shifts in Holiday’s critical reception as a jazz artist parallels the growing appreciation for and legitimacy of jazz as a form of art music and “American national treasure.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> David Brackett, “Performance Comparison as an Index of Affect” (paper presented at the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Chicago, October 10-13, 1991). University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Lori Burns, “Feeling the Style: Vocal Gesture and Musical Expression in Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong” *Music Theory Online*, 11, no. 3, (September 2005), accessed November 11, 2009, <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.05.11.3/mto.05.11.3.burns.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Whalen, “Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study,”.

<sup>127</sup> Gibson “Alternate Takes,” 1.

Gibson is interesting as she has chosen to pick up the mantle on behalf of musicologists in her work, arguing (contra O'Meally) that Holiday's victim status was not caused by music critics, and in fact that musicology should play a greater role in future writing so that innovative narratives can be created in order to liberate critical inquiries of race and gender in her music.<sup>128</sup>

Arguably the most useful of these musicological studies for the present thesis is provided by Kate Daubney, who combines musicology and a gendered perspective in her analysis of Holiday's early career.<sup>129</sup> Daubney contends that Holiday emerged as a highly distinctive singer in an artistically confined situation (i.e. by contributing short choruses to showy instrumental numbers); nevertheless, from her first recording, she employed the dominant male instrumental discourse of these performances as a framework for the development of her own singing style. How Holiday was able to do this will be discussed in more detail in chapter three of this work. However, a major limitation of Daubney's approach is that it is restricted in its historical scope to Holiday's recordings on the Columbia label (that is, the period covering 1933-1944), so her analysis is not applied to any developments which took place in Holiday's career after this period.

This overview of the most significant texts on Holiday reveals the wealth and diversity of the available material, even if their strictly musicological content is rather limited. I will argue in the second chapter that the approaches adopted by Daubney and taken on and espoused by Gibson, which combine musicology with theoretical perspectives from other disciplines, offer the best prospects for the future of Holiday scholarship.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>129</sup> Kate Daubney, "Songbird or Subversive? Instrumental Vocalization Technique in the Songs of Billie Holiday," *Journal of Gender Studies*, 11, no. 1, (March 2002): 17-28

## The Birth of an Icon

In the search for the origins of the mythology of victimhood which surrounds Holiday, it has been argued that blame lies not only in the vilification of her in the tabloid press of the singer's day, but also with contemporary critics and commentators, or those writing soon after her death. As already mentioned, O'Meally in particular blames "music historians" for creating this assessment of Holiday.<sup>130</sup> But Barry Ulanov argued in 1972 that it was the tabloid press's determination to constantly apprise the public of Holiday's wrongdoings, by successfully whetting its appetite for scandal, which resulted in the construction of Holiday as a tragic heroine.<sup>131</sup>

The most substantial of the articles on Holiday began to appear shortly after the publication of *LSTB* in 1956. Reading the articles, essays and books of these commentators, what is evident is that their works are rather formulaic. They begin with a discussion of Holiday's formative years, her rise to prominence, and then provide some kind of aesthetic analysis of her work in which the quality and value of her middle and later recordings are often compared unfavourably with the earlier material. In addition, the critics generally discuss Holiday's limited vocal range, her uncanny ability to recompose the melodies of songs and her deep emotional impact, as well as her ability to listen and match the timbre and musical phrasing of the instrumentalists who played with her.

In a 1959 review of *LSTB*, Glenn Coulter situates Holiday's career within the evolution of jazz as a musical genre. He criticises *LSTB* for its use of a "racy side-of-the-mouth" idiom and the "vast amount of insignificant name dropping," yet he also considers that she set jazz on a new course, placing her as the originator of the jazz singing tradition, with a style and method which many imitated but none succeeded in duplicating.<sup>132</sup> In a 1962

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<sup>130</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 252-256.

<sup>132</sup> Glenn Coulter, "Billie Holiday" in *The Art of Jazz: Ragtime to Bebop*, ed. Martin T. Williams, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc. 1959), 170.

piece, Balliett attempted a musical analysis of Holiday's art that took account of her tragic persona. He called attention to the misfortune in Holiday's life, but on the whole focused on her vocal qualities in order to underline her true artistic greatness.<sup>133</sup>

In his 1964 book, *The Reluctant Art*, Benny Green claimed that, after listening to Holiday and understanding what she was doing with her material, he was forced to relearn the jazz repertoire. Green wrote that "Billie Holiday is one of the most significant jazz artists who ever lived, more significant by a thousandfold than many of the mimetic artisan craftsmen whose nuances we all strove to acquire as fashion changed."<sup>134</sup>

By 1968, the critic Martin Williams was arguing that Holiday's particular musical talent lay in "her ability to find emotional and melodic beauty in banality."<sup>135</sup> He discussed Holiday's improvisational skills, vocal timbre and her similarities to Louis Armstrong in the manner of her phrasing. In his discussion of the perceived decline of Holiday's voice towards the end of her career, Williams argued that this occurred not only because it was not formally trained, but also because as a person "she seemed so determined not to feel a deeper self-pity that she couldn't see the terrible sadness of her self-destruction."<sup>136</sup> William's ultimate assessment was that "She was an actress. And she was a great musician. But she never had an act."<sup>137</sup>

As we have already observed, critics of the 1980s and 1990s sought to defend Holiday's repertoire against interpretations that highlighted her addictive personality and early death. For example, writing in 1998, Gary Giddins was committed to the idea of Holiday as an exceptional jazz artist, arguing that "Holiday's influence can be calibrated in the language of musical technique: in her use of legato phrasing, ornamentation, melodic variation,

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<sup>133</sup> Whitney Balliett "Miss Holiday" in *Billie Holiday Companion*, 100-101.

<sup>134</sup> Benny Green, *The Reluctant Art: The Growth of Jazz*, (London: The Jazz Book Club by arrangement with MacGibbon & Kee, 1964), 123-124.

<sup>135</sup> Martin T. Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 78.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

chromaticism. But musicology cannot do justice to the primary impact of her singing, which is emotional.”<sup>138</sup>

Ironically, late twentieth century critics have chosen to situate Holiday within the romantic paradigm of the classical musical genius to enhance her status. This Romantic “great man” narrative idea has been common in jazz history writing for decades.<sup>139</sup> If we ask ourselves why this appears to be the case, we come to the nub of the matter. As part of an effort to legitimise jazz as American art music, Holiday was situated in a critical framework which emphasised her significant contributions to jazz history. Writers began to downplay her personal difficulties which they believed detracted from the overall purpose of establishing her as a jazz figure of major significance. As Gibson observes,

[t]ypically, major jazz writers ...paid keen attention to the aesthetics of Holiday’s voice in lieu of focusing on whatever tragedies befell her. In record reviews, they sometimes panned her voice’s instability and alluded to its deterioration in the last decade of her life, but they almost always praised Holiday for her musical brilliance – placing her on equal footing with other jazz musicians they admired as geniuses.<sup>140</sup>

Thus, again, it is apparent that criticism of Holiday’s career and her artistic material reflects the repositioning of jazz within the American cultural environment as a whole. The changing nature of Holiday’s construction as an artist offers us a unique window from which can be observed the acceptance of jazz from a peripheral to a mainstream genre. It is possible to conceive that Holiday’s critical status mirrors the mechanics of jazz’s legitimation by replicating Western art music’s evolutionary outline and incorporating its heroic model into jazz discourse.

The mainstream acceptance of the genre within American cultural life is therefore important, as is the recognition of the racial disparity which previously existed in the history of jazz critical writing, which, because of its

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<sup>138</sup> Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 369.

<sup>139</sup> Perchard, “Writing Jazz Biography”, 119-145.

<sup>140</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,”76.

impact on the Holiday literature forms an important part of this discussion. Inclusion of voices often previously excluded voices from jazz criticism, especially those of Black women and men, has inevitably enabled transformations in the Holiday narrative, and provided a new lens through which her career can be viewed. It should come as no surprise therefore that most of the Columbia School of jazz critics are African-American.

Even though jazz as a musical genre has arguably existed since the beginning of the twentieth century, jazz criticism did not become an acknowledged mode of journalistic writing until the 1930s.<sup>141</sup> Perchard has pointed out that because there did not exist any “organised official historical mechanisms for the genre, magazines were all the institutions the music had, with the long running *Down Beat* as the journal of record-cum-historical repository.”<sup>142</sup> As John Gennari has shown in his study of jazz criticism, many of the genre’s critics and historians originated from diverse backgrounds and catered for diverse audiences.<sup>143</sup> During the thirties and forties, they were usually not professional musicians or musicologists, but rather journalists, enthusiasts and record collectors. Michael Denning (2010) notes that many of the critics were part of the Popular Front jazz subculture, and that even though there were often heated debates over jazz in the left-wing press, virtually all of the major American jazz critics of the period were politically on the Left.<sup>144</sup> These critics fostered an appreciation for the music despite the absence of any formal musical training.<sup>145</sup> As Mark Tucker

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<sup>141</sup> For example, *Down Beat*, perhaps the genre’s most well known magazine was established in 1934 in Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>142</sup> Perchard, *Lee Morgan*, 128.

<sup>143</sup> John Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool: Jazz and its Critics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7-8. And Gennari mentions Dan Morgenstern, who, in defence of jazz critics, lists the jobs many of them have worked at: “editors, a&r men, broadcasters and emcees, publicity flacks and personal managers, concert producers and TV script advisors, songwriters and lecturers.” Dan Morgenstern, “A Critical Matter: Afterthoughts,” *Down Beat*, January 9, 1969, 14. Cited in Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 7-8.

<sup>144</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Verso, 2010), 337.

<sup>145</sup> However, this was not the case with all the critics and journalists. John Hammond, who wrote the first article on Holiday, had attended the Julliard School in New York before working as a writer and producer.

informs us, their writing laid the groundwork for the “discographical, biographical, historical, critical, and analytic activity that would follow in the coming decades and come to be known in time as Jazz Studies.”<sup>146</sup>

LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) was one of the first writers to bring to the fore the fact that the majority of writers on jazz were white and middle class. He was concerned that they were attempting to enforce middle-brow standards on the genre. In his 1963 essay “Jazz and the White Critic”, he famously lambasted the quality of many jazz writers, arguing that

...in most cases the writers, the jazz critics, have been anything but intellectuals (in the most complete sense of that word). Most jazz critics began as hobbyists or boyishly brash members of the American petit bourgeoisie, whose only claim to any understanding about the music was that they knew it was *different*; or else they had once been brave enough to make a trip to a Negro slum to hear their favourite instrumentalist defame Western musical tradition.<sup>147</sup>

The ripple effect of his perspective is that recent writers on Holiday, particularly those with African-American origins, have found it essential to challenge the earlier ones because of the hegemonic authority possessed by white males in the critical history of jazz from the 1930s onward, and the relative absence of African-American critical voices involved in the historical construction of Holiday’s persona as a jazz artist. Gibson recognised that “the absence of African-American voices in Holiday’s early critical construction has given the appearance that only white men could ‘speak for’ Billie Holiday.”<sup>148</sup> Most contemporary critics therefore consciously attempt to rebalance the racial disparity of the early critical voices that shaped Holiday as a major jazz figure in their own works. Griffin is the writer who comes closest to explaining the emotional experience of the absence of Black as well as female voices in the critical analyses of Holiday’s life and work, when discussing her reactions to John Jeremy’s documentary *The Long Night of Lady Day* (1984):

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<sup>146</sup> Tucker, “Musicology and the New Jazz Studies,” 133.

<sup>147</sup> Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) “Jazz and the White Critic” in *Black Music* (New York: Akashic Books, 2010), 20.

<sup>148</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 63.

[t]o watch *The Long Night of Lady Day* (sic.) is to witness a parade of white male authorities, many of whom were men who actually controlled Billie Holiday's career throughout her life. There were other voices, of course...But for me, it is the white men who stand out. They are so knowing, so authoritative. Even though I am sure some of them were friends who helped her out on occasion, their authority angers me... For years I have been uneasy about this documentary because of the preponderance of white male authority.<sup>149</sup>

The actions of more recent critics have further implications for Holiday scholarship with the infusion of African-American voices in the construction of Holiday as an important jazz figure, as, according to Gibson, this shift “from white controlled and authored to black authored – reflects broadly the trends of the cultural and academic reception of jazz historiography, writ large.”<sup>150</sup>

These innovative reassessments of Holiday's life and work by African-American writers have certain aesthetic implications, as they have generally championed songs she recorded for the Verve record label in the 1950s, as well as her earlier material. This is despite the fact that, as noted, most of the earlier critics considered the highpoint of her career to be the mid-thirties to early forties. O'Meally argues that

[t]he typical outline for a discussion of Holiday's career is as follows: (1) the great stuff of the thirties, 'out of nowhere'; (2) 'Strange Fruit' and the beginning of the decline; (3) the final years when she miserably imitated herself. I see quite a different Holiday career chart, in which the three Holidays have equal stature: richly innovative in the thirties; just as creative in the forties; equally so in the fifties. That is not to say that there were no valleys and only peaks. But there is a brilliant material from all three periods, along with clunkers.<sup>151</sup>

Implicit in both O'Meally's and Griffin's writings is an underlying African-American aesthetic which signifies approval for the mature voice in contrast to the often purer timbre possessed by younger singers. This appreciation is explicitly stated by Melanie E. Bratcher, who validates her preference and usage of Holiday's later recordings in her work by arguing

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<sup>149</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 99.

<sup>150</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 93.

<sup>151</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 97-98. Also see Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 66.

that an “African” aesthetic is one which values the wisdom and experience integral in the timbre of the aged voice. The implication in her work is that this appreciation still remains an important part of the African-American aesthetic experience.<sup>152</sup> Numerous writers have pointed out that raspiness, or what Alan Lomax refers to as a “dirty sound,” is an important characteristic of the blues genre.<sup>153</sup>

These primarily African-American scholars address a genuine racial disparity in jazz’s critical history, and the new Black cultural critics take aim broadly at Holiday’s contemporary critics in order to wrest from them their authority as Holiday experts. What is at stake between the new critics and the old is the question of *ownership* – a transfer of the authority vested in who owns or defines Billie Holiday for coming ages.<sup>154</sup> Who has the authority and the right to define and redefine Holiday for future generations? In this thesis I will be attempting to answer this question in my own way by proposing a new kind of optic or emphasis which takes account of a gendered and raced analysis.

This chapter has argued that a critical refashioning of Holiday affords writers the opportunity not only to re-mythologise her, but also to provide a strong platform upon which to dismantle the criticism that came before. Holiday has, in effect been brought in from the cold and has now – in critical jazz circles, if not in the realm of the public imagination – been reconstructed as a heroic genius.

This relates to the (successful) attempts by generations of writers, audiences and musicians to raise the status of jazz within the U.S. cultural environment. According to Scott DeVeaux, “only by acquiring the prestige, the ‘cultural capital’...of an artistic tradition could the music hope to be heard and its practitioners receive the support commensurate with their training

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<sup>152</sup> Bratcher, *Words and Songs*, 43; Francis Bebey, *African Music: A People’s Art*, trans. Josephine Bennett, (New York: Lawrence Hill & Co). On this subject, see also Whalen, “Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study,” 272.

<sup>153</sup> Alan Lomax, “Sleeve notes,” *Roots of the Blues*, New World Records, New World 252, Recorded Anthology of American Music Inc. 1977.

<sup>154</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 65.

and accomplishments.”<sup>155</sup> But there are conflicted attitudes amongst critics toward this jazz-as-classical-music cultural transformation. For instance, Green describes jazz music’s relentless striving for respectability as being absurd, and DeVaux initiates an important discussion on what he portrays as “the looming new orthodoxy,” questioning the price jazz music has to pay in order to be in the classical music club.<sup>156</sup>

As early as the 1960s, Baraka also had concerns about jazz becoming part of establishment culture, claiming that

[w]hat has happened was that even though the white middle-brow critic had known about Negro music for only about three decades, he was already trying to formalize and finally institutionalize it. It is a hideous idea. The music was already in danger of being forced into that junk pile of admirable objects and data the West knows as *culture*.<sup>157</sup>

However, although Holiday the artist can be said to have secured her place amongst the greats in jazz history, it is still the case that she remains wrapped around with associations of victimhood and lack of agency. It would be hard to imagine Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong through a similar lens, however difficult their life experiences.

For the rest of this thesis I will be building upon the Holiday material created by both early and contemporary writers in order to ascertain why this view of her is proving difficult to shift. Over the years, there has been detailed analysis of Holiday’s performance styles and vocal techniques, but scarcely anything on her songwriting and the works she wrote herself or with collaborators. I argue it is now vital to carry out work on those areas: as long as interpretative characterisations of Holiday lurch from tragic heroine to singular genius, the wider network of people with whom Holiday developed her music – a number of them women – remains obscure. Focussing on this largely ignored area of her creative career will provide us with an original understanding of the work and experiences of both Holiday and her

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<sup>155</sup> Scott DeVaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography” *Black American Literature Forum*, 25, (1991): 526.

<sup>156</sup> Green, *Reluctant Art*, 16; DeVaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 553 and 546.

<sup>157</sup> Baraka, “Jazz and the White Critic,” 23.

collaborators. To achieve this, a socio-musicological approach will be adopted, but this will be combined with what were previously – as far as musicology is concerned – regarded as “outsider” theoretical approaches drawn from feminist theory and practice. The following chapter will clarify how these approaches will be deployed in the service of that project, and of the research questions I posed at the outset.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Feminist Methodologies: towards the Creation of a Women's Jazz History**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will demonstrate the relevance of feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives for musicology and jazz studies generally. More specifically, it will establish the significance of these contextual approaches for a study of Billie Holiday's work. This is an interdisciplinary approach informed not only by women's studies, gender studies and feminist theory, but also by what for some musicologists were previously considered to be "outsider" theoretical approaches, such as critical theory, African-American studies, and ideas about class and gender devised by socialist and radical feminists as well as post-structural commentators.

These types of theories are utilised in order to aid the examination of the nature of assumptions in jazz literature regarding women and music and in particular, Holiday's songwriting, which has been neglected, in order to capture some of the impact of the intersectionality of gender, race and social class upon her life and career. This approach is also adopted in order to build upon the work of writers who have brought critical questions about gender, race and class to bear on jazz and popular music, making it possible for a re-examination of the Holiday material from a fresh perspective. Thus, overall, what follows is a review of salient features of the main perspectives to be utilised, which integrates discussions on feminist theory, stand point theory, intersectionality and other critical developments with respect to gender and jazz studies, in order to prepare us for our analysis of Holiday's songwriting in the rest of the thesis.

## Feminist Methodologies and Feminist Knowledge

Many feminist writers support the idea that meanings attributed to sex differences (gender) were defined in historically specific ways through culture and politics, and that these “man-made” interpretations of sex differences were applied in order to secure male domination over women.<sup>1</sup> Writers such as Simone de Beauvoir had presented such ideas earlier in the twentieth century, but in the 1970s, that is, during the second-wave period of feminist activism, theories devised to define the concept of gender effectively ignited an explosion of feminist scholarship that continues to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Jill Halstead elucidates why it is necessary to make a distinction between the terms “sex” and “gender” in relation to music. She argues that when issues of “gender” and “music” are being discussed, the term “gender” is often being incorrectly used to indicate the unchangeable aspects of biological sex, when in reality,

[s]ex is the biological fact of being either male or female, whilst gender is the range of characteristics, behaviour, roles and values – masculinity and femininity – which are imposed on the sexes through conformity to social norms and through social interaction. Separating sex from gender distinguishes the innate from the imposed, and only through a definite and distinct use of these terms can any clear understanding of the issues be attempted.<sup>3</sup>

This feminist concept of gender is not uncontested, even though it remains central to feminist theory. In the work of Judith Butler, binary opposites become replaced by a proliferation of difference which queer theory and

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Hoff, “The Pernicious Effects of Poststructuralism on Women’s History” in *Radically Speaking, Feminism Reclaimed*, eds. Diane Bell and Renate Klein (London: Zed Books, 1996), 393-412.

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape/David Campbell Publishers Limited, 1962). See also, Anne Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972 and 1985) and Gayle Rubin’s, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R. Reiter, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210. Carole R. McCann & Seung-Kyung Kim, eds., *Feminist Theory: Local and Global Perspectives Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (New York/London: 2010) 14-17, provide a historical overview of developments in theories about gender in feminist thought.

<sup>3</sup> Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Aldershot/Brookfield: Ashgate, 1997), 215.

politics refuse to place in a hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Joan Wallach Scott has developed this aspect of feminist theory further by arguing that not only can gender be regarded as distinct from biological sex, but also that it describes a construct constantly being recreated and endorsed across societies, organisations and history by cultural institutions.<sup>5</sup> Scott's definition rests on the integral connection between two propositions, which are, firstly, that gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and, secondly, that gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Therefore,

[k]nowledge refers not only to ideas but to institutions and structures, everyday practices as well as specialized rituals, all of which constitute social relationships. Knowledge is a way of ordering the world; as such it is not prior to social organisation, it is inseparable from social organisation. It follows then that gender is the social organisation of sexual difference.<sup>6</sup>

For this reason, she believes that examination of social and historical contexts are required for an accurate analysis of both the subject of the analysis and perspectives of those writing the analysis. It is possible to link Scott's ideas to this work on Holiday, as in this analysis I will be referencing the social and historical contexts she operated within. In order to further clarify the nature and issues present for Holiday in her social and historical environment and their impact upon her, this thesis will make use of two orienting theoretical approaches: "intersectionality," and "standpoint theory."

The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, in order to account for the way multiple oppressions are experienced by Black women: intersectionality treats race, class, gender and nation as intersecting categories of analysis. Using case law, Crenshaw illustrates how Black women are discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter; On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 2 and 28-50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

within the legal categories of either “racism” or “sexism,” but are a combination of both. She argues that

Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women’s experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Crenshaw demonstrates how the complaints made by Black women often fall between the legal cracks in the judicial system because they are discriminated against *both* as women and as Blacks, because the American legal system has generally defined sexism as based on injustices confronted by *all* (including white) women, while defining racism to refer to those faced by *all* (including male) Blacks and other people of colour. The net result for Black women is that they are rendered legally “invisible” and without legal recourse, because sex-based and race-based discrimination are not amalgamated into a single category of discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Crenshaw argues that Black women are frequently absent from analyses of both gender oppression and racism, since the former focuses primarily on the experiences of white women and the latter on Black men.

The ideas underpinning the term “intersectionality” are not new. Sharon Smith has pointed out that in the past Black women have eloquently described the multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender – referring to this concept as “interlocking oppression,” “simultaneous oppression,” “double jeopardy,” “triple jeopardy” or any number of descriptive terms.<sup>9</sup> It is

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<sup>7</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Issue 1, Article 8: 149.

<http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol11989/iss1/8> Accessed July 10, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Crenshaw uses the case of *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* to illustrate her argument.

<sup>9</sup> Sharon Smith, “Black Feminism and Intersectionality.” *International Socialist Review*, No. 91. <http://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>. Accessed July 10, 2016. See also Francis Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” in Beverley Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 146-155; Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire*, 284-291; Deborah K. King, “Multiple

a paradigm reflected in the explorations of systems of oppression in the works of many African-American women, such as Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class* (1981), “A Black Feminist Statement” drafted by the Combahee River Collective in 1982, and the feminist classic *Sister Outsider* by Audre Loude (1984).

Crenshaw’s recognition that for Black women multiple oppressions are not each suffered separately –rather as a single, synthesised experience – has placed her in a position where she challenges previous feminist and anti-racist practice. She contends that “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.”<sup>10</sup>

Crenshaw uses extracts from Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech delivered to the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio to provide us with historical underpinnings for her approach. Truth’s words were,

[t]hat man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?<sup>11</sup>

Truth’s words contrasted the nature of the oppression experienced by white and Black women. As Barbara Welter has demonstrated in her examination of the restrictive nineteenth ideology, *The Cult of True Womanhood*, for a white middle-class woman,

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Jeopardy, *Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology* *Signs*, 14, no. 1 (Autumn, 1988): 42-72.

<sup>10</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 140.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 153. Also in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17 and bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 159-160.

[t]he attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.<sup>12</sup>

White women were therefore able to be treated as delicate and emotional, destined to subordinate themselves to white men. But in contrast, within American society Black women were denigrated and subject to racist abuse; and when subject to the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood, they were always found wanting. The relevance of this kind of thinking to Billie Holiday's own story is already beginning to become apparent.

Significantly, Crenshaw discusses the context of Truth's speech in order to clarify the different experiences of white and Black women. At the conference, white male hecklers had argued that women were too frail and delicate to get involved in political activity, and "[w]hen Sojourner Truth rose to speak, many white women urged her to be silent, fearing that she would divert attention from women's suffrage to emancipation."<sup>13</sup> Crenshaw thus signalled the degree of racism within the American suffrage movement and links to Black women's experiences of modern feminism, contending that "[w]hen feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect *women's* experiences and women's *aspirations* do not include or speak to Black women, Black women must ask, 'Ain't *we* women?'"<sup>14</sup> Therefore Truth can be perceived as not only having challenged patriarchy; she also challenged white feminists wishing to embrace Black women's history "to relinquish their vestedness in whiteness."<sup>15</sup>

Patricia Hill Collins extends and updates the social contradictions initially raised by Truth, while crediting collective historical struggles with establishing a "collective wisdom" among Black women:

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" *American Quarterly*, 18, no. 2, Part I, (Summer 1966): 152.

<sup>13</sup> Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 153.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

[i]f women are allegedly passive and fragile, then why are Black women treated as “mules” and assigned heavy cleaning chores? If good mothers are supposed to stay at home with their children, then why are US Black women on public assistance forced to find jobs and leave their children in day care? If women’s highest calling is to become mothers, they why are Black teen mothers pressured to use Norplant and Depo Provera?...But the legacy of struggle among US Black women suggests that a collectively shared Black women’s oppositional knowledge has long existed. This collective wisdom in turn has spurred US Black women to generate a more specialized knowledge, namely, Black feminist thought as critical social theory.<sup>16</sup>

Thus Collins acknowledges class as a crucial component among Black women in shaping political perceptions, writing that “[w]hile a Black woman’s standpoint and its accompanying epistemology stem from Black women’s consciousness of race and gender oppression, they are not simply the result of combining Afrocentric and female values – standpoints are rooted in real material conditions structured by social class.”<sup>17</sup>

Collins’s writings helpfully lead us into the subject of feminist standpoint theory – a derivative of socialist feminist ideology – and how it may be of service in our study of the Holiday material.

The four key assumptions of feminist standpoint theory, are, firstly, that knowledge is always situated; secondly, that it is the product of a particular set of material relations; thirdly, that it is provided from a range of different standpoints; and finally, that because the forces of knowledge are produced from different material positions, not all standpoints are equally valid.<sup>18</sup>

How standpoint theory could be used to provide explanations of experiences of women in the world was a major task for feminist writers on the subject. Borrowing heavily from Marx, yet adapting her insights to her specifically feminist ends, Nancy C.M. Hartstock claims that it is women’s unique standpoint in society that provides the justification for the truth claims of feminism, while also providing it with a method with which to

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<sup>16</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (2009), 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” in *Signs*, 14, no.4, *Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women’s Lives* (Summer, 1989): 758. Accessed July 15, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 148.

analyse reality.<sup>19</sup> Using this perspective, she argues that whereas the ruling group in society represents its own partial perspective as the truth, it is possible for oppressed groups to achieve an alternative and/or competing truth and view of society.

Opponents of standpoint theory accuse it of committing or even embracing a damaging epistemological relativism, since standpoint theorists argue that all knowledge claims are socially located, and that such locations are preferable as possible sources of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> However, by taking seriously the challenges of standpoint and intersectional thinking, it is possible to give equal status for examination to the words and music of Holiday, with the writings/material of the many commentators who have made her a subject. This is important, since her own explanations of her life and art were often dismissed, and this thinking makes it possible to give her expressed views and opinions equal footing with those of her detractors.<sup>21</sup> In addition, this approach provides us with a means in our examination of Holiday, to undo that binary of truth/falsehood so often shown in previous approaches. Moreover, it makes it possible to put a new emphasis on the social situation and construction of Holiday's creative work, one which undercuts old Romantic myths still in operation – and which has accounted for both positive and negative elements in her reception. These methods, then, will be seen to orient the second part of this thesis.

Theorists have diversified standpoint theory. Donna Haraway connects the strengths of standpoint with her discussion of situated knowledge. She attempts a deconstruction of the mind/body split by suggesting that “[f]eminist objectivity is about limited location and situated

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy C. M. Hartstock, *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983), 117-118, 231-234.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Harding “Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate” *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Clarke, a contemporary writer, is an example of one of these. He described the first biographical piece on Holiday, which was written for the *PM* magazine by the journalist Frank Harriott as being “full of the sort of factual errors that resulted from her embroidery whenever she opened her mouth.” Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 396.

knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object.”<sup>22</sup> Thus she argues against any superior vantage point from which to see everything clearly.<sup>23</sup> Haraway makes the case for “the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position.”<sup>24</sup> But she also believes that “how to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language, with the mediations of vision, as the ‘highest’ techno-scientific visualisations.”<sup>25</sup>

The use of standpoint theory is important for the present thesis, especially in its employment of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks’s ideas as both articulate a specifically Black feminist standpoint. These writers have attempted to negotiate a prominent space within feminist thought for the consideration of race related subjectivities. They have both, in differing ways been concerned to examine the marginalisation of Black women from mainstream society.

Collins further develops her use of standpoint theory by linking it with the concept of the “organic intellectual” devised by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) – “a thinker who emerges from an oppressed group and reflects its concerns and interests” – and Michel Foucault’s theory of subjugated knowledge, that is, “[t]he secret knowledge generated by oppressed groups.”<sup>26</sup> It is apparent that this approach might open up further ways of considering Holiday’s agency as an artist and perhaps even as a political activist; I will consider the implications of this thinking most fully in this thesis’s final chapter.

Despite her association with this theoretical approach, Collins makes it clear that standpoint theory, although important, cannot alone explain

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<sup>22</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books Limited, 1991), 190.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 279 and 281.

Black women's experiences within the U.S.<sup>27</sup> Collins writes that whilst she is committed to intersectionality as an important conceptual framework that "treating race, class, and gender as if their intersection produces equivalent results for all oppressed groups obscures differences in how race, class, and gender are hierarchically organised, as well as the differential effects of intersecting systems of power on diverse groups of people."<sup>28</sup> She contends that the economic difficulties associated with the experiences underpinning many Black women's life experiences need to be taken on board, as

[h]istorically, racial segregation in housing, education, and employment fostered group commonalities that encouraged the formation of a group-based, collective standpoint. This collective wisdom on how to survive as U.S. Black women constituted a distinctive Black women's standpoint on gender specific patterns of racial segregation and its accompanying economic penalties.<sup>29</sup>

The work of the writer bell hooks is useful here, as she has equated the marginal as a site of Black women's resistance rather than – as has so often been the case in narratives of Holiday's life – humiliation and powerlessness. hooks discusses her own marginality as an African-American woman in locations such as a small town in Kentucky, and as a person originating from a poor working class community learning to survive in a university environment and other "privileged cultural settings." She writes: "I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently. I am talking about what I see."<sup>30</sup> For hooks, "[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole, but outside the main body."<sup>31</sup> However, she argues that the result of this marginalisation is the creation of "an oppositional world-view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, according to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 201 and 268.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>29</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (2009), 28.

<sup>30</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 152.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

hooks, “[u]nderstanding marginality as a position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people. If we only view the margin as a sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being.”<sup>33</sup> Also of importance for hooks is the fact that the oppressor functions in order to both obliterate and silence the power of the oppressed when they use the margins as a site of resistance.<sup>34</sup> This is of relevance to my own study of Holiday, as I believe it aids our understanding as to why her testimony about her life in *LSTB* and previous interviews, was until recently not taken seriously; this attitude will be seen to inform the central investigations of subsequent chapters.

### **Feminist Musicology**

The ways in which sex and gender are communicated, symbolised or expressed in musical forms – and in the musical community itself – has been an important consideration for feminist musicologists in the decades since feminist scholarship has made inroads into the discipline. In a 1993 overview of the nature of this progress, Joke Dame argued that there existed three phrases in the development of feminist musicology, which essentially mirror three phrases in the changes in priorities within the works of feminist writers of the twentieth century. In the first phrase (commonly defined within women’s studies as the period of equality feminism), musicologists focused primarily on the (re)-discovery of forgotten/unknown women composers; the “recovery” of women’s culture and women’s voices as historical actors were important tactics for feminists of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>35</sup>

Feminist musicologists recognised that the absence of women in the reference books of music history did not arise because of the absence of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>35</sup> See Joke Dame, “Theme and Variations: Feminist Musicology” in *Women’s Studies and Culture*, eds. Rosemarie Buikema & Anneke Smelik (London: Zed Books, 1993), 107.

women from the history of music itself, but from sheer neglect. So, Dame informs us, “[a]s a compensation and a form of justice, from the beginning of the 1980s, a stream of anthologies, monographs and bibliographic editions were published, sometimes including recordings of compositions by women, usually performed by women.”<sup>36</sup>

During the second phrase, feminist writers began to focus on the study of what is specific to music by women, and how it may be possible to distinguish it from that of men. Finally, during the third phrase, writers influenced by post-structuralism argued that it was now possible to embrace alternative forms of positively valued otherness, instead of the traditionally negative notion of difference.<sup>37</sup>

The priorities of the three phrases were reflected in the nature of the material produced. For example, the works *Music and Women: The Story of Women in Their Relation to Music* (1995) by Sophie Drinker, *The International Encyclopaedia of Women Composers* (1987) by Aaron I. Cohen, and *Women in Music: An Encyclopaedic Bibliography* (1987) by Don L. Hixon and Don A. Hennessee, can clearly be seen to fit into the aims of the first phase: the primary motive of these works is to dispel the invisibility of women in music.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, their efforts are essentially compensatory in nature because they are concerned to identify those aspects of music history which have been overlooked and ignored by male centred scholarship.<sup>39</sup>

Writers such as Heide Göttner-Abendroth (1984, 1991), Ellen Koskoff (1987), Karen E. Peterson (1987), Carol E. Robertson (1987), and Mavis Bayton (1990), attempted to focus on that which can be described as being specific to the female aesthetic experience, and so can be said to fit into phase

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>38</sup> Sophie Drinker, *Music and Women: the Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995); Aaron I. Cohen, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers, Vols. 1& 2*. 2nd Edition (New York/London: Books & Music (USA) Inc., 1987) and Don L. Hixon and Don A. Hennessee, *Women in Music: An Encyclopaedic Bibliography*. 2nd Edition, (New Jersey/London, The Scarecrow Press/Metuchen, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> See also Margaret D. Ericson, *Women and Music: A Selective Annotated Bibliography on Women and Gender Issues in Music, 1987-1992* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996).

two of the model articulated by Dame above. The works of Dame herself (1990), Peter Martin (1995), John Shepherd (1991) and Nicholas Cook (1998) – which contrast musicological orthodoxy with new theoretical paradigms that encourage a proliferation of voices, instead of a hierarchical structuring of them – appear to fit more logically into phase three.<sup>40</sup> An example of this approach is provided by Gary Tomlinson (1991), who in a discussion of the use of Signifying and other theories in musicology, notes that “[it] is especially significant that the African-American voices calling loudest for...what Henderson describes as a “dialogic engagement with the various and multiple discourse of the other(s)” – seem to be women’s voices, for they have been doubly marginalized, by ethnic origin and by gender.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus it can be argued that the Black feminist project has been especially intent upon privileging difference, diversity and otherness. Also, in recognition of the implications of epistemological transformation for musicology as a discipline, John Shepherd argues that “questions of music and gender...go deeper than the difference in power that women and men typically experience in relations to the world of music. To raise concerns of music and gender is to raise concerns having to do with the socially grounded affect of music.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For instance Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *The Dancing Goddess: Principles of a Matriarchal Aesthetic*, trans. Maureen T. Krause (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 1991); Ellen Koskoff, “An Introduction to Women, Music and Culture” in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Ellen Koskoff, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1987), 1-23; Karen E. Peterson, “An Investigation into Women-Identified Music in the United States” in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 203-212; Carol E. Robertson, “Power and Gender in the Musical Experience of Women” in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 225-244; Mavis Bayton, “How Women Become Musicians” in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. (London: Routledge, 1990), 238-257; Peter Martin, *Sounds and Society: Themes in the Sociology of Music*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); John Shepherd, *Music as Social Text*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Gary Tomlinson, “Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies,” *Black Music Research Journal*, 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 238. Tomlinson is citing from Mae G. Henderson, “Response to Houston A. Baker, Jr.” in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990’s*, eds. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Patricia Redmond, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989: 155-163 at 157.

<sup>42</sup> John Shepherd, “Difference and Power in Music” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 65.

Susan McClary could be described as fitting into both phrase two and three of Dame's paradigm, as her most celebrated work, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (1991), focuses on the gender underpinnings of the conventions of musical composition, as well as "the habits of cultural thought that guarantee the effectiveness of the music – that allow it to 'make sense' while they remain largely invisible and apparently immutable."<sup>43</sup> McClary offers us a feminist critique of certain musical-theoretical codes and conventions within Western society. The framework devised by McClary might be described as "experimental," but many musicologists have taken advantage of the interpretive freedoms proffered by *Feminine Endings* in order to address both canonical and non-canonical areas of research.<sup>44</sup>

McClary's influence has extended to the area of jazz studies. Nicole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (2008) point out that scholarship in jazz and gender produced after the early 1990s drew from and also contributed to feminist musicology a set of practices that emerged with the publication of McClary's book.<sup>45</sup> They consider the most exciting application of McClary's approach to jazz studies to be Robin D.G. Kelley's analysis of how dissonance was differently gendered in 1950s jazz in comparison to the operatic and Western classical models analysed by McClary. Kelley argues that "resistance to order" not "establishment" of consonant order, was considered masculine by those moved by Black male jazz musicians in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Minnesota; University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 16.

<sup>44</sup> See Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism" in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 498. Ellie M. Hisama researches on areas which link the fields of feminist theory and social critique with music theory. See for example, her gender analysis of the music of Ruth Crawford, Marian Bauer and Miriam Gideon, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) as well as explorations of the music of Joan Armatrading in "Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading" in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, Music*, eds. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich/Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 115-131.

<sup>45</sup> Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz-Avant-Garde" *Black Music Research Journal*, 19, no.2, (fall), 139.

## A Women's Jazz History

Women-centred approaches to the study of history received important impetus in America and Europe when historians, as activists in the second-wave of the women's liberation movement, recognised that there was little scholarship about women available. As June Purvis points out, they showed that history was still generally written by men, and concerned itself mainly with topics about men in the public sphere (for example, war, politics and diplomacy), while women in the past had rarely assumed leadership roles in national, political or economic life. When women were included in historical narratives, they usually occupied limited and stereotypical roles such as wives, mothers, daughters and mistresses.<sup>47</sup> It was also recognised that because women's lives often centred around different realities to those of men – for example, family, interpersonal relations and other aspects of the private sphere – these different realities also needed to be studied and even prioritised, if greater understanding of the structuring of gender in history and society was to be achieved.<sup>48</sup> As will become clear, a new emphasis on the private and social spheres in which Holiday and her colleagues carried out their creative work forms one of this thesis's primary methodological departures.

Inherent in the study of women's history is the belief that more traditional studies have minimised or ignored the contributions of women and the effect of historical events on the lives of women as a whole. For these reasons it was recognised that it was imperative to find ways of making women visible as subjects of study. As Joan Wallach Scott points out, the

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<sup>47</sup> June Purvis, "Women's History Today," in *History Today*, 54, no.11 (November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004): 1. <http://www.historytoday.com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/print/9021>. Accessed August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit, "Introduction" in *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*, eds. Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit, 2 (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992). Elizabeth Gross argues that it is not possible to include women in those theories where they had previously been excluded because many patriarchal discourses were incapable of being broadened or extended to include women without major upheavals and transformations. Elizabeth Gross, "What is Feminist History," in *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*, 356.

mission was to “reconstruct women as historical subjects.”<sup>49</sup> Scott argues that “[b]y recovering stories of women's activism, feminists provided not just new information about women's behaviour, but new knowledge – another way of understanding, of seeing, women, and another way of seeing and understanding what counted as history.”<sup>50</sup>

Feminist historians often challenge or attempt to expand historical orthodoxy, and their efforts can be said to function as a form of historical revisionism. The development of the discipline was an important factor in increasing understanding of the value-laden nature of the study of history as a whole.<sup>51</sup> This explains why women-centred approaches to history – as well as to society and culture – focus not only on recovering the history of women and lost or marginalised traditions of female cultural production, but also on the establishment of alternative traditions of women's cultural production; the intention is to (re)write women's history, to research “herstory” rather than only “history”. Feminist writers have also sought to develop theoretical frameworks to aid the study of women which include, rather than exclude, factors such as cultural identity, race and social class, with an emphasis on power relationships.<sup>52</sup>

Of particular interest is the fact that the study of women's history found its strongest expression in cultural feminism, which, as Chris Weedon has written, “developed the tendency to view women's creativity as

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<sup>49</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, “Introduction,” in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3. Scott also informs us that the titles of major books on feminist history of that period *Becoming Visible*, (1977), edited by Hartman & Banner and *Hidden from History*, (1973) by Sheila Rowbotham, reveal the preoccupation with making women evident to readers of history. Catherine Hall also notes that “Feminist history as first conceptualised in the early 1970's was about the recovery of women's history. We needed to fill out the enormous gaps in our historical knowledge.” Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Purvis, “Women's History Today,” 1.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Denise Riley, “Does Sex Have A History?” in *Feminism and History*, 17 and 32 and Joan Wallach Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism,” *Feminist Studies*, 14, no.1 (Spring 1988): 33. See also Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander eds. “Defining Women's History” in *Major Problems in American Women's History: Documents and Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1996), 1.

something different from male culture to the point where there could be no overlap between the two cultures.”<sup>53</sup> Writers began to explore, firstly, whether there were cultural differences between genders (i.e. evidence of a “female aesthetic”), secondly, whether there was social and historical evidence of different modes of representation, and, finally, whether cultural works could be said to offer resistance to patriarchy.<sup>54</sup>

The growth in the study of women’s history had implications for the orthodox historical discourse in jazz history, and for ideas about women’s place within it. Perhaps the most radical voice arguing for the transformation of jazz studies as a discipline has been the writer Sherrie Tucker, who has consistently argued for the complete transfiguration of jazz studies to enable gender as a category to be centrally located, rather than regulated to the margins. She is particularly interested in, “how jazz sounds, spaces, images, scholarship and historiography are gendered whether women are in them or not and what we can learn about jazz and gender when we ask “Where are the women?” and theorize those representations and experiences.”<sup>55</sup>

If Tucker’s ideas are taken on board, they will of necessity result in nothing less than the root and branch transformation of jazz studies as a discipline: the inclusion of gender will entail not only the critical questioning of traditional explanations of the origins and genesis of the field but also illuminate the nature of the hierarchical power existing within it. As she explains,

I am also interested in gender as an analytic category for understanding how power is organized, maintained and challenged, and how change occurs. Historical and professional invisibility is one way that hierarchical power is attained...successful invisibility is attained not just once, but over and over and over again. What makes it possible to ignore women jazz musicians as historical subjects when so many women musicians have participated and excelled in jazz throughout the music’s history?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Weedon, *Feminism, Theory*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Göttner-Abendroth’s work, *The Dancing Goddess* provides a good example of this approach.

<sup>55</sup> Sherrie Tucker, “Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies” *Current Musicology*, nos. 71-73, (Spring 2001): 398.

<sup>56</sup> Tucker, 2001, “Big Ears”, 386-387.

Tucker also argues that issues concerning ideas to do with race and ethnicity are now crucial components of jazz studies, but considers that with respect to gender, “Jazz Studies has been a ‘mouldy fig,’ stubbornly out of the theoretical loop in its sluggishness to incorporate current theories about gender, particularly those that may be considered feminist.”<sup>57</sup> Tucker writes that, with few exceptions, “the field has proceeded largely as though feminist theories about gender and music do not apply to jazz and as though the painstakingly compiled ‘women-in-jazz’ histories that began to appear in the 1980s, never existed.”<sup>58</sup>

Tucker likens the experience of working as a feminist within the discipline to that of a participant in a cutting competition:

[e]ven in academic jazz studies, to raise the specter of feminist theory, or even of gender as a pertinent consideration, is often to invite an eerie parallel of what it must feel like for a woman horn player, of any number of historical time periods, to enter a cutting contest where the rules of what counts as virtuosity, prestige, authenticity and value have been laid down by people who, quite possibly, do not want you there.<sup>59</sup>

When Tucker is writing about gender she is using the term in the manner developed by Scott, who (as already mentioned above) articulates gender as one of the primary fields “within which or by means of which power is articulated.”<sup>60</sup> This approach has profound ramifications if consistently applied to the discipline of jazz studies. Tucker explains that

rather than studying women or gender in the field of jazz, one might study jazz on the field of gender... as one kind of practice that mediates struggles over historically contingent ideas about sex-assigned qualities and relationships. A study of jazz on a field of gender (as a field of power) may yield insights into how style hierarchies, star systems, club policies, hipness barometers, etc., were established by recording companies, music publishers, jazz journalists and historians.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 385-386.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>60</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Tucker “Big Ears,” 387.

Tucker found evidence of deeply embedded sexism within the field of jazz when she started going through *Down Beat* magazines of the late 1930s and 1940s in search of information on “all-girl” bands. Her research eventually resulted in the publication of *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940’s*, a book which documents a generation of female musicians overlooked by standard jazz histories.<sup>62</sup> It became apparent to her that whilst the careers of many female musicians went unnoticed or understated, nevertheless “there was no shortage of representations of women’s bodies in *Down Beat*.”<sup>63</sup> She was especially struck by the negative portrayals of the women who did find a place within the magazine’s pages, “by the jokes, poems, and cartoons in which women were portrayed as sexy, ditzy, talentless singers, dumb dates who didn’t appreciate jazz, provincial kill-joys (often wives) who spoil hipster fun and squealing, misguided Sinatra fans.”<sup>64</sup>

With this in mind, it is possible to place in a contextual framework the obsession many contemporary male writers had with Holiday’s appearance (for example). In the first piece of music journalism to introduce Holiday to the world beyond Harlem, John Hammond wrote: “This month there has been a real find in the person of a singer named Billie Halliday. Although only eighteen she weighs over two hundred pounds, is incredibly beautiful, and sings as well as anybody I ever heard.”<sup>65</sup> Even an obvious fan such as Dave Dexter wrote in an in-depth interview with Holiday that “Billie slapped her pudgy thigh, lighted another cigarette, and continued.”<sup>66</sup>

Two models – the “exceptional” and the “always emerging” – have been commonly utilised by writers, musicians and performers to explain the presence or explain away the absence of women in the field of jazz. Both reflect the nurture/nature dichotomy in negative terms. Tucker describes the “always emerging” model as “a handy disposable container for jazz

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<sup>62</sup> Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940’s*, (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Tucker, “Big Ears,” 398.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>65</sup> Hammond, “More Places with Spike,” 271.

<sup>66</sup> Dexter, “I’ll Never Sing” 4.

women”.<sup>67</sup> With this model, the idea is that there are not a lot of talented women musicians because women have traditionally not been exposed or had access to the environments, instruction and mentors necessary to create great musicians. In other words, women have not been sufficiently nurtured to take on the role of jazz musician. With the scenario of the “exceptional” model, women are invisible because they are simply not good enough, where playing “good enough” meant playing like a man; being “good,” then, was not in their nature. But, the argument goes, women who play like men are exceptional women, and exceptional women can enter the discourse without changing it. Thus, when describing the effective tokenising of Mary Lou Williams, Tucker contends that “[i]nclusion of one woman (or jazz musician trapped in a woman’s body) justifies omission of others, and inclusion on the basis of male acceptance reinforces a vision of jazz as men’s natural domain.”<sup>68</sup>

It appears as if the “always emerging model” underpinned the reasons Wynton Marsalis, the Artistic Director of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, did not hire female orchestra members. When asked by Lara Pellegrinelli in an interview why the LCJO had not, up to that point, ever had a female member (or even given one an audition for that matter) Marsalis offered up the emerging jazzwomen trope. He stated that he hired orchestra members on the basis of merit, the implication being of course that women did not make the grade.<sup>69</sup> But Pellegrinelli cites Tucker who effectively rebuts Marsalis’s contention, pointing out that “[t]he argument that women will eventually be good enough is very old...There have been women good enough to be included for at least 60 years” and she gives Lil Hardin – Louis Armstrong’s second wife – as an early example.<sup>70</sup> Pellegrinelli comes to the conclusion that the greatest obstacle for women instrumentalists in the LCJO

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<sup>67</sup> Tucker, “Big Ears,” 385.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>69</sup> Lara Pellegrinelli, “Dig Boy Dig: Jazz at Lincoln Centre Breaks New Ground, But Where Are the Women?” November 8-14: 1. [www.villagevoice.com/news/dig-boy-dig6417174](http://www.villagevoice.com/news/dig-boy-dig6417174) Accessed March 23, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

is the orchestra's recruitment practices, as they never held any auditions and hiring takes place through by word of mouth. To Pellegrinelli Marsalis said "I ask the guys in the section who they like."<sup>71</sup> But she concluded that he has autonomous decision-making power, determining who gets a job and whether or not they keep it. This tendency has important ramifications for the legitimation and inclusion of female musicians in jazz history.

Second-wave feminism impacted upon jazz studies as a discipline in particular ways. As we have already observed, in women's history, transformations occurred in assumptions around who counted as viable historical subjects. The theories and methodologies associated with this kind of scholarship – hidden histories, women's history and histories of gender, sexuality, race, class, experience and other social categories – have inevitably become more complex since the early women- and-jazz literature was produced. Nevertheless, Rustin and Tucker point out that within jazz studies, much early scholarship still remains overlooked by current scholars, even though a great amount of gender and race analysis was introduced to the field through these works.

Origin questions such as "where and how did jazz begin, and how did particular styles come to be developed?" have always had an important role to play in jazz studies as a genre.<sup>72</sup> This is why Rustin and Tucker argue that an understanding of the gendered interpretations of traditional jazz history discourses means that listening for gender in jazz studies effectively "shifts the contours of jazz history: the boundaries and definitions of what counts as jazz sounds and practices and our awareness of whose bodies are seen and not seen as jazz bodies."<sup>73</sup> An important illustration of this is Susan Cavin's 1975 essay "Missing Women: On the Voodoo Trail of Jazz," which examines the precursors of jazz in Congo Square in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans. Cavin inspected the primary documents used by jazz historians who had studied the practice of drumming in Congo Square in New Orleans, and came to the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>72</sup> Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 19.

conclusion that the scholarly “benign neglect” of the jazz historians ensured that they failed to notice “the sex variable” in drummers at a location considered to be the birth place of jazz. In her essay, Cavin brings to the foreground the role played by the voodoo queens in laying the foundations of jazz in America, as they were responsible for arranging the drumming and dancing in Congo Square and also performed drumming and dancing there.<sup>74</sup>

When women do enter the historical narrative about the birth of jazz, they are usually relegated to the extravagant brothels, which Tucker describes as being “as much a part of the popular imagination of New Orleans as gumbo and Mardi Gras.”<sup>75</sup> For example, the majority of the women who feature in the first chapter of Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff’s work, *Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya* which consists of fond reminiscences by male jazz musicians of life in Storyville and New Orleans in the early part of the twentieth century, are associated with brothels; where they are portrayed usually vicariously, as sexual objects. Louis Armstrong, for example waxes, lyrical about individuals he describes as “some of the biggest prostitutes in the world...Standing in their doorways nightly in their fine and beautiful negligees – faintly calling to the boys as they passed their cribs.”<sup>76</sup> Even though Shapiro and Hentoff’s work was compiled less than forty years after the U.S. Navy dismantled Storyville in 1917, as editors they chose a narrative approach which presented this part of New Orleans as a far-away idyll, a kind of sexualised Garden of Eden in jazz history. The choice of material and perspective on the gender realities of life in Storyville in their first chapter is reflected in the subtitle to their work, *The Story of Jazz As Told By the Men Who Made It*.

When we begin to examine more closely the nature of historical framework presented by Shapiro and Hentoff, we find that the main reason female musicians appear to be absent is because singing has been virtually

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<sup>74</sup>Susan Cavin, “Missing Women on the Voodoo Trail to Jazz” in *Journal of Jazz Studies*. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1975): 14 and 21-22.

<sup>75</sup> Sherrie Tucker, “Rocking the Cradle of Jazz.” *Ms. Magazine*. Winter 2004. <http://www.msmagazine.com/winter2004/jazz.asp> Accessed April 30, 2016: 1-6.

<sup>76</sup> Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, eds. *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told By The Men Who Made It*. (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1966).

ignored and/or relegated to a second class status within jazz culture by scholars. It could also be argued that, when linked to dancing and movement, it is even further debased in the dominant historical discourse, as singing and dancing were among the major types of entertainment offered in brothels. The reality of this situation for our understanding of the role played by women in the creation of the genre is discussed by Pellegrinelli in her feminist “recovery” history essay, “Separated at ‘Birth’: Singing and the History of Jazz.”<sup>77</sup> Reading this work, it is possible to perceive how the “benign neglect” of jazz historians has served to obscure the important role played by many women in the creation of the genre, because of the low status attributed to the voice in the dominant discourse. Pellegrinelli takes her cue from Edward Said, who argued that, in the context of an acknowledged departure from pre-existing traditions of discourse, the beginning carries weight, as it functions as “the first step in the intentional production of meaning.”<sup>78</sup> Like Cavin, she is concerned how certain “truths” told about jazz history reflect inconsistencies in that history; like Cavin, in order to research this she revisits the “scene of the crime” – the early jazz history of New Orleans, and its anecdotes and autobiographies – in order to highlight the centrality of singing in jazz culture. She argues that narratives of origin are embedded within gendered narratives resulting in the marginalisation and devaluation of certain aspects of jazz culture. Despite the fact that the origins of jazz are rooted in singing – blues, work songs and spirituals – singing has always been viewed in traditional jazz histories as subordinate to the “higher” art of instrumental music, a predominantly male domain. According to Pellegrinelli,

[a]side from the grudging nods afforded a few Swing Era “canaries,” ones so prominent that they would be difficult to ignore, singing only factors into the majority of histories as a musical practice common to many forms that comprise jazz’s nineteenth-century precursors.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lara Pellegrinelli, “Separated at ‘Birth’: Singing and the History of Jazz’ in Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*, 31-47.

<sup>78</sup> Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (New York: Columbia University Press, New York, 1985, 5. Cited in Pellegrinelli, 2008, 32.

<sup>79</sup> Pellegrinelli, “Separated at Birth,” 32.

Thus, for Pellegrinelli, the absence of singing from orthodox discourses on the origins of jazz is a signal that these discourses are gendered. In her explorations of traditional treatments of jazz history – works such as Marshall Stearns’s *The Story of Jazz*, (1956) – she discovered that

[i]n jazz historiography, they [i.e. jazz writers and historians] effectively fix the marginalized status of women early in a tradition of representation as well as in the musical chronologies themselves. Despite its symbolic and practical importance in jazz’s parentage, singing is dropped from historical narratives soon after the music’s birth. Having waited for her to deliver her offspring, historians cut the umbilical cord, separating mother from child and enabling the yowling infant to toddle off on his own down the streets of New Orleans.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, because Storyville was “a place where men went to drink, gamble, drug and whore – to the accompaniment of music,” women were still able to work as musicians in this environment.<sup>81</sup> Musical entertainment not only featured in the elite brothels, but also permeated all aspects of life in New Orleans and Storyville. If Pellegrinelli’s analysis is taken on board, and singers are treated as fully fledged musicians in the historical record, it is possible to re-examine the anecdotal musings and retrospective material about life in Storyville and read them for evidence they provide that many of the women who worked in the brothels were musicians and dancers. For example, Jelly Roll Morton (1890-1941) describes how “[t]he chippies in their little-girl dresses were standing in the crib doors singing the blues.”<sup>82</sup> Spencer Williams remembers that his friend Tony Jackson used to play piano at a house run by a Miss Antonia Gonzales, who sang and played the cornet.<sup>83</sup> Antonia Gonzales advertised herself as “the only cornet-playing madam in Storyville,” and performed duets with renowned pianists.<sup>84</sup> Ann Cook, like many poor women, worked temporarily

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazz Women* (London/Melbourne/New York, Quartet Books Limited, 1984), 14.

<sup>82</sup> Shapiro and Hentoff, *Story of Jazz*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>84</sup> Tucker, “Rocking the Cradle.”

as a prostitute but had a successful career at the Willie Piazza carving out a reputation as the most popular barrelhouse blues singer. She is described as possessing “a unique voice, a memory for endless verses and a powerful sound – by turns playful or mournful, raspy or full.”<sup>85</sup> An advertisement for the Piazza states that “[i]f there is anything new in the singing and dancing line that you would like to see while in Storyville, Piazza’s is the place to visit.”<sup>86</sup> In his description of some of the most expensive brothels, the pianist Clarence Williams (1893-1965) mentions that “[t]hose houses hired nothing but the best, but only piano players, and maybe a girl to sing. And there was no loud playin’ either. It was sweet, just like a hotel.”<sup>87</sup>

Mamie Desdoumes, one of the most well-known blues musicians in New Orleans, was an early influence on Jelly Roll Morton and played the brothel circuit along with pianists Rosalind Johnson, Camilla Todd and Wilhelmina Bart.<sup>88</sup> The cornetist Bunk Johnson knew Mamie Desdoumes well, and reminiscences about working with her, saying that she,

played many a concert with her singing those same blues...She was a hustlin’ woman. A Blues singing poor gal. Used to play pretty passable piano around them dance halls on Perdido Street. When Hattie Rogers or Lulu White would put it out that Mamie was going to be singing in their place, the white men would turn out in bunches and them whores would clean up.<sup>89</sup>

Approaching jazz history from a different perspective, using gender as a mode of analysis, makes it possible to recognise as Tucker argues that “[w]omen *did* contribute to New Orleans jazz, in many and significant ways. They played bawdy piano in...Storyville. They were instrumentalists, vocalist, dancers and bandleaders.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, while they were all these things,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.; Frederic Ramsey Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, eds., *Jazzmen*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1939, 1977), 32.

<sup>86</sup> Shapiro and Hentoff, *Story of Jazz*, 10.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>88</sup> Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: University of California Press Ltd., 1973), 20-21.

<sup>89</sup> Shapiro and Hentoff, *Story of Jazz*, 7-8.

<sup>90</sup> Tucker, “Rocking the Cradle,” 1.

they were often (on the brothel circuit) doing it out of the public eye. Again, this is an implication I will pursue in subsequent chapters.

During the early 1980s, several important book-length studies were published which aimed to recover women's culture and voices as historical actors with agency in jazz. These historical surveys were *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras* (Handy, 1981), *American Women in Jazz, 1900 to the Present* (Placksin, 1982) and *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (Dahl, 1989).<sup>91</sup> These works have subsequently become recognised as classics and indispensable references for women-in-jazz historians and jazz historians interested in including women in their studies.

In their "recovery" of women's histories in jazz, Cavin, Handy, Placksin and Dahl made use of the same archives that had been investigated by authors of histories which assumed women were outside the jazz community. But they also, crucially, used sites commonly overlooked by more traditional historians, such as family bands and school bands.<sup>92</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, documenting "lost history" can often be perceived as being a dated form of feminist inquiry, as it may be regarded as being less "theoretical." But Rustin and Tucker rightly stress that without this approach and an implicit gender analysis, Handy, Plackin and Dahl,

would not have been able to open up the jazz history frameworks that had not previously "counted" nor know where to look for the "missing" women. In addition, asking "where are the women" has also been an important route towards finding the gendered spheres of fields thought to be gender-neutral meritocracies; these spheres, incidentally often include men as well as women.<sup>93</sup>

Masculinity studies is a developing area of study that has also opened up theoretical possibilities for "listening to gender" in jazz.<sup>94</sup> Rustin and

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<sup>91</sup> D. Antoinette Handy, *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras: The Ladies Band From Piney Woods Country Life School* (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow, 1981); Sally Placksin, *Jazzwomen: 1900 to the Present: Their Words, Lives and Music*, (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*, (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1984).

<sup>92</sup> As did for example Handy in *Black Women in American Bands and International Sweethearts of Rhythm*.

<sup>93</sup> Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Tucker argue that, right from its genesis, writers, critics and promoters “danced around notions of racialized masculinity.”<sup>95</sup> As jazz developed, some writers – Nat Hentoff, Amiri Baraka – began to introduce more complex readings of the relationship between nation, race and masculinity within American culture, because their work reflected what was happening among musicians themselves: the beginning of a challenge towards assumptions about race, masculinity and cultural politics figures in musicians’ compositions, performances, writings in the press and autobiographies.<sup>96</sup> From the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, writers such as Eric Porter, Hazel Carby, Nichole T. Rustin and Ingrid Monson have begun to lay the foundations upon which knowledge of racialized masculinity can be built. We have already mentioned Ingrid Monson’s essay, “The Problem of White Hipness” which is one of the most influential and earliest of the articles originating from the new jazz studies. Within it, she analysed white fascination with Black masculinity as part of the representations of jazz, providing a conceptual and gendered lens for thinking about race and music, illustrating how even when the “hipster” is sincere in loving jazz, he or she may be reproducing elements of aspects of dominant constructions of race that shore up white supremacist ideology.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Gabbard made an analysis of the “Jazz Nerd” in cinema, a white man who cannot bear any gaps in his collection, and who develops an outside-the mainstream masculine identity through amassing and organising and memorising jazz records – especially those of Black men, whom the “Jazz Nerd” admires as hip.<sup>98</sup> It is within this recent tradition of jazz studies that I position my own work on Billie Holiday.

Despite the vast amount of material that has been written about Holiday, Kate Daubney’s work is one of the few which takes a musicological

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>97</sup> Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, no.3 (Fall 1995): 396-422.

<sup>98</sup> Krin Gabbard, *Black Magic, White Hollywood, and African American Culture*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 199-232.

approach (although, as I have already noted, it is limited in its historical scope to Holiday's recordings on the Columbia label). Four other writers already discussed – Angela Y. Davis (1999), Farah Jasmine Griffin (2001) Maya C. Gibson (2008) and Kim La Vern Purnell (2000) – have also used what may be described as feminist, gendered, or women-centred perspectives in their examinations of Holiday's life and work. When Davis discusses Holiday's work she constructs her as a political and social figure whose career as an artist and oppression by the State raises questions about intraracial gender relations as well as race relations in the United States.<sup>99</sup> But even though Davis has successfully used the parameters of gender, race and class as prisms through which to explore the female blues tradition, and a previously unacknowledged proto-feminist consciousness within working class communities as a whole, she still offers only two chapters on Holiday, and therefore cannot be said to provide a comprehensive overview of her musical work. In addition, she focuses on Holiday's lyrics, rather than her creative processes or performed musical output.

Farah Jasmine Griffin has chosen to utilise a woman-centred approach in her work. Although she disagrees with some of the assertions that Davis makes about the feminist implications of Holiday's performances, Griffin informs us that they do “share the project of a black feminist reclamation of Billie Holiday.”<sup>100</sup> Griffin has an interesting chapter on how various pillars of respectability within American society attempted to shoehorn Holiday as an individual, and illustrates this process with a discussion of an article written for the July 1947 edition of *Ebony* magazine, the sole purpose of which was to provide Holiday with the mantle of respectability usually reserved for the middle-class Black woman. However, it is the myths that have grown up around Holiday, rather than her actual musical creations, that provide the focus of Griffin's book.

Maya C. Gibson, who combines the fields of musicology and Black cultural studies in her methodology, has an insightful chapter on Holiday's interpretation of the song “My Man,” that she links to the so-called Cult of

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<sup>99</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 180.

<sup>100</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 130.

True Womanhood, which, as previously mentioned, was the nineteenth century ideology which stipulated the forms of behaviour and ideal attributes by which white middle-class women were judged by within society.

Gibson is keen to counteract what she describes as misreadings of “My Man” by writers on Holiday, and points out that the song was inspired by its creator Jacques Charles’s feelings for another man.<sup>101</sup> She discusses the implications of this for Holiday’s own performances of the song, as well as its performances by other female singers. Gibson arguably does not use feminist or gender theory as the central framework for her dissertation. Nevertheless, in her conclusion she does contend that it would be useful for scholars in the future to examine Holiday’s work using gender analysis, and suggests that Holiday’s performance style and material could be examined in terms of the construction of erotic power as conceived by Audre Lorde. This programme, Gibson argues, would reconceptualise the work of Holiday and push her scholars towards new critical frameworks.<sup>102</sup>

Kim La Vern Purnell uses a multidisciplinary approach in order to facilitate an exploration of the way Holiday’s autobiography, personal narratives and song lyrics can be understood to provide a reconception of both dominant and pejorative perceptions of her and, by extension, of other African-American women. Purnell argues that the main themes in the narratives and lyrics produced by Holiday deconstruct dominant narratives around Black American womanhood, while reconstructing a more acceptable social identity.<sup>103</sup> This work is interesting and thought provoking, but gender analysis nevertheless forms only a part of the author’s methodological approach.

From this chapter’s discussion, it should be apparent that despite the women-centred work already undertaken by writers on Holiday – much of which is insightful, innovative and even personally inspiring – there has yet

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<sup>101</sup> See Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 168.

<sup>102</sup> Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 53-59.

<sup>103</sup> Kim La Vern Purnell, “I Sing Therefore I Am: the (De)Construction of Identity Through the Autobiography, Personal Narratives and Music Lyrics of Billie Holiday” (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2000), 64.

to be produced a work which provides a comprehensive overview of her creative output using gender as a mode of analysis. This is the task that will be begun in this dissertation, in order to build upon and develop the successful work already undertaken by others.

So I will now begin again, constructing a critical biography of Holiday that places the kind of emphasis on gender and social situation I have now outlined theoretically (and which I have argued is present in the extant literature only to a limited extent). The first aim here is to provide a reframing of a familiar story according to new critical, feminist priorities. I will then move on to a series of closer studies of particular aspects of Holiday's musical work, the scope and method of which is similarly defined by the theoretical attitude just sketched out. Taken as a whole, this study, in both its overarching design and instances of closer reading, will attempt to understand and reposition Holiday according to specifically gendered experience and thinking, and in so doing to give a new description of her agency as a Black American woman and a musician.

To this end, in the next chapter I will examine the impact of gender relations within the jazz community on the role and function of singers and other female musicians, and the strategies they devised to overcome the difficulties they encountered in their efforts to build careers within that environment. Subsequently, chapter four brings Holiday's songwriting to the fore. In the context of songs she wrote herself and with others, I consider the reasons why this aspect of her work has generally been unappreciated. Finally, in chapter five I will be providing a detailed case study of authorship issues raised by the fact that the song "Strange Fruit" has often been attributed to Holiday. This song will also be examined for the cultural dissonance it reveals between Tin Pan Alley and blues/jazz modes of creating new musical material, and for its assemblage in performance; also discussed here will be the nature of the relationship between Holiday and her audiences, along with the dissertation's key theme: the intertwining of Holiday's gendered and raced experience with her creative jazz endeavour.

**Part 2: Billie Holiday and the Gendered Politics of Jazz Creativity**

## Chapter 3

### One of the Boys? Hyper-Masculinity within Holiday's Jazz Community

*“One thing about Billie was that she had a very strong gift, in that she could sing five seconds and her name was written all over the music.”* Teddy Wilson.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

By way of the multidisciplinary perspectives previously developed, this chapter will reframe what is known about Holiday to reveal types of agency, and structures of socio-musical relations, that have hitherto not been recognised or emphasised in accounts of the artist's life and work.

A lot of the Holiday material is given over to studies of her distinctive voice.<sup>2</sup> Schuller and Whalen in particular have provided the most in-depth and comprehensive analysis of Holiday's singing style.<sup>3</sup> However, much of what is available follows the Romantic trope I discussed earlier, and tends to think about her work in isolation from her cultural and social environment.<sup>4</sup> My method is to resituate Holiday radically in order to think about her voice within the “social” context of the jazz community and swing band – which will reveal how aesthetic choices and performance techniques were forged, out, in and around other types of social relations. In doing this, I am attempting to describe Holiday's musical work and style as another articulation of social and power relations, in keeping with the feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 527-547; Ralph J. Gleason, “The Golden Years” in *Billie Holiday Companion*, 78-79; Gary Giddins, *Faces in the Crowd: Players and Writers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); O'Meally, *Lady Day*.

<sup>3</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 527-547; Whalen, *Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study*, 239-273.

<sup>4</sup> Whalen's perspective as an ethnomusicologist is one of the exceptions.

criticism discussed in the previous chapter. I am not just trying to show her as a “product of her environment”: I am showing how she was exceptional, but that her exceptional status can only properly be understood as part of this newly holistic redrawing of agency.

In retrospect, one can see that the early jazz community in New York functioned as a proving ground, a haven from a harsh and racist society, which could be conceived as being an important and exciting economic opportunity. But perhaps more tantalisingly for the young and ambitious Holiday, it provided a supportive educational environment where, once accepted, it was possible for her to develop and understand her creativity and also improve her musical skills by learning from those already acknowledged to be amongst the best in the profession. As Dahl and other commentators have acknowledged, jazz is not only an art form, “but also a subculture...the music we call jazz depends on its community for the young jazz musician is trained on the job, really; the apprentice learning from the leader, the members of the group, the gig itself.”<sup>5</sup> Gaining entry into the tightly knit group of jazz musicians in New York was also a necessity for economic as well as educational reasons, as the insiders needed to be able to put a name to a face when offers of gigs came up. Yet Holiday’s need to become a member of the jazz fraternity has to be considered within the context of the extreme masculinity of a jazz scene which was often negative and dismissive in its attitudes toward female singers when compared to male musicians.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, xi.  
See also Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Anonymous “Why Women Musicians are Inferior,” *Down Beat*, February 1938; 4; Ted Toll, “The Gal Yippers Have No Place in our Jazz Bands,” *Down Beat*, October 15, 1939, 18 and Anonymous “Are Vocalists Unnecessary? Band Leader Urges Elimination of All ‘Sour-Voiced Singers,” *Down Beat*, February 1, 1942, 6. It is important to understand that constructions of Black masculinity as being particularly misogynistic can obscure endemic sexism and racism within the dominant (white) culture. Following Tucker in her own discussion on the usefulness of gender as a mode of analysis in jazz studies, my intention is not to “reproduce narrow, stereotypical and damaging representations” within the dominant discourse.<sup>6</sup> She notes that these representations associated with Black masculinity have had negative historical consequences for the African-American male. In a discussion of Ornette Coleman (1930-2015), Tucker argues that his rejection of the image of the hyper-phallic jazzman “was an implicit critique of the construction of hyper-virility that is commonly mapped onto African-American men – and onto black male jazz musicians in particular ways – by the dominant culture. This is a stereotype that has been...historically deployed to justify lynching and castration of black men.” Tucker, “Big Ears,” 390, 402, note 21.

Nevertheless Holiday succeeded in utilising her vocal skills within a creative community which writers such as Porter have documented as being both “hyper masculine” and even “homosocial” in nature; a community which, despite its existence on the margins of society, still essentially “mirrored gender inequalities in the broader society, the labour force and the arts in general.”<sup>7</sup> Burton W. Peretti also argues that “[l]ong nights away from female partners on tour buses and in alien towns and hotels, hours spent daily in union halls and nightly in clubs and the scorn heaped on women intruders suggest a highly homosocial environment,” although “the invective against sissies and the decidedly swaggering, dominating nature of cutting competitions suggest hostility to any deviant or submissive behaviour.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Porter, this is not to say that

the early jazz community was uniformly misogynist – although sometimes individuals were – or that women were always excluded from musical circles...But such interventions did not fundamentally alter an ethos predicated on the marginalization of women in musicians’ circles and the cultivation of the idea that one’s artistry was linked to one’s manhood. <sup>9</sup>

How then did Holiday succeed in getting her foot in the door of this “gentlemen’s club”, and, more importantly not merely survive, but artistically thrive, eventually gaining the respect and admiration of its members?

How females were viewed, treated and able to operate within this world was dependant on a number of factors. Therefore, as individuals, or together with other women, female artists used various strategies to develop

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<sup>7</sup> Porter, *What Is This Thing*, 28 and 31 and Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race and Culture in Urban America*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1992), 125. “Hyper masculinity” and “homosociality” are disputed terms, but hyper masculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression and sexuality. In sociology, homosociology means same-sex relationships that are not of a romantic or sexual nature. The term was first popularised by Eve Sedgwick in her discussion of male homosocial desire in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). Feminists such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Heidi Hartmann and others have emphasised the role of male homosociality in perpetuating patterns of male dominance in the workplace.

<sup>8</sup> Peretti, *Creation of Jazz*, 125. Peretti bases his argument on the documents contained within *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, ed. Jonathan Katz, (New York: Meridian, 1992), 39-52, 82, 530-538 and John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman’s, *Intimate Matters; A History of Sexuality in America*, Third Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012) Harper and Row, 1988), 288.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, *What Is This Thing*, 32.

and maintain their careers within an environment where the odds were decidedly stacked against them.

This chapter will therefore firstly be examining how the dominant society's attitudes toward gender shaped the experiences of female vocalists within the jazz community and swing band setting, as well as the features that made Holiday distinctive as a vocalist. Secondly, it will ask how some women succeeded in overcoming the jazz community's inherent gender-related obstacles in order to secure careers. Thirdly, it will examine extant Holiday materials to see what they tell us about the means she used to gain entry to the jazz fraternity in New York. Finally, in the context of a discussion on the invisibility of women within the orthodox historical discourse, the song "Some Other Spring" will be used as a case study to examine how women within the jazz community collaborated in order to bring new jazz material to audiences. A close reading of the Holiday material makes it possible to foreground some of the female friends and colleagues she was surrounded by and worked with – albeit in private contexts and out of the public eye – and also to critique contemporary histories that fail to value the important contribution some of these women made to Holiday's career.

### **Canaries, Chirpers, Torchers, Crooners, Warblers, Thrushies and Sparrows.<sup>10</sup>**

As the jazz genre developed during the 1930s, the collective improvisation-driven texture of New Orleans and Chicago styles evolved into the smoother, more commercial Swing sound. Bands developed into larger groups than their predecessors, becoming dedicated to the provision of entertainment to the large numbers of dancegoers across the United States, producing music on an almost industrial scale.<sup>11</sup> This increased commercialism augmented the involvement of singers who were popular with audiences, (if not with the

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<sup>10</sup> Slang names or what David W. Stowe describes as the "critical nomenclature" applied to vocalists during the 1930's and 1940's. David W. Stowe, *Big Band Jazz in New Deal America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994),173; See also Dahl, *Stormy Weather*,<sup>122</sup> for her discussion on gender assignments for jazz instruments.

<sup>11</sup> Daubney, "Songbird or Subversive?" 18.

instrumentalists and bandleaders themselves). In effect, singers became central in keeping the profile of Swing accessible to the public by bringing songs out of the theatre and onto the radio and recordings.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the commercial orientation of most bands, vocalists were sometimes given useful and creative roles. A few bandleaders were imaginative enough to recognise the value of adding the voice to instrumentation and used the public's enthusiasm for female singers to work on the development of vocal jazz. According to Dahl,

[t]he fact was that a pleasant physical presence *and* a good voice could be strong selling points on the bandstand, as Count Basie quickly realized. Furthermore, a knowledgeable singer, unlike an equally skilled woman instrumentalist, ruffled no feathers about the propriety of her role, posed no threat to male players by way of increased competition for jobs, and did not disturb the status quo by invading what was regarded as male musical turf. No indeed: a woman singer with intelligent ears could be a real plus for a band.<sup>13</sup>

This explains why the big bands became one of the most viable seedbeds for making possible the participation of women in jazz, and why just about every woman singer who could later be deemed to have been successful in vocal jazz served their time in the swing bands.

Nevertheless, as women became integrated into jazz performance practice, they were generally forced to operate within an artistically confined situation, and they were usually contributing short choruses to showy instrumental numbers.<sup>14</sup> Vocalists were expected to present the identifiable hook of the song, usually the chorus, in a pleasant way, "but without exceeding the identity of the band, and without making the words more important than the music. The objective was not meaningful lyrical delivery."<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that female vocalists strengthened a band's commercial appeal, they were generally looked down upon by the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 124-125. For example in 1927, Duke Ellington, integrated the voice with the rest of his band's orchestral texture by featuring Adelaide Hall's trumpet-like vocalise on "Creole Love Call" so that it meshed with the instruments in his orchestra.

<sup>14</sup> Daubney, "Songbird or Subversive?" 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 19.

instrumentalists and regarded as a necessary evil, “an unmusical adornment designed to catch the male customers’ eyes without if possible, offending their ears.”<sup>16</sup> The industry journal *Down Beat* contained articles with titles such as “The Gal Yippers Have No Place in Our Jazz Bands” and “Are Vocalists Unnecessary? Band Leader Urges Elimination of All ‘Sour-Voiced Singers.’”<sup>17</sup> A 1938 *Swing Magazine* article provides a relatively accurate exposition of the prevailing views of many instrumentalists about vocalists:

[a]sk any ten bandleaders as to their pet headache...nine will answer “girl vocalists”...Yes, girl vocalists are a nuisance. Too many of them are beautiful and can’t sing. Those who have talent are usually gobbled up by the movies or shrewd promoters who exploit them... [But] no matter what stand you take, you can’t deny that a beautiful girl in front of a mike looks pretty good to the paying males.”<sup>18</sup>

Ted Toll, in a 1939 *Down Beat* article, suggests that a band could be memorable for all the wrong reasons, as “nobody seems to have bothered to find out why none of these gals (with a few exceptions of course) can sing a song that won’t react like a monkey-wrench thrown into a smooth working piece of machinery.”<sup>19</sup> Negative views of singers developed and persisted even though as has been previously discussed, vocal forms such as the blues, minstrelsy, gospels, spirituals and work songs provide the cornerstone of the African-American contribution to jazz and its performance practices. However, in the commercial environment of the swing band, the recognition of the significance of these vocal forms became sidelined. The lyrical content was demoted in preference to “the musical articulation, the rhythms, pitch contours, textures and dynamics of the delivery.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, vocalists were generally presented to their paying audiences as a kind of singing cheerleader for the team behind her. Dressed up to the nines, she (and it was usually a she) was there mainly to provide a glamorous

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<sup>16</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Toll, “Gal Yippers Have No Place,”<sup>18</sup>; Anonymous, “Are Vocalists Unnecessary?” 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Swing Magazine*, October 1938. Cited in Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 124.

<sup>19</sup> Toll, “Gal Yippers Have No Place,” 18.

<sup>20</sup> Kate Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 19.

contrast to the “field of serious suited males.”<sup>21</sup> Inevitably they appeared to be taking care of the main business of music whilst the vocalists were usually limited to singing the thirty-two bars of the melody’s refrain between the bands section arrangements and instrumental solos.”<sup>22</sup> The upshot was that many of these vocalists were easily forgettable, as they were not able to cultivate a distinctive musical sound, which set them apart from other singers in the minds of the general public.<sup>23</sup> According to Dahl, “though it is unfair to condemn the ‘chirpers’ for performing the role assigned to them, the fact remains that most contributed little to vocal music except for a pretty face.”<sup>24</sup> Seen in this context, it can be recognised that Holiday’s eventual feat was unusual, as she was ultimately able to impose her artistic identity on the bands she worked with. The quotation by Teddy Wilson, which introduces this chapter, can thus be understood as significant.

In addition, within the swing band environment, vocalists had to contend with obstacles over which they had no control but which could determine how well they sounded and ultimately how successful they became as artists. According to George T. Simon,

Some singers were forced to stray and strain outside their vocal range...Too often leaders sacrificed singability for danceability, and singers...would be forced to rush through their choruses at ridiculous paces...On recordings, singers often appeared to disadvantage because tunes were tossed at them at the last minute and they didn’t have time to familiarize themselves with them.”<sup>25</sup>

Inevitably, the aim of many vocalists was to escape the arduous working conditions and achieve success beyond the world of the bandstand. However, even this natural impulse to improve one’s career was viewed negatively as jealousy toward singers because they fronted bands was

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<sup>21</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 122.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>24</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 124.

<sup>25</sup> George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, revised ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1974), 35.

prevalent amongst instrumentalists.<sup>26</sup> The jazz critic George T. Simon throws some light on this situation with his comment that it was “amazing the number of musicians in bands who are fed up with the girl singer because she never does anything but try to build herself up, no matter at whose expense.” He attributed the inabilities of female vocalists to achieve lasting success either to marriage or stupidity and indiscretion, acerbically concluding that “[t]he vocalists may have done a lot for the big bands, but it was nothing compared with what the big bands did for them!”<sup>27</sup> Inevitably, vocalists were placed in a no-win situation in an often misogynistic environment. They were criticised if they were not considered good enough, but also criticised if they became too successful.

A few vocalists did become well-known or even famous Hollywood stars, like Doris Day or Lena Horne. Even Holiday succeeded in gaining entry to the world of celluloid when she obtained a role in the feature film *New Orleans* in 1946 along with her hero Louis Armstrong. Yet the reality was that it made no sense for membership of a band to be the “be all and end all” of a vocalist’s career trajectory unless she was the leader of that band. Ella Fitzgerald, for example, took over the leadership of the Chick Webb Orchestra when Webb died in 1939, but this was quite a rare event for women, if the band was not an all-female one.

A driving force behind the wish for many female singers to achieve a degree of economic success was the fact that a career as a big band vocalist required substantial capital outlay that could only be paid off if a different level of financial success was achieved. Singers often went into debt purchasing an adequate supply of gowns at prices ranging from \$100 to \$150 apiece.

Added to this, whether they were men or women, vocalists were paid less than most of the instrumentalists and were sometimes required to double at other jobs within their bands.<sup>28</sup> The average female vocalist earned

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<sup>26</sup> Stowe, *Big Band Jazz*, 174.

<sup>27</sup> Simon, *Big Bands*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, “Are Girl Singers Unnecessary,” 6; Anonymous, “Heck, Chick Spends Check to Look Chick,” *Down Beat*, December 15, 1944, 4; Toll, “Gal Yippers Have No Place,” 18;

fifty to seventy-five dollars a week. From this, she was expected to pay ten dollars for hotels, twelve to fifteen for meals, five to the hairdresser and one to three for miscellaneous expenses.<sup>29</sup> The vocalist Helen Humes (1913-1981), who replaced Holiday in the Count Basie orchestra in 1938, described her delight at finding a second-hand shop where she could purchase the elegant gowns she was expected to wear on stage at a price she could afford as a singer starting out in the business.<sup>30</sup>

The unjust situation faced by many vocalists was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike the instrumentalists, they did not have any union representation. Union organising for big-band singers of both sexes occurred largely through the efforts of the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) but this did not become officially established until 1948 and Debra Brodlie, organising consultant for AGVA, told Dahl that she could not find any instances of sex discrimination cases brought by woman singers against bands or bandleaders in the thirties and forties. Brodlie believed that abuses were certainly taking place, but legal action concerning sex discrimination progressed more slowly than the efforts to improve job conditions, wages and benefits.<sup>31</sup>

In *LSTB*, Holiday raises the financial difficulties she experienced whilst touring with the Count Basie orchestra, a contract she had initially entered into to be better paid and see the world. Looking back on her time with Basie, she acknowledges the naivety of the young woman setting out on what she thought would be a big adventure:

Nobody bothered to tell me I'd have to travel five hundred to six hundred miles on a hot or cold raggedy-ass Blue Goose bus; that it would cost me two or three bucks a night for a room; that by the time I was through having my hair fixed and gowns pressed – to say nothing of paying for pretty clothes to wear – I'd end up with about a dollar and a half a day. Out of that I had to eat and drink and send home some loot to Mom."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Information from *The Baton*, October 1, 1941. Cited in Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 123.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 57.

With respect to the tyranny of wardrobe maintenance, *LSTB* highlights the fact that the vocalist's expensive glamorous wardrobe usually had to be paid for and scrupulously maintained by the vocalist – amidst the nightmare experiences of cramped living conditions, constant travelling, hurried one-nighters, irregular meals and, for Black bands, endemic racism. Faced with this situation, it becomes apparent why Holiday often felt it necessary to utilise card games as a means of improving her financial situation and redistributing funds from the more highly paid instrumentalists to herself. As Count Basie related in his own autobiography, on the last leg of the tour on the way to New York, Holiday “ended up winning so much money that she had to lend some of the guys a little change to get them through the...Christmas season.”<sup>33</sup>

Holiday was able to mount a successful challenge against her low wages in the Count Basie orchestra, aided and abetted by her friend Lester Young. In *LSTB*, she states how she was so fed-up with her working conditions that that they both threatened to resign. The upshot was she claimed, “I got raised to fifteen a day and Lester got boosted to eighteen-fifty. I thought this was just too marvellous for words.”<sup>34</sup>

With such arduous working conditions and pay, why did so many women aspire to become vocalists in the first place? One important reason is that when all was said and done, it was a job, and during this period, it was a better job compared to the type of work open to most poor African-American females.

The swing bands flourished in the midst of the Great Depression, which affected all groups in society. However, the African-American community and African-American women in particular, were the most severely affected. According to the historians Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, by January 1931, more than a quarter of all Black women who lived in any city with a significant Black population had lost their

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<sup>33</sup>Count Basie with Albert Murray, *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 206. Also, Holiday, *LSTB*, 57-58.

<sup>34</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 59.

jobs.<sup>35</sup> Holiday had had first-hand experience of the difficult economic situation experienced by many Black women during this period.

As mentioned in the biographical sketch in chapter one, in 1928 Holiday left Baltimore to join her mother in Harlem, who had gone there to improve her life chances and job prospects. To many African-Americans living in other parts of the U.S. it almost appeared as if Harlem's streets were paved with gold. In 1910, the population of Harlem was 91,000; by 1930, it had more than doubled.<sup>36</sup>

According to Hine, Black women who were moving into the big cities should not merely be considered to be "southern leaves blown North by the winds of destitution." There were many "who were self-propelled actresses seeking respect, control over their own sexuality and access to well-paying jobs."<sup>37</sup> However, the roller-coaster ride Holiday and her mother experienced soon after their arrival in Harlem (which included a stay in the hospital and prison on Welfare Island) is indicative of how the negative economic situation caused by the Wall Street Crash and ensuing Great Depression made it difficult for them to survive.

The tenor saxophonist Kenneth Hollon (1909-1974) remembered both Sadie and Holiday from this period. Sadie was working as a domestic, but Holiday was adamant that she would "never scrub floors or keep house for white folks. Billie said that all she wanted to do was SING and SINGING was what she could do most successfully."<sup>38</sup> According to Hazel Carby, for Black women, performing in vaudeville or nightclubs was not only attractive because of the glamour associated with these locations; they were opportunities to do "clean" work and reject the life of a domestic servant.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 242.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West" *Signs*, 14, *Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives*, (Summer, 1989): 914.

<sup>38</sup> Johnny Simmen, "Kenneth L. Hollon: Portrait of an Unsung Musician," *Coda*, May 1974, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Hazel V. Carby, "Policing the Black Women's Body in an Urban Context." *Critical Inquiry*, 18, no. 4, *Identities* (Summer, 1992), 752.

Therefore, Holiday was certainly not unique in her attitude toward domestic work. Any African-American woman hoping to improve her lot disliked having to undertake domestic work and live-in work was particularly despised.<sup>40</sup>

In considering what made Holiday distinctive as a vocalist within the jazz fraternity, I will be making use of material available about her performances within the swing band environment during the early part of her career, when she was a member of the Count Basie and Artie Shaw orchestras, and performed as a vocalist with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. However, jazz writers have suggested that often, in attempting such a task, the unanalysable is being analysed. Schuller even goes so far as to argue that assessing Holiday's work is problematic because "her art transcends the usual categorizations of style, content, and technique...But as with all truly profound art, that which operates above, below, and all around its outer manifestations is what touches us, and also remains ultimately mysterious."<sup>41</sup>

Schuller's words provide evidence that, to some extent, he like many writers on Holiday tended to have a Romantic conception of her skills and techniques. However, as stated, my aim now will be to consider – using gender as a means of analysis – Holiday's aesthetic choices and performance techniques amidst the context of the social and power relations articulated within the jazz community.

Between March 1938 and December 1938, Holiday honed her skills as a vocalist in the Count Basie Orchestra and the Artie Shaw Orchestra, both of which had different sound identities. The demand for jazz for dancing and entertainment led to a simplification of the complex improvisational texture of the earlier jazz style to organised notated scores/arrangements with layers

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 204; Hine and Thompson, *Shining Thread of Hope*, 243 for discussions on the search for "clean" work by African-American women and the use of the "slave markets" for domestics in New York City.

<sup>41</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 528.

of pitch and texture from instrumental sections.<sup>42</sup> Swing numbers became dictated by the contrast between individual solos and ensemble, the call and response dynamic between instrumental sections, and the verse-chorus structure of the numbers that formed the basis of the repertoire. This had consequences for the voice part, which was in some ways just another soloist, but did not belong to any of the sections, and so had no part to play in creation of the definitive swing texture.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the reduced emphasis on solo virtuosity in swing music, all successful jazz instrumentalists were highly trained, either in conventional ways or through the competitive oral and aural tradition in which musicians learnt through playing together. As already mentioned in chapter one, Holiday had learnt to sing by listening to and imitating the recordings of artists such as Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong.<sup>44</sup>

The singer's restricted role within the Swing band template only served to enhance the view that they were not fully-fledged musicians. Therefore,

[m]ost Swing singers were not expected to improvise, nor were they given the opportunity to do so. Furthermore, the fundamental technique of vocal performance is overshadowed by the [apparent] greater complexity of playing an instrument...The voice, with its comparatively limited range of pitch and of opportunities for timbral variation appears to provide less of a technical challenge, and its physical intimacy to the performer implies easier expressive channels. Additionally, vocalists have lyrics which speak in a broadly understood representational language; instrumentalists are restricted to communicating in a musical language which, arguably, transcends universal comprehension.<sup>45</sup>

In effect, instrumental skills were often perceived of as being more complex, sophisticated and “authentic” than the ability to sing.

Holiday joined the Count Basie Orchestra on March 13<sup>th</sup> 1937 on a salary of \$14 per day, and John Hammond, who during this period was the

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<sup>42</sup> Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* is dedicated to trying to gain a greater understanding of, among other things, nature of the pedagogic journey entered into by many jazz musicians.

<sup>45</sup>Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 20.

band's unofficial manager, had a role in Basie recruiting her.<sup>46</sup> He convinced Basie that adding her as a second singer would complement the blues shouter Jimmy Rushing and enhance the band's popularity. As I will illustrate later on in this chapter, Holiday's attitudes toward musical aesthetics stressed the importance of being original and so the orchestra provided a welcoming environment for her as she discovered like-minded innovators, musicians interested both changing and challenging traditions.<sup>47</sup> Her musical relationship with Lester Young was an extremely important one. According to Sherrie Tucker, "[h]e and Billie Holiday together, with other members of that Basie band, are really a pre-bop generation, who are playing between the beats; they are playing between the expected places."<sup>48</sup> This explains why her confidence developed to such an extent that she was able to move forward artistically. According to John Gennari,

[i]n her short stint with the band, Holiday established herself as a consummate jazz singer, possessed of a uniquely astringent voice, an unerring sense of time, and a fearless ability to trade swing riffs with Basie's superb hornmen, tenors Young and Herschel Evans and trumpeters Buck Clayton and Harry "Sweets" Edison.<sup>49</sup>

The orchestra, which was set up by William "Count" Basie (1904-1984), possessed the salient features associated with music from Kansas City and its environs from where it originated. These features were a loose swinging ensemble sound based on the use of simple phrases, incessant brass riffs and a 4/4 rhythm.<sup>50</sup> The rhythm sections in many Kansas City Swing bands therefore placed equal emphasis on all four beats to create a smoothly flowing pulse. It was an approach, which was not only helpful to the bands as

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<sup>46</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Buck Clayton, "Foreword" in Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Billie and Me: A Celebration of Billie Holiday*, Programme 2, BBC Radio 2, Produced by Sarah Cropper, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Joop Visser, *The Count Basie Story* (Compilation). Compiled and produced by Joop Visser. Liner Notes, (Proper Records Ltd., 2001), 10; Schuller, *Swing Era*, 222-223, 238; Burton W. Peretti, *Jazz in American Culture*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 1997), 59.

a whole, but provided a useful environment for soloists as it gave them more space and freedom than they commonly enjoyed when improvising.<sup>51</sup>

The chief figures in the Swing era bands were not the instrumentalists, but the bandleaders, who were almost exclusively male. They were the public face of the music, and they usually selected the personnel for the band, including the singers.<sup>52</sup> Many of the most commercially successful bands were led by domineering personalities who infamously intimidated their musicians in order to control them. Thus, there was “Goodman’s ‘Death Ray’ glare, Tommy Dorsey’s chronic pugilism, Glenn Miller’s ruthless calculation.”<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, it should be understood that the amiable Basie’s personality and methods of working with his band members also influenced Holiday’s contribution to the band’s music; no matter how good they were, if a singer did not have a good musical relationship with the band leader their chances of success were very slim. However, Holiday was in luck with Basie, for unlike some of the celebrity bandleaders, of the period, artistically he was certainly not an autocratic dictator.

During the mid 1930s, the Count Basie Orchestra’s repertory consisted of head arrangements from Buster Smith (1904-1991), the alto saxophonist/clarinetist and arranger, which were worked up at rehearsals from sketches and rough charts. As Ross Russell points out,

[i]n the main, the band’s style depended upon its collective spirit and the flow of ideas from the soloists brought to a singular degree of unity by Basie’s quiet musicianly leadership and orchestral employment of the piano. Essentially the band was built around the rhythm section and the rhythm section was built around Basie’s piano.<sup>54</sup>

As a performer, Basie is now renowned for his unobtrusive and minimalist piano style. The “less is more” aesthetic formed the cornerstone of

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<sup>51</sup> Visser, *Count Basie Story*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 18.

<sup>53</sup> Stowe, *Big Band Jazz*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 135.

his technique. He appears also to have used this approach to negotiate successfully the delicate tightrope between producing an interesting collective musical sound and making it possible for soloists with original ideas not to be submerged by that sound; in other words, he was not intimidated by creative individuals. This was during a period when the amount of creative freedom individual musicians had within the Swing band template was becoming an issue as a result of the increasing commercialisation and associated perceived simplification of the genre.<sup>55</sup> Basie made it possible for soloists to preserve their artistic independence. It is possible that Rushing, who has been described as being “almost as much the background of the classic Basie band as the rhythm section,” may have resented the imposition of Holiday on the band by Hammond.<sup>56</sup> However, he also was the possessor of a distinctive voice, which like Holiday’s, was difficult to submerge below layers of horns.

Three recordings taken from two air checks of Holiday with the Basie orchestra reveal the success of the partnership.<sup>57</sup> Holiday performed “Swing It Brother Swing” and “They Can’t Take That Away From Me” at the Savoy Ballroom on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1937, and “I Can’t Get Started” at the Meadowbrook Lounge at the Cedar Grove New Jersey on 3<sup>rd</sup> November of the same year. The air checks were transferred to tape in the early 1960s, but only became commercially available in 1964.<sup>58</sup> These performances immediately identify the singer as being Billie Holiday despite the fact that she is in a band with its own distinct musical personality. Describing the way she uses her voice in the air checks, Schuller writes that it was “not only a wonderful vocal parallel to Prez’s lean tenor but, by virtue of its extraordinary presence, a welcome

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<sup>55</sup> Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1992), 171, 175, 176. T. Wilson with A. Lighthart and H. Van Loo, *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz*, (London: Cassell, 1996), 24.

<sup>56</sup> Visser, *Count Basie Story*, 20; Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 137.

<sup>57</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Brooks “The Songs of Billie Holiday” Liner Notes in *Lady Day: The Complete Billie Holiday on Columbia 1933-1944*, 106; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 94.

contrast to the band's laid-back sound; her voice stood out like the raised foreground in a bas-relief."<sup>59</sup>

Holiday developed a range of solutions as a vocalist in order to successfully integrate her performances into the wall of sound created by the Swing Band orchestra. In order to combat and enhance the closeness of her voice to the swing band texture, she tended to use both contrast and imitation of the chief instrumental textures around her. This use of imitation in her style is found most predominantly in her musical dialogues with her close friend, the tenor saxophonist Lester Young. On recordings where they perform together, they often imitate each other in the shaping of phrases, the use of timbres and the quality of tone. Analysis of their work reveals that Holiday drew from Young's style, but also that "Young could evoke Holiday's voice."<sup>60</sup> Whitney Balliett describes Holiday's flexible sense of timing and her ability to make a song float along somewhere behind the beat, "thereby setting up an irresistible swinging tug-of-war between the original tempo and her version of it." He noted that "[t]his freeing effect was doubled when Young accompanied her. They were twins rhythmically and tonally, and while she sang he would improvise a soft countermelody behind her – applauding her, caressing her, welding their voices"<sup>61</sup> Ralph Gleason even goes so far as to suggest that it was not until Holiday had her first recording date with Young in January 1937 that Holiday was able to musically feel at home.<sup>62</sup>

These technical features are inextricably bound up with principles of improvisation as employed by the jazz instrumentalists she was surrounded with. From this perspective, she becomes much more than a songbird, belting out a memorable chorus, as the instrumentalists become her peers, and "it is their discourse she exploits."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 238.

<sup>60</sup> Daubney, "Songbird or Subversive?" 22.

<sup>61</sup> Balliett "Lady Day" 100.

<sup>62</sup> Gleason, "Golden Years," 78-79.

<sup>63</sup> Daubney, "Songbird or Subversive?" 22.

According to Al Avola, the guitarist in Artie Shaw's orchestra,

[s]he was not disturbed by the things which disturbed other singers and still do – too much brass or too much background. She cared for a great deal of rhythmic background and a lot of band. So did Shaw; so did all the people involved with jazz. She was not inhibited by this other thing going on, or disturbed by music going on behind her. Most singers don't like to be disturbed by too much background...But she wanted a lot of that."<sup>64</sup>

The air checks bear this out. Even though Holiday did not write the songs herself, they were arranged to suit the way she communicated with her audiences.

Before Holiday began working with Basie, she had performed almost exclusively with small groups and therefore did not have any music arranged for a big band. As Buck Clayton explains in his Foreword to Chilton's *Billie's Blues*, Holiday asked him to make a big band arrangement of "I Can't Get Started with You" when she started working with the orchestra and made a successful debut with the song in Pennsylvania.<sup>65</sup> "They Can't Take That Away From Me" is a slow dance ballad. The arrangement is simple, but the heartbeat of the orchestra, its famous rhythm section, allows Holiday the freedom to express her unique style. The song has a four bar introduction and except for sixteen bars at the beginning of the second chorus, the spotlight is on Holiday. In the air checks, Lester Young is the Basie orchestra member with the most prominent role to play. He improvises during the instrumental section, sixteen bars at the beginning of the second chorus. Holiday plays with the tempo and in the final verse, slows down the pace dramatically in order to provide a contrast with the rest of the song. She manages to end with a *rallentando* and a *crescendo* for a big finish, as the dynamics change from *mf* to *ff*.

Clayton's arrangement of "I Can't Get Started" follows a similar format; there is an eight bar introduction, Holiday takes a chorus, the band takes over the next sixteen bars and Holiday sings until the end. According to Nicholson, Young's part-solo-part *obbligato* on the middle-eights of "I Can't Get Started" provides advance notice of his more famous studio

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<sup>64</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 142-143.

<sup>65</sup> Clayton, "Foreword," 3.

performances with Holiday in the summer of the same year. In the same song, Basie's piano can be distinctly but discretely heard providing us with a link to Holiday's take-up of the second middle eight.

The arrangement for the up-tempo "Swing, Brother Swing" was "tailor-made" for Holiday by Eddie Durham, a key collaborator with Basie.<sup>66</sup> The arrangement is arguably the simplest of the three. Holiday sings all the way through, taking two choruses, the second a repeat of the first, but the band remains constantly supporting with the creation of riffs in the background.

The information available to us about her tenure in the Basie orchestra discloses that Holiday proactively chose the material she wanted to be arranged, and that all her arrangements were tailor-made for her. Like most successful musicians, she appears to have been acutely aware of the need to choose material that suited her style of presentation. To achieve this, she commissioned material from other band members.

The bassist Bobby Boswell (1928-2001), who later toured with Holiday, reported that her book contained more pop than blues songs and that she ensured that the arrangers around her orchestrated all her material.<sup>67</sup> Describing her tenure at Café Society in 1939, John Williams (1906-1998) the bass player in Frankie Newton's band, which was the house band, pointed out that "[a]lthough Frankie was the bandleader, Billie had her own numbers arranged and *she* picked the numbers for her set; we did what *she* wanted."<sup>68</sup>

Thus, Holiday appears to have consistently been an active partner in her relationships with arrangers. A description of the creation of the song, "Tell Me More," with the arranger Danny Mendelsohn, (discussed in chapter four), reveals not only that she would commission songs, but also that she told arrangers precisely how to write them for her.<sup>69</sup> (For the lyrics of the

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<sup>66</sup> Harry "Sweets" Edison in O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 122.

<sup>67</sup> Whalen, "Sociological and Ethnomusicology Study," 249.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 112.

<sup>69</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 188-189.

songs discussed in this thesis, see Appendix 2). Her determination to stick to material she had chosen herself can even be said to have resulted in her sacking and messy separation from the Count Basie Orchestra during a period when nearly half of Basie's music was in the blues format.<sup>70</sup>

Holiday's assertiveness about her choice of material was certainly unusual at the time, when most "girl" singers were expected to sing what they were given by band leaders whether or not it fitted their inclination, personalities or even vocal type and range. However, in retrospect, it is possible to understand that Holiday's ability to choose her own material was one of the reasons why she was able to perpetuate her mode of presentation.

Basie himself informs us that Holiday was quite uncompromising about preserving her identity within the orchestra:

When she rehearsed with the band, it was really just a matter of getting her tunes like she wanted them. Because she knew how she wanted to sound, and you couldn't tell her what to do. You wouldn't know what to tell her. She had her own style, and it was to remain that way. Sometimes she would bring in new things and she would dictate the way she'd like them done. That's how she got her book with us. She never left her own style. Nobody sounded like her.<sup>71</sup>

Evidence of the effectiveness of Holiday's approach can be gleaned from the band's weeklong booking with the Apollo Theater, which commenced from March 15<sup>th</sup> 1937. There was a positive write-up in the *New York Amsterdam News*, where Holiday's performance was said to have "raised the roof."<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Basie recollected their success was largely due to Holiday's input, as "Billie Holiday sure was a great help to us on that programme... [she was] the sensation of the show."<sup>73</sup> What Nicholson finds particularly interesting about the booking is Holiday's choice of material. The songs she chose, "I Cried for You", "(This is) My Last Affair", "One Never Knows—Does One?" and "Them There Eyes," were already associated with

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Williams, *Jazz Heritage*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26. "Count Basie Eliminates Billie," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1938: 16; "Seeking Girl to Sing with Basie's Band," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1939: 17; Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 50-51; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 97-98 and Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 134-135.

<sup>71</sup> Basie, *Good Morning Blues*, 200.

<sup>72</sup> "Stage....Screen....Radio," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 27, 1937, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Basie, *Good Morning Blues*, 190.

her because of her recordings with the Brunswick and Vocalion record labels. On this occasion, instead of projecting the band's identity, "Billie was projecting Billie Holiday." For Nicholson, this provides evidence that

Billie was allowed a degree of autonomy with Basie far beyond that customarily associated with a big band vocalist; it was such that she was able to preserve her own identity as a singer within the Basie band set-up. Even though she sang "Swing, Brother, Swing" and a Buck Clayton arrangement of "I Can't Get Started," these numbers were at her discretion...Even within a big band with a very specific musical personality, Billie refused to relinquish control of the character part she had created for herself.<sup>74</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Holiday may have made the decision to stick to material she was familiar with in order to preserve the quality of her performances.<sup>75</sup> The experiences of Helen Humes, the vocalist who replaced Holiday when she left the Basie orchestra, appear to bear this out. She claimed that

When I got with Basie, that's the way they did it in the Basie band. They'd come up and hand everybody the music... You know, they didn't *teach* me nothin'. They just handed you your piece like they handed the trumpets their piece... And in the studio they'd just hand me the words. If you didn't know the song – well, I'd just say, 'Well, I don't know nothin' about this tune.' Then *maybe* they'd come and hand me a piece of music. Then they just stood there and played it and I just sang it. They'd say, 'It goes like this.'<sup>76</sup>

It is useful to compare Humes's comments to Basie's when discussing how well Holiday fitted in with the band. According to Basie: "She fitted in so easily, it was like having another soloist. All she needed was the routine, then she could come in with her eyes closed – no cues or signals.' Asked how it was planned that Sweets or Buck 'came in' to accompany her, Basie said, 'It wasn't in the arrangement. When they felt like it.'<sup>77</sup> Clayton wrote in his autobiography, "I would watch her mouth, and when I saw that she was going

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<sup>74</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 85.

<sup>75</sup> As mentioned previously, various factors over which the singer had little control could make it difficult for them to produce decent performances. See Simon, *Big Bands*, 35.

<sup>76</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 227.

<sup>77</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 132.

to take a breath or something I knew it was time for me to play between her expressions. It's what we call "filling up the windows."<sup>78</sup>

Holiday's last engagement with the Basie orchestra was at the Apollo Theater on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938, and confusion still reigns about the reasons for her departure in the same month.<sup>79</sup> Her dismissal occurred even though, when being interviewed by Kuehl many years later, Basie stated, "I loved Billie an awful lot. I loved Billie as far as love could go."<sup>80</sup> Two main explanations have been put forward to explain her departure. Firstly, as previously mentioned, this was a period when nearly half of Basie's music was in the blues format. But Basie's drummer Jo Jones (1911-1985), also interviewed by Kuehl, was insistent that Hammond had fired Holiday because she had refused to sing the blues. According to Jones, "[h]e fired her because he wanted her to be a coloured mammy."<sup>81</sup> Jones contended that whilst Holiday did not actually totally shun or totally abstain from the blues style, she had made the decision to limit herself mainly to rhythm numbers.<sup>82</sup> Holiday's attitude toward the blues may be best summarised in her succinct response to Hammond's request that she revive numbers from the 1920's which were associated with Ethel Waters, Clara Smith and other female singers, which was "[a]h, hell, I ain't gonna sing that old shit! This is 1938!"<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, rumours circulated that Holiday had left because she felt she was not being paid enough. At the end of February 1938, the *New York Amsterdam News* carried the heading "Count Basie Eliminates Billie Holiday's Singing." The obviously carefully worded official explanation was that Basie "felt it would be 'easier' to work without a girl singer...It was explained that with constant jumps facing the group, dropping the vocalist

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<sup>78</sup> Buck Clayton with Nancy Miller Elliott, *Buck Clayton's Jazz World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 98.

<sup>79</sup> Ken Vail, *Lady Day's Diary: The Life of Billie Holiday 1937-1959*, (Chessington, Surrey: Castle Communications, plc. 1996), 19.

<sup>80</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 130.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>82</sup> Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 42.

<sup>83</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 137.

would facilitate movement.”<sup>84</sup> However, the gossip column within the same newspaper was more forthcoming: It reported, “The split between Billie Holiday and the Count Basie Orchestra, they say, is merely a matter of shekels.”<sup>85</sup>

Nicholson argues that on an aesthetic and practical level, Holiday’s approach to her work may have posed problems for Basie as,

she would only sing songs with which she could identify, refusing to sing current pops or even the blues; she wanted a say in how her accompaniment was framed in what she did sing, and, to cap it all, it was impossible for Basie to link her appeal to that of his band through recordings, as Chick Webb had done with Ella, because of her contract with Vocalion. In many ways, being a singer in the Basie band was good for Billie, but not for Basie.<sup>86</sup>

Holiday almost certainly considered herself to be a musically contemporary artist. She was still young enough not to feel the need to mine the past for inspiration. Her attitude toward the blues may be usefully illustrated by Amiri Baraka’s writings on the subject. According to Baraka, during the early to mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, for many African-Americans, the blues were viewed negatively, associated with “the mark of Cain,” with slavery, poverty and broken-down, oppressive rural communities. African-Americans were drifting away from an appreciation of the blues associated with the South because it simply was not a true reflection of their lives in America during a time of immense changes, when the community was becoming increasingly urbanised: “a whole new generation of Negroes was born into this transitional culture – the first generation with a preponderance of *citizens* rather than ex-slaves. These were the people who had to decide what was to be done with blues and what weight it would have in their lives.”<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, as I shall discuss in the following chapter when considering her songwriting, Holiday’s relationship to the blues genre was rather more

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<sup>84</sup> “Count Basie Eliminates Billie Holiday’s Singing,” 16.

<sup>85</sup> Lou Layne, “Moon Over Harlem,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1938, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 98.

<sup>87</sup> Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones], *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (London: The Jazz Book Club by arrangement with MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), 141.

ambivalent than was implied by her negative response to Hammond's request that she sing blues numbers.

By mid-March 1938 Holiday had moved on and joined Artie Shaw's Orchestra. This was an unusual move during this highly segregated era, as an African-American singer would be fronting a white orchestra. Artie Shaw (1910-2004), the jazz clarinetist, bandleader, composer and arranger, had adopted an experimental approach with his first band in 1936, by integrating a string quartet into a small jazz group. But this had not proved popular with the public, and so in 1937 he formed a conventional swing band, a standard fourteen piece *sans* strings, called Artie Shaw and His New Music.

The Artie Shaw soundscape provided a contrast to that of Basie's. Perhaps the most striking difference existed between the rhythm sections. Shaw's orchestra produced dance music, but in contrast to the Basie orchestra, there can be no denying that the rhythm section sounded static and plodding. Schuller praises Holiday's contribution to Shaw's orchestra but is damning in his criticism of the music it was playing during this period:

Billie's singing of *Any Old Time* (July 1938), the only recorded vocal with Shaw (a telling fact?) is like a breath of fresh air in the welter of mediocre to average offerings Shaw was still generally dispensing...[Holiday] was clearly in a class by herself and a true jazz musician. Her one song with Shaw strikingly brings into focus how far Shaw himself was still removed from the essence of jazz."<sup>88</sup>

The song, which Shaw is nowadays most commonly associated with, "Begin the Beguine," became such a big hit that it made him famous. However, on the same day, July 24<sup>th</sup> 1938, his orchestra also recorded "Any Old Time" with RCA Victor on the Bluebird label, described on the original 78 as a fox trot. The song is not as well known as others by Holiday, possibly because once recorded, it was withdrawn, as Holiday was at the time under contract with Brunswick Records and made the recording without clearing it with them first. Its chief claim to fame nowadays is that it was the only side Holiday made during her brief time as a vocalist with the band. Another

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<sup>88</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 699. Schuller believed that Shaw still had much to learn before his band possessed the quality of those such as Benny Goodman's or Duke Ellington's. For example, before the arrival of Jerry Gray as an arranger, Shaw was still setting most of his arrangements to ordinary dance tempos. (Ibid., 698-699).

point of interest is that it is one of the few instances where Shaw wrote both the words and music.

Holiday's performance of "Any Old Time" is significant in the big band era as it again represented one of the few occasions when a tune was composed and arranged for a big band with the specific characteristics of the style of its singer in mind in terms of the lyrics, rhythmic phrasing and melody. Examples of arrangers framing singers were rare until Billy Strayhorn's arrangement of "Flamingo" for Duke Ellington's vocalist Herb Jeffries in December 1940, and Helen Forrest's performances with Harry James, where James specifically instructed his arranger to support and enhance Forrest's voice.<sup>89</sup> The song's theme of infatuation in love "was a variation on the character part Billie was constructing for herself of a woman unlucky or frustrated in love."<sup>90</sup>

On the recording Holiday is presented in the typical role of a band vocalist: singing a vocal chorus in a predominantly instrumental number. This contrasts to the way she featured in the Basie orchestra where whenever she was performing her vocals assumed a central role.<sup>91</sup>

The arrangement begins in the key of F Major with a four bar introduction, which is followed by a chorus shared between the ensemble and Shaw's clarinet. There is then a two bar modulation from F to C Major into Holiday's vocal. She provides a contrast to the rather predictable 4/4 pulse of the orchestra by syncopating when she enters, that is, she comes in slightly later than expected, an important feature of her behind the beat, laid back style. After her vocal, the band modulates into Ab where there is an eight bar tenor sax solo, followed by eight bars of the band. Then at the very end, there is a four bar tag where Shaw incorporates a clarinet-above-lead sax passage. Holiday's performance has been described as a "minor gem." Nicholson writes that "The whole performance presents her like a jewel in an elegant

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<sup>89</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 102-103.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

setting; the individual characteristics of her style are spelt out by the ensemble and expanded on by the singer.”<sup>92</sup>

However, Holiday walked away from the band on December 10, 1938, unable to stomach the racial and economic indignities membership imposed upon her.<sup>93</sup> She had for instance faced hostility from audiences. According to Chilton,

On tour, the band members tried their best to put a protective mantle around Billie, but it was impossible for even the most well-meaning and zealous guardian to stop the hostile glances and impudent racist comments that were occasionally unleashed – North or South – by people who saw Billie surrounded by a group of white men.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, many people, including Shaw’s manager, booking agent and producers pressured him not to use her and to employ a more “mainstream” singer. Holiday was never included on any of Shaw’s remote broadcasts as the orchestra’s new radio sponsors, the Old Gold cigarette company considered her unsuitable. Eventually, because of the insistence of promoters, that he must have a white female vocalist; Shaw took on Helen Forrest, and gave her a much more prominent role than Holiday. The front cover of the *Metronome* magazine dated September 1938 “showed the full Shaw Orchestra, with one female vocalist seated in front who was obviously white.<sup>95</sup> Finally, Holiday was dropped for radio work where Forrest did all the singing. The jazz critic Leonard Feather wrote in *Melody Maker* in December 1938 that “[i]t is now said that Holiday left Shaw because (a) His new radio sponsors, the “Old Gold” cigarette people, refused to use her on the air – maybe because Billie smokes a different kind of cigarette and (b) she was made to enter the Lincoln Hotel, where the band plays, by the back door.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Vail, *Lady Day’s Diary*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> “Artie Shaw’s Band Background” *Metronome* September 1938, 17. Cited in Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 36.

<sup>96</sup> Leonard Feather, “Fats in a Fracas, Feather Forecast and News: Why Billie Left Artie,” *Melody Maker*, December 17, 1938, 5.

In *LSTB* Holiday states about this period: “I was singing less and less. Some nights I’d only be on for one song all night – and that would be before or after the band had been on the air.”<sup>97</sup> An indication of the difficulties she had to put up with may be ascertained by the fact that usually vocalists with big bands were expected to sit on the bandstand when not singing, but according to Helen Forrest, “lots of times she wasn’t even allowed to sit on the bandstand with me. She had to use the back entrance and wait backstage to go on.”<sup>98</sup>

It has also been argued that music publishers were at the root of the decision not to feature Holiday in the radio programmes. Her ability to improvise lay at the root of their objections. During this period, song pluggers graded their potential hit songs and they were only willing to allocate exclusive material to Shaw if he promised not to allow Holiday to sing their songs on the radio:

For them, Billie’s style didn’t stick closely enough to the written melody. Their dictum was: less artistry equals more sheet-music sales (at that time a bigger source of income to music publishers than the royalties from record sales). Shaw absolutely detested these pressures, but his management were in total agreement with the Tin Pan Alley dictum and described Billie in print as being ‘too artistic.’<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, Holiday’s wish to improvise was certainly not unusual. According to Daubney, “Holiday probably never delivered a song straight in her entire career, but then she was doing no less than any other instrumentalist in the history of jazz.”<sup>100</sup>

The beginning of the end for Holiday occurred at the Lincoln Hotel in New York in October 1938 when the hotel’s manager told Shaw to tell Holiday she had to use the back entrance to enter the hotel so that the hotel’s customers would not assume that African-Americans were staying in the hotel. Holiday commented about this deeply upsetting episode in *LSTB*: “Down South I can dig this kind of stuff, but I can’t take it in New York,”

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<sup>97</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 81.

<sup>98</sup> Vail, *Lady Day’s Diary*, 28

<sup>99</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 56.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

which she describes as being “my own home town.”<sup>101</sup> Holiday also later elaborated on the reasons why she left Shaw in a 1939 interview, where she also brought up the matter of her pay and conditions:

The hotel management told me I had to use the back door. That was all right. But I had to ride up and down in freight elevators, and every night Artie made me stay upstairs...I would stay up there, all by myself, reading everything I could get my hands on, from ten o’ clock to nearly two in the morning, going downstairs to sing just one or two numbers. Then one night we had an airshot...and Artie said he couldn’t let me sing. I simply got enough of Artie’s snooty, know-it-all mannerisms and the outrageous behaviour of his managers and left the band. With Basie I got seventy dollars a week, with Artie I got sixty-five dollars.”<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, Holiday’s view of Shaw did not remain negative as she later forgave him, describing him as “a good cat deep down.”<sup>103</sup>

Sherrie Tucker’s description of Holiday’s three-week engagement (between June 29<sup>th</sup> 1944 and July 26<sup>th</sup> 1944) with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm at the Grand Terrace in Chicago, demonstrates her commitment to a particular aesthetic approach as even when singing with big bands she refused to be railroaded into singing loudly. Barney Josephson, the manager of Café Society (where she performed between 1938 and 1939) said that “[s]he never had a really big voice – it was small, like a bell that rang and went a mile.”<sup>104</sup> In contemporary jargon, she was not a “belter”, despite the big voiced Bessie Smith being one of her heroes.

Bessie Smith was able to project her powerful and dramatic voice successfully to the back rows of theatres and tent shows before the invention of amplification. But what became known as “microphone singing” freed Holiday from the burden of having to produce a big sound, making it possible for her to play to her strengths and use her flexible voice to focus more on colour and timbre. This enabled her to communicate to audiences subtler nuances of sound than Smith could ever have hoped to achieve. As Simon Frith points out, the general effect of the invention of the electrical

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<sup>101</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 81 and 80.

<sup>102</sup> Dexter, “I’ll Never Sing with a Dance Band Again,” 4 and 40.

<sup>103</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 59.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

microphone was to “extend the possibilities of the public expressions of private feelings in all pop genres.” He compares the microphone to the close-up in film history.”<sup>105</sup>

Holiday, after a nervous start, familiarised herself with the new technology so quickly that according to Joachim-Ernst Berendt and Günther Huesmann,

she was the first to realize...that not only was her voice the instrument but also the microphone...that a singer using a microphone had to sing in a totally different way from one not using a mike. She humanized her voice by “micro-phoning” it, thus making subtleties significant that had been unknown in all singing up to that point – in fact, that had been unnecessary, because they could not have been made audible.<sup>106</sup>

The International Sweethearts, (the first racially integrated all women’s band in the United States) were extremely proud of the powerful sound they projected. However, one of their members, the saxophonist Frann Gaddison, told Tucker that when they were performing with Holiday, “[she] wanted us to soften down...And we were busting those notes! We had a drummer that was, you know *bad* as any guy out there.”<sup>107</sup> In other words they sounded “masculine.”<sup>108</sup>

Holiday was so forthright in her insistence that she was never going to raise her voice unnecessarily that Gaddison claimed that “She screamed at us...She called us a bunch of names...She just cussed us out in rehearsal. Called us a bunch of bitches”<sup>109</sup>

Tucker does not disguise the fact that feelings of jealousy and competitiveness may have existed between Holiday and the International

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<sup>105</sup> Simon Frith, “Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music,” *Media, Culture and Society*, 8 (1986): 270. See also Paula Lockheart, “A History of Early Microphone Singing, 1925-1939: American Mainstream Popular Singing at the Advent of Electronic Microphone Amplification,” *Popular Music and Society*, 26, no.3 (2003): 369 and 380.

<sup>106</sup> Joachim-Ernst Berendt and Günther Huesmann, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, trans. H and B Bredigkeit, Dan Morgenstern, Tim Neveill and Jeb Bishop, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 565. Holiday described her nervous start in the recording studio with the Benny Goodman orchestra in Holiday, *LSTB*, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 213 and 358.

<sup>108</sup> Tucker, “Big Ears,” 393.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

Sweethearts. According to Tucker, “[i]t appears that the Grand Terrace represented an unhappy booking for Holiday, one damaging to her sense of herself as both an artist and a lady; she did not like to sing in variety acts, she did not like singing with loud bands, and she could have seen her booking with an all-girl band as an insult.”<sup>110</sup>

However, Tucker’s work is insightful as she delves into important gender issues underpinning Holiday’s use of her voice. She notes that Gaddison’s description of the drummer’s skills provides us with knowledge of Holiday’s positioning of herself as a musician:

Holiday’s own approach to crafting an identity as a female jazz artist did not consist of “busting notes,” nor did it entail straining to be heard over instrumentalists who “busted notes” behind her. Holiday’s intervention into the usual gender division of jazz labor included her insistence that instrumentalists, usually men, listen to her as she listened to them and interact with her in the same spirit of collaboration and with the same respect they would accord any other soloist in the band. In this way, she transformed not only the role of the jazz singer, but the role of the jazz instrumentalist as well. Her preference for tenor saxophonist Lester Young’s softer-toned, behind-the-beat style to Herschel Evan’s bigger, harder-swinging, Coleman Hawkins – inspired sound explains, in part, why she might try to “soften down” the Darlings.<sup>111</sup>

By the 1930s the initial prominence given to the vocal performances of the female blues singers had diminished so far under a wave of commercialism in the music industry (particularly, that associated with Swing), that Holiday had few of the generic advantages her predecessors had used to overcome the social disadvantages of being a Black female singer in a world dominated by male instrumentalists.<sup>112</sup>

Yet by singing as an instrumentalist would play, Holiday excelled beyond the expectations of band vocalists. Fundamentally, she did not overcome the dominant male instrumental discourse, but rather employed it to empower herself and create equality where none existed. Because of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 216. See also Danica L. Stein “Clora Bryant: Gender Issues in the Career of a West Coast Musician,” in *California Soul: Music of African Americans in the West*, eds. Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 283 for Bryant’s comments on girl novelty bands. Bryant said she focussed on honing her skills so that she could branch out from the realm of novelty acts into the “real” world of jazz.

<sup>111</sup> Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 213.

<sup>112</sup> Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 20

nature of the repertoire associated with Holiday – that is, because she chose songs with lyrics that were contemplative and of a sad nature where she adopts the persona of the tragic lovelorn woman – we are in danger of not hearing the evidence of this. In effect, her persona as victim obscured the accomplished technician.<sup>113</sup>

Analysis of her performances with Basie and Shaw’s orchestras in particular reveal that rather than remaining in the shadow of top flight and often-brilliant musicians, Holiday’s vocal actually emphasises their skills by joining in the vigorous call and response patterns of the horn sections. She picks up the gauntlet and throws it down again in her musical conversations with the other performers. As a vocalist her level of exposure and repertoire were not designed to be innovative. Tunes and the lyrics were the main means of communication with her audiences. But Holiday succeeds in recreating these parameters on another level, just as jazz instrumentalists reinvent melodies through improvisation. Such an approach was a subversion of the aural contract she was meant to keep as a songbird, and when she eventually became successful in her own right, it became her chief mode of communication.<sup>114</sup>

### **Survival Techniques and Subversive Tactics**

In order to survive and thrive in the hyper-masculine world of the jazz community, female musicians adopted a range of strategies, one of the most important being the determination to stick with a particular aesthetic approach. As I have already indicated, this Holiday did, sometimes against the odds, even when her ideas proved to be unpopular with managers and contemporary mainstream audiences who could find her style perplexing. However, her experiences provide us with a good example of the importance of self-hood in the jazz genre.

In *LSTB* Holiday describes how she lost work because Ed Fox, the manager of the Terrace Club in Chicago, along with the club’s audiences

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 27.

simply did not know what to make of her.<sup>115</sup> And in a rehearsal recorded in August 1955, she recalled how she stuck to her aesthetic approach despite her manager Joe Glazer's repeated requests for her to change her repertoire by singing pop songs with a faster tempo.<sup>116</sup> The rehearsal reveals that she had a vision of the type of sound she wanted to achieve and how she wished to communicate it to her audiences. As she pointed out, "[y]ou know these people don't dig my goddamn singing no how...Man, it took ten years [before] the people picked up on me...They didn't dig me and I wouldn't change!"<sup>117</sup> Holiday was thus articulating a strong individualism within a very male context. This in itself is a useful survival tactic.

Our knowledge of Holiday's aesthetics, which is crucial to our understanding of her as a creative individual, is mainly derived from her autobiography. Previously we discussed how *LSTB* had often been censured by critics who had viewed it as being untrustworthy and/or an amalgam of literary conventions. Nevertheless, the limitations of the work aside, most critics concur that "the passages devoted to music-making ring the most true."<sup>118</sup> For example, Gibson, who supports this view, argues that as "music saturates the text organically... *LSTB* ably represents an integration of Holiday's life story intertwined inextricably with her musical ideology."<sup>119</sup> Therefore, if one is able to believe that the work presents the reader with some of Holiday's core standpoints about music and being a musician, then it is possible to acknowledge its important contribution to music history and the field of jazz autobiography. However, we need to acknowledge that Holiday is constructing her own myth of individualism here, as well as recording matters of fact. Such a construction represents not just public relations, but another kind of survival tactic.

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<sup>115</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 63. The run-in with Fox ended with a fight and her being sacked.

<sup>116</sup> Billie Holiday, *The Complete Billie Holiday on Verve 1945-1959*, Disc 4, Track 2 and Joel E. Siegel and Phil Schaap, "Musical and Discographical Commentary," 111. (PolyGram Records Inc., 517658-2, 1992).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 46.

<sup>119</sup> Gibson, *Alternate Takes*, 29-30.

In *LSTB*, music is utilised to provide the organising principle for Holiday's life story. For example, the title of the book and each of the chapters is called after a significant song from her repertoire. Within each of the chapters there are examples informing us of Holiday's overall technique, musical philosophy and value system. It is for these reasons that Gibson and other critics consider that those passages where Holiday discusses her overall philosophy of music outshine any factual discrepancies within the text.<sup>120</sup>

Even in her accounts of her early childhood experiences, Holiday's devotion to music is made apparent. She had to work for her living scrubbing the doorsteps of well-off families. However, she makes it clear that during this period she sings because she enjoys it whilst doing this work, saying that "I used to love to sing all the time. I liked music."<sup>121</sup>

Her audition at Pod's and Jerry also gives us some insight on Holiday's attitude toward music. She auditions as a dancer and is rejected; but when asked if she could sing, replies, "[s]ure I can sing, *what good is that?*" I had been singing all my life, but I enjoyed it too much to think I could make any real money at it."<sup>122</sup> Thus Holiday makes it clear that she does not regard singing as being work, in the same way as being a maid, prostitute or a dancer.

I have spent time in this chapter discussing some of the technical features of Holiday's performance style, but throughout *LSTB* Holiday wishes to clarify that she regards her ability to communicate emotion to her audiences as the factor that makes her unique and sets her apart from other singers. Revealing the feelings engendered by her year-and-a-day-long imprisonment at the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson, Virginia, she discloses the unhappiness she experienced by explaining how, despite being begged to do so, she could not do any singing, and tells her readers that "[t]he whole basis of my singing is feeling. Unless I feel something, I can't sing."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>121</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 138.

Work for Holiday would have been being forced to sing songs she was not emotionally connected with: “[i]f I had to sing ‘Doggie in the Window,’ that would actually be work. But singing songs like ‘The Man I Love’ or ‘Porgy’ is no more work than sitting down and eating Chinese roast duck, and I love roast duck. I’ve lived songs like that. When I sing them I live them again and I love them.”<sup>124</sup> For Holiday, the usual distinction between work and play do not apply; instead, the distinction is between work and feeling.<sup>125</sup>

Holiday had very definite views about the need for originality in music, a cornerstone of the belief systems of many jazz performers. As I highlighted at the very beginning of this thesis, Holiday was clearly proud of the fact that the Apollo Theater’s MC, Ralph Cooper, found it difficult to comment on her voice and style, and stated that he “couldn’t put any label on me.”<sup>126</sup> And she tells us, “[t]his, I always figured was the biggest compliment they could pay me. Before anybody could compare me with other singers, they were comparing other singers with me.”<sup>127</sup>

In *LSTB*, Holiday describes a cutting contest between Chu Berry (1908-1941) and her close friend Lester Young.<sup>128</sup> Holiday’s account is interesting, as it also reveals the learning process involved when jazz artists attempt to gain an original style. She admits that for a time both of them attempted to gain, fruitlessly, a powerful tone, as “this talk about a big tone messed with Lester for months. And me too.” She describes how they desperately tried to mimic Berry’s big tone, writing “[w]hat the hell, Lester, don’t let them make a fool of us. We’ll get you a big horn with big fat reeds and things...We’ll get us a tone.” However, she comes to her senses, realising that Young simply was not meant to sound like Berry and he also gives up trying. The wisdom she gains from this she passes on to her readers,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Gibson, “Alternate Takes,” 54.

<sup>126</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 39.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 47-48.

concluding that “There ain’t no rule saying everybody’s got to deliver the same damn volume or tone.”<sup>129</sup>

Famously, an important trait Young shared with Holiday was the drive to be constantly original. Amongst his most repeated remarks were “I try not to be a repeater pencil, you dig?”, and “[y]ou can’t be in the choir till you’ve learned to sing your own song.” When he got a chance to elaborate on this subject in interviews, it is clear that the desire to be original was a constant.<sup>130</sup> Despite views of the limitations of the work expressed by earlier critics, close readings of *LSTB* make it possible to believe that this was an approach and area of knowledge directly gained from Holiday’s influence and teaching in his musical relationship with her.

In *LSTB* Holiday further develops her argument about the important relationship between originality and feeling, pointing out that “[e]verybody’s got to be different. You can’t copy anybody and end up with anything. If you copy, it means you’re working without any real feeling. And without feeling, whatever you do amounts to nothing. No two people on earth are alike, and it’s got to be that way in music or it isn’t music.”<sup>131</sup>

Finally, she hammers home her point about the function of and need for originality in the work created and performed by musicians in her description of a television programme she saw about the cellist Pablo Casals. After he played some Bach, the programme interviewer tells him that he plays it differently every time. Casals replies: “It must be different...How can it be otherwise? Nature is so. And we are nature.”

Holiday interprets Casals’ approach as a vindication of her own beliefs: “[s]o there you are. You can’t even be like you once were yourself, let alone like somebody else. I can’t stand to sing the same song the same way two nights in succession, let alone two years or ten years. If you can, then it

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>130</sup> François Postif “An Interview with Lester Young,” in *A Lester Young Reader*, ed. Lewis Porter, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 186; Frank Büchmann-Møller, *You Just Fight for Your Life, The Story of Lester Young*, (New York: Praeger, 1990), 158 and Allan Morrison, “You Got to be Original Man,” *Jazz Record*, (July 1946), 8-9.

<sup>131</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 48.

ain't music, it's close-order drill or exercise or yodelling or something, not music. <sup>132</sup>

Holiday's musical standpoint does replicate to some extent a Romantic ideal of originality and authenticity, but it also provides credible accounts, which make it possible to reframe her as an artist and distance her from a stereotypical victim persona. Having an original sound is the holy grail for most jazz musicians, and the quote by Teddy Wilson at the beginning of this chapter indicates that it was something Holiday was, in her peers' eyes, in possession of. When off the stage or out of the studio, her emotional life was certainly not perfect, but the fact that as a performer she possessed a clear vision about her aesthetic ideals, makes it apparent that she was aware of where the locus of power lay artistically in the jazz environment. Focussing on Holiday's musical ideology also makes it possible for us to treat *LSTB* as a work of musicological significance despite the inaccuracies it may contain, and move beyond O'Meally's treatment of the book as being a "dream book" of "wishes and lies."<sup>133</sup>

Another important survival technique would be to receive support from the knowledge of the contribution made to music making by earlier generations of women. We have already discussed the enormous influence Bessie Smith and (no doubt, the other classic blues women) had on Holiday, but I will also be considering their position as role models and the influence of their lyrics and lifestyles on her and other young women of the period.

One of the main reasons feminists have been concerned to discover or resuscitate women as historical agents has been the realisation that knowledge of the existence of women engaged in cultural activities in earlier times serves to strengthen and empower contemporary women. Thus the tendency has been to relate to past historical figures not merely lineally, but as an important part of the contemporary communal creative experience. In the field of music, contemporary women have used this historical knowledge to make themselves less divided from the past by the realities of time in order to strengthen their views of themselves as artists in the present.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 21.

According to Marcia J. Citron, in a discussion on female composers,

female creativity has a great need for communal support...A sense of relating or belonging to a palpable tradition is crucial: a tradition of the past, on which one can build and to which one can look for models and validation; a tradition of the present, especially support groups promoting women composers and their music; and a sense of a future tradition, for which one can function as a precursor to subsequent women composers...This chronological swing from past through present to future, nurtures a sense of psychic and social locatedness and creates space for the unencumbered subjective gaze across the historical horizon.<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, the artists celebrating Holiday in the BBC radio series, *Billie and Me: A Celebration of Billie Holiday* were also keenly aware of the value of the communal support provided by Holiday for contemporary female artists. According to Neneh Cherry, “This feeling of Billie’s legacy, of being descended from a long line of musical ancestors, is very important for many women artists today.” In the same programme, the drummer Terri Lyne Carrington comments that “[w]hen I think about Billie Holiday and what she means as far as women artists or jazz artists, she’s one of the people that paid for us, meaning that they paid the dues that allowed us to do our art more freely these days.”<sup>135</sup> Owing to the passage of time it is now rare to find people who actually knew and worked with Holiday, but in a recent interview, the former blues singer, Dr. Mabel John (b.1930) – who worked with Holiday as a fledging professional singer weeks before her final hospital admission and death in 1959 – revealed how Holiday gave her useful nuggets of advice and encouragement based on a distillation of the knowledge she had acquired from her years in the music business.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps the most important advice Holiday gave to John was that one “*must* remember three things. Know when you have done enough. Know when you have given enough. Then you must have guts enough to say I have done enough, I quit. She said, if you remember that – she said I didn’t – she said you will make it,

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<sup>134</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 78-79.

<sup>135</sup> *Billie and Me: A Celebration of Billie Holiday*. Programme 6. Created by Wise Buddha Productions. Presented by Neneh Cherry.

<sup>136</sup> Susan Whitall, *Women of Motown: An Oral History*, (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 10.

and you will live a long time. And she was right. And I still hear those words till today.”<sup>137</sup>

Holiday had had a profound influence on the young performer, and ultimately it was her advice which eventually gave John the strength to walk away from the music industry altogether and move on to do other things which interested her more. John describes an experienced performer, unselfishly passing on hard-won knowledge to subsequent generations of female musicians.

Davis places Holiday third in a lineage of blues “queens,” following on after Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Smith. Like the runners in a relay race passing on the baton, Davis portrays these women as individuals who were transmitting crucial aspects of knowledge to the following generation.<sup>138</sup> These women were venerated because their audiences viewed them as figures of resistance and resilience; women capable of freely expressing their own desires.<sup>139</sup> Davis and Carby demonstrate not only how the blues women were symbols of glamour, freedom and power, but also how as role models they functioned as “organic intellectuals” in the Gramscian sense of the term, as they were able to transmit feminist traditions within working class Black communities.<sup>140</sup> I will explore this idea further in the final chapter.

The authority of the classic blues singer was manifested in their edgy glamour. Mary Lou Williams’ description of seeing Ma Rainey in performance gives us some idea the impact of their appearances could have on audiences. Williams said: “Ma was loaded with real diamonds – in her ears, around her neck, in a tiara on her head. Both hands were full of rocks, too; her hair was wild and she had gold teeth. What a sight.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Dr. Mabel Mercer, interview by Jenni Murray, *Women’s Hour*, BBC Radio 4, April 30, 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*.

<sup>139</sup> Peter Antelyes, “Red Hot Mamas: Bessie Smith, Sophie Tucker, and the Ethnic Maternal Voice in American Popular Song,” in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, edited by Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 213.

<sup>140</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, xi and xiv; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 3-5.

<sup>141</sup> Shapiro and Hentoff, *Story of Jazz*, 248.

The authority possessed by the blues queens was also made manifest in the enhancement of the status of the voice in blues and vaudeville, the lyrics in their songs and the nature of their performances and lifestyles. They therefore provided a major exception in the patriarchal story of jazz.<sup>142</sup> Writers such as Anne Douglas, Porter and Tucker have noted with irony that the recorded legacy of the masculine world of instrumental jazz developed out of women's blues music in the 1920s. According to Tucker,

Early blues queens Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey...as well as noted hometown blues belters such as Lizzie Miles, Edna Hicks, Mary Mack (McBride) and Esther Bigeou, have often been miscast as *precursors* to jazz rather than essential participants in the birth of the music. While it's true that blues preceded jazz as an American idiom, many women blues singers performed with jazz bands and appeared on early jazz recordings well beyond the passing of that torch."<sup>143</sup>

The reality was that from an economic perspective, record companies at first had little interest in recording instrumental jazz until its practitioners established their reputations by accompanying female blues singers as it never sold as well as their music did.<sup>144</sup>

Black women were the first to produce commercially successful recordings of the blues. The spectacular success of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" (1920), which sold more than one million copies in seven months, made possible the successful recording career of Smith and other blues women of the 1920s. Recording companies were keen to jump on this highly profitable bandwagon and thus were continually on the lookout for similar artists they could promote and exploit.

An important precedent that Smith and the other blues divas established for Holiday and her contemporaries is closely linked to the status of the voice within the blues genre. Because the recording of jazz did not begin until the late "teens" of the twentieth century, singers such as Smith achieved most of their fame by going on the road and criss-crossing the

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<sup>142</sup> Anne Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920's*, (London: Papermac, 1997), 409.

<sup>143</sup> Tucker, "Rocking the Cradle."

<sup>144</sup> Porter, *What Is This Thing*, 31; Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 409.

southern United States as singers and performers in minstrel, ragtime and vaudeville bands, and this ability to seemingly roam free over the American landscape was an important facet of their authority. I have already mentioned how this kind of work was attractive to Black women because it was viewed as “clean,” but the Black vaudeville circuit was also regarded as being one of the few ways women could attain the economic mobility assigned to men.<sup>145</sup> Baraka argues that the circuit helped to develop the concept of the professional African American female entertainer.<sup>146</sup>

According to Baraka, the emergence of many white women as entertainers and the women’s suffrage movement were factors which came together to “make the entertainment field a glamorous one for Negro women, providing an independence and importance not available in other areas open to them – the church, domestic work, or prostitution.”<sup>147</sup>

Symbolically, working the vaudeville circuit also had similar associations to the idea of “running away to the circus,” that is, the ability to make a new start. Even though these environments were hard training grounds, Handy has unearthed the names of many Black women musicians who succeeded in making a living in these settings.<sup>148</sup> However, despite the work this involved, Daubney argues that the “blues singer was her own strongest asset,” for while the blues could be performed by any number of musicians, as an expressive form, it relied principally on the vocalist.<sup>149</sup>

Many of the female blues performers of the 1920’s were prolific songwriters themselves, writing on average about a third of the songs they sang. In addition, much of the material they performed but did not write were composed specifically for them, with the lyrics usually written from a woman’s point of view.<sup>150</sup> In fact, Dahl argues that through Ma Rainey and

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<sup>145</sup> Antelyes, “Red Hot Mamas,” 215.

<sup>146</sup> Baraka, *Blues People*, 93.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. The white women entertainers, he is probably thinking of are performers such as Sophie Tucker (1886-1966).

<sup>148</sup> Handy, *Black Women in American Bands*, 157-158.

<sup>149</sup> Kate Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive?” 20.

<sup>150</sup> Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 409.

Smith, a small, but significant thread of women singers continued to write their own material, and she places Holiday as an important part of this tradition.<sup>151</sup>

From the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is possible to perceive that the feminism of the blues divas went beyond singing or even songwriting. Ethel Waters often used a woman pianist – accompanist, Pearl Wright – in performance and on records; Bessie Smith had her own chorus and company; and Mamie Smith picked and controlled her backup band, Mamie Smith’s Jazz Hands.<sup>152</sup>

Other important areas in which the authority of the blues divas were made manifest was in the radical perspectives on marriage and relationships transmitted in many of their performances. Unlike most African-American women of the period, they appeared not to be geographically, economically or socially constrained by domestic duties. For their audiences the blues women appeared to have succeeded in disengaging themselves from the trammels of domesticity.

Much of the material of the blues women of the 1920s challenged the gender politics implicit in traditional cultural representations of marriages or heterosexual relationships.<sup>153</sup> According to Carby, an examination of the work of the classic blues singers of the 1920s reveals “a discourse that articulates a cultural and political struggle over sexual relations; a struggle that is directed against the objectifications of female sexuality within a patriarchal order but which also tries to reclaim women’s bodies as the sexual and sensual objects of women’s song.”<sup>154</sup>

This explains why, of the 252 songs recorded by Smith and “Ma” Rainey, only a handful – such as “Poor Man’s Blues,” “Pinchback Blues” (which warns women not to marry an exploitative man) and “Take Me for a Buggy Ride” (all written by Smith) – refer to marriage in a way which takes

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<sup>151</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 1-2.

<sup>152</sup> Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 409.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>154</sup> Hazel V. Carby, “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime,” in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 474.

the relationship for granted. It also explains why it was possible for Smith to deal with issues such as lesbian relationships and domestic violence in her lyrics, subjects taboo in the dominant culture and the world of Tin Pan Alley.

Thus in “Mistreatin” Daddy” (by Porter Grainger and B. Ricketts), Smith sings about dealing with domestic violence:

*Mistreatin” daddy, you used to knock your mama down,  
when you knew I fell for you  
Had me so nervous I would start jumping ’round,  
yes, every time I saw you  
But I have got you off of my mind.*

In songs such as “Young Women’s Blues”, (written by Smith), the protagonist is simply not interested in marriage. In “Yes, Indeed He Do,” the words criticise the stultifying domestic chores women were compelled to do for their partners. And the extremely sarcastic “Safety Mama” (another Smith composition), humorously criticises the sexual division of labour that confines women to the household.<sup>155</sup>

Thus, until the stock market crash of 1929 temporarily put paid to the profitability of the recording industry, the blues women were on a roll, and artists like Smith were popular role models to thousands of Black women as they delivered messages in song, which defied the male dominance represented by mainstream culture.<sup>156</sup> It should therefore come as no surprise for us to find out that Smith and other blues women enjoyed lifestyles, which also challenged the normal social expectations surrounding female experience. Many of the successful blues divas such as Smith, “Ma” Rainey, Ethel Waters and Alberta Hunter were bisexual or gay.<sup>157</sup> Although

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<sup>155</sup> Bessie Smith, “Mistreating Daddy,” Recorded December 4<sup>th</sup> 1923. Reissued on *Any Women’s Blues*, Columbia, G 30126, 1972; “Young Women’s Blues,” Reissued on *Nobody’s Blues but Mine*, Columbia CG 31093, 1972; “Yes, Indeed He Do,” recorded August 24<sup>th</sup> 1928, Columbia 14354-D. Written by Porter Grainger. Reissued on *Empty Bed Blues*, Columbia GC 30450, 1972; “Safety Mama”, recorded November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1931, Columbia 14634-D. Reissued on *The World’s Greatest Blues Singer*, Columbia CG 33, 1972.

<sup>156</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 41.

<sup>157</sup> Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 410.

most of them married, few of them had children or built families as the centre of their lives, which is why Davis perceives an emancipatory quality about their music which she believes almost certainly would not have been present had their lives been anchored in family pursuits.<sup>158</sup>

### **The “Haunting” of Clarence: Entry into the Jazz Fraternity**

It appears as if the jazz community was one relatively easy for women with the sobriquet of dancer, entertainer or prostitute to gain entry to but more difficult for female musicians. One solution to the problem was that as with most “gentlemen’s clubs” a person’s path to entry might be smoothed if one was able to obtain the recommendation or the support of someone who was already a member, such as a family member or friend. It is interesting to note that the lives of the many female musicians described by Dahl and Placksin reveal that in the South, many women got the opportunity to become musicians via school and family bands. However, undeniably, the jazz fraternity in New York would have been a harder nut to crack for outsiders and women.

In Holiday’s case, entry into the New York jazz scene was partially achieved by what she described in *LSTB* as the “haunting” of her father, Clarence Holiday, once she had moved to New York to be with her mother. Today we would use the word “stalking” rather than “haunting.” Clarence was already established as a guitarist and from 1928 to 1933 was a highly regarded member of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, which was generally recognised as being the pre-eminent orchestra of the day.<sup>159</sup>

Clarence had effectively abandoned Holiday and her mother by marrying Helen Bouldin in 1922, and leaving Baltimore to pursue the peripatetic life of a musician. Commentators on Holiday, such as O’Meally and Nicholson, do some psychologising in their writings and speculate that Clarence’s absence during a crucial period of her early upbringing affected all

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<sup>158</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 72.

<sup>159</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 37.

her emotional relationships.<sup>160</sup> Holiday's friend, Yolanda Bavan, claimed in a television interview that for Holiday "[i]t was a constant search for a father figure. To be loved and protected and looked after. It was a constant search."<sup>161</sup>

Her father's success was such that when Holiday arrived on the jazz scene in New York, she could conveniently be introduced to people as Clarence's daughter. The trumpeter Bill Coleman hearing Holiday for the first time at the Hot-Cha Club recalled that he "could tell instantly that she sounded different from any female singer that I had heard before. I didn't know who she was, but Don Frye...was playing piano for her, and he told me she was Clarence Holiday's daughter."<sup>162</sup> For this particular musician, in the telling of the story, Holiday's status appears to be enhanced by her links to her father, and it becomes easier for him to respect her as well as find her talent interesting. It is interesting to note that in the very first article written about Holiday, she is described as Clarence Holiday's step-daughter; again because jazz fans would, at that stage, have been familiar with Clarence's work with Fletcher Henderson. Later the critic Leonard Feather described her as "a second generation jazz artist."<sup>163</sup>

After her arrival in New York, Holiday's relationship with Clarence was initially cemented by practical rather than artistic concerns. Whenever the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra was playing on their home turf, the Roseland Ballroom in New York, Sadie Fagan would send her daughter over to get some money from him to help towards their rent. In New York City, a combination of low wages and extortionate rents "often resulted in African-Americans spending more than double the percentage of their income on rent than did White families."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 71-73; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 20.

<sup>161</sup> *The Queen of Hearts*, BBC 2, 2010.

<sup>162</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 20.

<sup>163</sup> Hammond, "More Places with Spike," 271; Leonard Feather, *From Satchmo to Miles*, (London: Quartet Books, 1975), 75.

<sup>164</sup> Giddings *When and Where I Enter*, 148.

Holiday's account in *LSTB* of how she would "haunt" Clarence until he came up with the money for rent is both tragic and humorous: "Pop was in his early thirties then, but he didn't want anyone to guess it... He used to plead with me. 'Please,' he'd say, 'whatever you do, don't call me Daddy in front of these people.' 'I'm going to call you Daddy all night unless you give me some damn money for rent,' I'd tell him. That would do it."<sup>165</sup>

As a commentator, O'Meally focuses on the positive outcomes of their complicated father-daughter relationship by describing how Clarence familiarised Holiday with the most important locations and individuals within the jazz community. According to O'Meally, Clarence must have been proud of Holiday as he took her around to the Rhythm Club and the Band Box, places where musicians and other show people could relax, free from the public eye. When she was old enough, she would meet him at Big John's Café on Seventh Avenue in Jungle Alley.<sup>166</sup> Thus, Holiday got used to hanging out with musicians. According to Nicholson, it appears as if "[s]he drank with them, she smoked pot with them and she sat in with them. She was seldom, if ever, pushy."<sup>167</sup> She was perhaps astute enough as a gigging musician to realise that despite his obvious imperfections as a father, Clarence was a handy route into the musical community within which she was working hard to become established.

It is not inconceivable that Holiday would have become recognised as an excellent jazz musician without the aid of her father, but what is certain is that a difficult task would have been even more arduous. In an embryonic fashion, Holiday had started gigging in New York soon after her release from the hospital and workhouse on Welfare Island, but, as do most musicians starting out, she found it very tough going.<sup>168</sup> Holiday's autobiography reveals that in order to get work, she did do a lot of legwork and cold calling.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 32-33.

<sup>166</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 103.

<sup>167</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 36-37.

<sup>168</sup> This was originally known as Blackwell's Island on the East River in New York.

<sup>169</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 33-34.

It is worth mentioning that Clarence was not immediately openly supportive of her talent. In 1932, he had told Bernhardt that he did not believe that Holiday had any future as a singer because her voice was not smooth enough to be popular with the public. Aware of the fact that Holiday was heavily influenced by Louis Armstrong, he also said that he did not think a girl singer should copy Armstrong because so many musicians were doing so already.<sup>170</sup>

However, the independently minded Holiday chose to disregard her father's advice, and by 1935, Clarence's disappointment in her singing appears to have diminished as he was beginning to acknowledge, openly, the complements that many musicians in his milieu were making about his daughter's work. Eventually, he even began to take pride in telling people that his daughter was "the Billie Holiday."<sup>171</sup> It is thus possible to observe that for Clarence, the approval of his peers within the tightly knit jazz community may have significantly influenced his own views of his daughter's talent.

Eventually, overt signs of her father's approval caused Holiday to take his surname for her stage name, and she now changed her last name from Halliday to Holiday.<sup>172</sup> It is interesting to note that, despite all the views expressed by Holiday scholars about her yearning for a father figure, she finally only decided to take on her father's surname once he had both acknowledged her own talent and abilities and given her his approval. It was a truly complex relationship.

Despite the fact that for a period before his death in 1937 they were both working in New York, there exists evidence of only one occasion when they performed together. This was in a band formed by the trumpeter Louis Metcalf at the Bedford Ballroom in Brooklyn in 1936, whose members were all important jazz community insiders.<sup>173</sup> For the fledging jazz vocalist, this

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<sup>170</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 29.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>173</sup> Leonard Kunstadt, "The Story of Louis Metcalf," *Record Research*, October 1962: 9. The other band members were Oran "Hot Lips" Page, trumpet; Lester Young, Rudy Powell, Happy Caldwell, reeds; Jonas Walker, trombone; Billy Taylor, bass; Alfred Taylor, drums

entry into and membership of this most exclusive of clubs was arguably a gift more precious than any money could buy.

One aspect we should also consider is the relationship music has with the bonding experience between musicians. According to Ingrid Monson, “music can be centrally involved not only in the production of performances, but in the establishment and maintenance of human and/or spiritual relationships.”<sup>174</sup> If Holiday’s relationship with her father is viewed in this light, then it may be realised that she could be said to be attempting to achieve the same as other musicians within the jazz community, that is, feelings of solidarity and emotional connections. Monson writes that generally speaking, it is generally assumed that these musical relationships occur between men, as a kind of male bonding, but I would argue that in Holiday’s case we possibly have an example of a father and daughter emotional bonding.

Now however, from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is possible to recognise both the poignancy and irony of the situation as Clarence’s own career as a musician has become a mere footnote to his daughter’s own major influence on the jazz tradition.

For vocalists to survive and thrive in the jazz community once awarded entry – a world where they had to contend with the array of libidos and egos of the male band members and employers, as well as the difficulties associated with the low status of their role – other strategies were available besides the ones previously discussed. How vocalists responded to and resisted the difficulties in their environment was dependant on their individual belief systems, level of maturity and experience of the entertainment industry. According to the critic George T. Simon, to survive, women generally adopted one of three tactics. “Some girls tried very hard to be one of the boys, an attitude that was often resented. Others protected themselves with a pronounced air of independence, which might have been a

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and also, along with Holiday the vocalist Orlando Robeson and dancer Earl “Snakeships” Tucker.

<sup>174</sup> Ingrid Monson, *“Saying Something”: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 181.

good defense maneuver, but also produced much loneliness. Still others tried the extra-feminine approach, which sometimes resulted in the capture of one man for good.”<sup>175</sup>

Holiday’s Basie orchestra replacement, Helen Humes, decided to go down the maternal route. She recalled that she would “often pretend to be asleep on the Basie bus so the boys wouldn’t think I was hearing their rough talk. I’d sew buttons on, cook for them to. I used to carry pots and a little plate around, and I’d fix up some food back stage or in places where it was difficult to get anything to eat when we were down South.”<sup>176</sup>

The trombonist and composer Melba Liston (1926-1999) told Dahl in an interview that once you convinced the other band members you could play, the expectation was that you would also take on maternal duties and in effect do a double shift. She was asked by Dizzy Gillespie to join him on a State Department sponsored tour in 1955, but most of the other members of the band were not happy with this; a typical response being “Goddamn, Birks, you sent all the way for a *bitch*?” Liston proved she was more than up to the job, and relates, “Of course they got about two measures and fell out and got all confused and stuff. And Dizzy said, ‘Now, who’s the bitch...’ So after that I was everybody’s sister, mama, auntie. I was sewin’ buttons, cutting hair and all the rest...I was a woman again.”<sup>177</sup>

Reminiscences collected by Kuehl and writers a generation or so after Holiday’s death reveal that approval of her musicianship often took the form of appreciation of characteristics she possessed that are generally signified as male rather than female in society. She was often viewed by fellow musicians as being “one of the boys,” or given the status of an “honorary man.” The pianist Jimmy Rowles description of his first meeting with her at the Trouville Club in West Hollywood in 1942 provides an excellent example of this, “She was young, and one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen...She

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<sup>175</sup> Simon, *Big Bands*, 36.

<sup>176</sup> Stanley Dance, *The World of Count Basie*, (New York: Scribner and London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), 132.

<sup>177</sup> Dahl, *Stormy Weather*, 265.

was looked up to – one of the guys – no holding back with the language, she loved dirty jokes like we do. I couldn't say enough good about her.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, it appears as if part of the reason Holiday “fitted in” to a hyper-masculine environment was because her presence did not require any modifications in the behaviour of the musicians she worked with. In other words, they did not need to adapt their behaviour and thus any salient features of the masculinist environment itself to take account of the fact that she was a woman. I have already mentioned how when touring with the Count Basie Orchestra, Holiday would gamble to supplement her meagre income. The trombonist Benny Morton, when reminiscing about this period, recollected that “If the guys played cards, Billie could play cards with them, if they shot craps, she could shoot crap. A lot of men don't like to play with women, because they feel they usually take away their luck, but with Billie it was okay.”<sup>179</sup>

Thus in the texts of commentators and writers, Holiday was presented, or may even have chosen to present herself, as the complete but uncomplicated package: an attractive woman with the attitudes and personality characteristics usually associated with the male of the jazz species. This perceived personality type was probably appreciated because it helped to simplify the inevitably chaotic life-style many jazz musicians had to put up with, where, for example, they were often forced to live and perform in situations in close proximity with each other, whilst touring in cramped buses or sharing low standard accommodation and backstage facilities in clubs and theatres.

Holiday was also relaxed about being often the only female in male company, a trait she appears to have possessed even as a child. Her childhood friend, Freddie Green, recalled that Eleanora liked playing pitcher on the sandlot baseball team where she would be the only girl, and roller-skating through the streets with her baseball friends.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 81.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; Holiday, *LSTB*, 58.

<sup>180</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 65-66.

O'Meally even goes so far as to speculate that her father Clarence encouraged this type of behaviour. According to O'Meally,

When he *was* around, he did not care much about whether she sat up straight, went to church, or made good grades in school. He had seen her rough housing with the neighbouring boys and had laughed and called her "Bill." To him, stopping by now and again, she was his own smart little tomboy whether she was her mama's good little girl or not.<sup>181</sup>

Part of O'Meally's own approval of Holiday appears to be linked to her possession of what are usually deemed to be male characteristics.

It is certainly true that Holiday's personality traits, like most of us, encompassed both "male" and "female" aspects: what is interesting however is that in order to be considered a jazz musician rather than a mere canary, many male commentators and fellow musicians preferred to emphasise their approval of her masculine characteristics.

### **Female Networks within the Jazz Community**

The previous strategies discussed could be effective for individual women when they were the lone female in male environments, but an often-overlooked tactic was to consciously or unconsciously join together and collaborate with other female friends and colleagues within the jazz community. As I have shown, one of the consequences of the fierce discrimination experienced by women in the jazz community has been that they have largely been invisible as active agents in the grand historical narratives of the genre. This cloak of invisibility was an integral part of the warp and weft of jazz historiography for such a long time that it has implications for our study of Holiday, and it can be argued that it has skewed and distorted our understanding of how she collaborated with her female creative colleagues and friends. One cannot help but be struck by the fact that, in much of Holiday's biographical material, relatively comprehensive information is presented on the successful male musicians or artists she

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

worked with, but the women in Holiday's contemporary creative circle – some of whom had apparently successful careers in the entertainment industry – have already almost disappeared from the historical record, or become mere footnotes in the story of her life and the history of jazz. It could be argued that this has to be considered an aspect of the ephemeral nature of “show business,” but a more accurate supposition for this state of affairs is that it is an inevitable consequence of what Tucker describes as “devaluation and absence,” or Cavin more charitably as the “benign neglect” of women in jazz and swing historiography.<sup>182</sup>

Close readings of the biographical literature reveal that Holiday was part of a female network that both supported and influenced her career choices. The names of artistic female colleagues and friends such as Memry Midgett (1920-2013), Irene Armstrong, Helen Oakley Dance (1913-2001), and female vocalists who had important influences on the development of her performance style, such as Mabel Mercer (1900-1984), do get mentioned in the Holiday biographies.<sup>183</sup> However, in most of the biographical treatments, these women's influence on Holiday's life and work are skated over, or else rarely followed up. Nevertheless, their presence suggests that despite the hyper-masculine nature of much of the jazz community, women were able to either carve out or negotiate artistic spaces for themselves. As Griffin points out in her discussion of Holiday's friendship circle, “[t]here were a number of black and white women writing songs in the thirties...I think they all influenced each other; they played cards together, they drank together, they used drugs unfortunately, some of them together. They fought; they made love. And so she did know all of these different women.”<sup>184</sup> Despite the difficulties she experienced in her life, Holiday was also clearly a beneficiary of the increased freedom in American urban societies that women had begun to experience since the 1920s.

The lifestyles of many of the women in Holiday's network obviously chafed against what Collins has described as the “controlling images of Black

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<sup>182</sup> Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 3; Cavin, “Missing Women,” 14.

<sup>183</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*.

<sup>184</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin in *Billie and Me: A Celebration of Billie Holiday*, Programme Two.

Womanhood,” that is, the tragic mulatto, the ridiculous maid or mammy figure, or the hypersexual jezebel.<sup>185</sup> It is documented that as an active and lively young woman, Holiday enjoyed a frenetic, carefree lifestyle in Harlem. There is evidence from friends and colleagues that she went out often in search of good music. The guitarist Danny Barker described the exhausting round of clubs, and dinner and dance spots Holiday and her friends would frequent. Often she would sit in for a few numbers at one club before moving on to another.<sup>186</sup> At dawn she usually ended up at the Clam House on 131 West 133 Street for breakfast, where Gladys Bentley, dressed in male attire, performed “naughty songs”; on most Sunday mornings, after Holiday had finished working, she and what Barker describes as a “fast crowd” went up by car to the White Castle night-club in Westchester county for breakfast. With her friend, Irene Armstrong, Holiday even ended up on occasions going to Irish bars where she would sing Irish songs.<sup>187</sup> For artists on low or even no income at all, the accommodation to poverty in Harlem in the Black population as a whole meant that they were able to maintain a creative and social lifestyle of sorts. For example, once a person became a regular client, the owner of the Moulin Rouge Café would allow them to run up a tab when times were financially tough.<sup>188</sup>

The relative freedom experienced by most women in the jazz community was one of the (unforeseen) benefits of being Black, too poor or too unconventional to merit inclusion into the previously mentioned Cult of True Womanhood, even though aspects of its ideology became an aspiration for some African American women.<sup>189</sup> The behaviour of Holiday and her friends did not always conform to the strictures of the Black clubwomen’s

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<sup>185</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009, 76.

<sup>186</sup> Danny Barker, *A Life in Jazz*, (Macmillan, London, 1986),135-137.

<sup>187</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 96.

<sup>188</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 43-44.

<sup>189</sup> Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,”151-174.

reworking of Victorian morality.<sup>190</sup> For Holiday and her companions, it was the public sphere (i.e. the streets and clubs of Harlem), rather than the domestic realm (i.e. the nuclear family, domesticity and subservience) which provided the avenue for feelings of empowerment.<sup>191</sup>

Blackburn's analysis of Kuehl's interviews has enabled her to document some of the intensity of the female friendships Holiday was engaged in with individuals who were often rivals for her affection.<sup>192</sup> Among the photographs in Clarke and O'Meally's works is one from the Linda Kuehl Archive, showing Holiday with a group of people sitting at a table in Café Society in 1944.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 199-200.

<sup>191</sup> Other classes and races of women also used various means to extend their freedom outside the domestic environment. Eleanor Alexander's essay, documents how as either customers or entrepreneurs, white middle class women used tearooms as a way to escape the domestic environment and onerous strictures placed on their day-to-day freedom in order to gain social and economic independence. Eleanor Alexander, "Women's Place is in the Tea Room': White Middle-Class American Women as Entrepreneurs and Customers," *The Journal of American Culture*, 32, Issue 2, (2009): 126-136.

<sup>192</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 93 and Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 26 for Carmen McRae's comments on Holiday.

<sup>193</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, between pages 148-149; O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 6-17.



Figure 1. Dorothy Donegan, Billie Holiday, Irene Armstrong and Kenny Clarke. Photograph from the Linda Kuehl Archive.

Holiday is centre-stage, smiling and looking at the camera, sporting large earrings and with her hair wrapped in a magnificent turban. To her right is Dorothy Donegan (1922-1998). Donegan was already an “up and coming” artist when this photograph was taken, who during her lifetime was recognised for her technical brilliance at the piano, gloriously uninhibited performances and natural rapport with audiences. In the photograph with Holiday, Donegan is looking rather shy – perhaps she was feeling rather overawed in the presence of Holiday and the other more established musicians sharing the table. On Holiday’s left is Irene Armstrong, who has her head turned towards her left, and is staring at the drummer and bandleader Kenny Clarke (1914-1985) who completes the group around the table.

Clarke’s place as a drummer and composer in the development of innovative and stylistic techniques in jazz is now well documented.<sup>194</sup>

However, our knowledge and awareness of Donegan’s contribution appears

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<sup>194</sup>For example, Ed Thigpen, “Kenny Clarke: Jazz Pioneer,” *Modern Drummer*, viii/2 (1984), 16-21, 72-3 and Mike Hennessey, *Klook: The Story of Kenny Clarke*, (London: Quartet, 1990).

to be growing ever fainter. Why is this? Is it merely an inevitability of the passage of time? Donegan may or may not have been an important part of Holiday's network. However, the reason she is being discussed here is because she provides us with an example of how the flames of even the brightest of female jazz stars can be extinguished from the historical record in the matter of a generation or so.

The following case study examines how some of the women in Holiday's milieu collaborated to produce new material, bringing to the forefront knowledge not only about how women were an integral part of the jazz community, but also regarding how they used their network to bring new work to audiences.

Irene Armstrong, Holiday's closest friend at the end of the 1930s, was the composer of the music for "Some Other Spring"<sup>195</sup> (Appendix 2). Information about Armstrong comes from six major sources. In the front of Chilton's book, her name is included among the ninety-five acknowledgements, so it is possible that Chilton had the opportunity to interview her before she died in the mid-1970s. She was also interviewed by her friend, the music critic and Artist and Repertoire Director, Helen Oakley, who wrote a chapter about Armstrong in Stanley Dance's book, *The World of Earl Hines* (1977). In Placksin's book, there is a long section on her life and work. Mary Unterbrink has a short section on about Armstrong in her book on female jazz keyboard players. Alun Morgan has written a short article on her, much of it appears to be gleaned from Oakley's article. Finally, Linda Kuehl interviewed her on November 27th 1971, and excerpts from the transcript of this interview are included in Blackburn's work, *With Billie* (2005).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Armstrong was married three times, so commonly comes under the name of one or two her three husbands, that is Elden/Edie, Wilson and Kitchings, and when mistaken for the songwriter Irene Higginbotham, the surname Higginbotham is added. For the purposes of this work, I will, be using her original family name, Armstrong.

<sup>196</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, "Acknowledgments,"; Helen Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," in Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines*, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1977), 179-182; Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 109-116; Mary Unterbrink: *Jazz Women at the Keyboard*, Jefferson, N.C./London: McFarland, 1983), 60-61; Alun Morgan, "Lost in Meditation: Irene Who?" *Jazz Journal*, 53, no.10 (October 2000):10; Blackburn, *With Billie*, 95-97.

Holiday recorded four of Armstrong's songs in 1939 and 1940 – "Some Other Spring," "Ghost of Yesterday," "What Is This Going to Get Us," and "I'm Pulling Through" and they became an important part of her repertoire. (Appendix 2).

Irene Armstrong lived and worked as a piano player and bandleader in Chicago during the years of Prohibition and the Depression. Born in Ohio, she had moved to Detroit and then to Chicago as a teenager and by 1930 had become a well-known bandleader in the city; even Al Capone, was a fan and so she always had plenty of work.<sup>197</sup> Thus Armstrong was highly respected even within the hyper-masculine environment of the jazz community because her talent and ability.

The tenor saxophonist, Paul Quinichette (1916-1983), who regarded most of the popular bandleaders of the period as being merely "baton wavers," considered that "Irene was the first woman and the greatest of them all. She knew how to handle the men and she was also a composer and writer."<sup>198</sup>

Nowadays, more is known about the work of her partner, the pianist Teddy Wilson. However, it is important to note that when their marriage commenced, artistically and perhaps even economically, Armstrong was the more established and successful of the two musicians. Loren Schoenberg has even argued that Armstrong was instrumental in the rapid development of Teddy Wilson's playing. Holiday clearly thought that Armstrong was the most musically talented of the two and claimed that with respect to the partnership between Armstrong and Wilson that Teddy Wilson "was a boy when she met, taught and married him."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," 179; Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 110 and 112; Wilson, *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz*, 16.

<sup>198</sup> Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 110. See also Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin'*, 127 for the comments of Joe Marsala (1907-1978) on her style.

<sup>199</sup> David Brent Johnson's radio programme "Ghosts of Yesterday: Billie Holiday and the Two Irene's (A Jazz Mystery)," is part of the *Night Lights* series and was originally broadcast by Radio WFIU 103.7 FM, Bloomington Indiana, on March 4, 2006. It is now archived online. <http://indianapublicmedia.org/nightlights/ghosts-of-yesterday-billie-holiday-and-the-two-irenes-a-jazz-mystery/> Accessed July 19 2016.

Armstrong told Oakley that she had had to give up performing when her husband was offered the chance in 1933 to work in New York because her mother-in-law disliked her working in public places and at the time felt that her husband's career was more important than her own.<sup>200</sup>

Armstrong first met Holiday at the Hot Shot Club on Seventh Avenue in 1935, when she first began working with Teddy Wilson for her early recordings for the Columbia label, and they became firm friends from the beginning.<sup>201</sup> This friendship became an even more important and vital part of their lives when Armstrong's marriage fell apart as Wilson's career took off. For Armstrong, the end of her marriage was devastating both emotionally and economically. She had to deal with problems such as having her electricity cut off and even held rent parties to keep herself afloat financially. In addition, her health began to deteriorate as she became afflicted with Eales disease, a rare visual disorder that eventually caused her to become blind.<sup>202</sup>

Nevertheless, the end of the marriage saw the reassertion of her creativity, and Armstrong came back, not as a player but as a composer, collaborating on all but one of her songs with the lyricist Arthur Herzog (1900-1983). Writing these songs appeared to help her cope with her grief.<sup>203</sup> Holiday introduced her to Herzog who, in his words, "began to equip her music with songs."<sup>204</sup> They appeared to be ideal collaborators as when he received her music Herzog never felt the need to make any changes. <sup>205</sup> When her emotional state and health deteriorated, further she went to live with an aunt in Cleveland, and remarried before passing away in the 1970s.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," 181.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," 182; National Institute of Health, Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center (GARD) at [http://rarediseases.info.nih.gov?GARD/Condition/6309/Eales\\_disease.aspx](http://rarediseases.info.nih.gov?GARD/Condition/6309/Eales_disease.aspx) , accessed June 14, 2011.

<sup>203</sup> Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 111; Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," 181.

<sup>204</sup> Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 111.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 112.

“Some Other Spring” has generally been appreciated by critics and musicians alike for its subtlety and sensitivity.<sup>207</sup> Holiday’s affinity with the song can be ascertained from the fact that “Some Other Spring” was the title of the first chapter of her autobiography and she constantly regretted that the song, although generally acknowledged to be beautiful, was never successful commercially.<sup>208</sup>

There are various descriptions available of how the song came into being. Holiday remembers it developing organically out of one of the many jam sessions, which were an important part of the social scene within the jazz community. During her radio interview with Willis Conover she discussed the creation of “Some Other Spring,” saying that they “were just sittin’ around playing, and she [Armstrong] got inspired and wrote the tune – but like Benny says, ‘*That’s not gonna – nothing’s gonna happen with the tune, it’s too beautiful!*’ And he just didn’t make sense to us, y’know; but he was right. He says, ‘Maybe in years to come.’”<sup>209</sup>

Holiday’s decision to record original music written by people in her milieu is interesting, as it indicates that she was looking for innovative material and was prepared to take a gamble and record what did not immediately appear to be commercially viable – as she had already done with the song “Strange Fruit”, which will be studied in chapter five. Also of interest is the fact that Holiday’s reminiscences contradict the idea that the usual locations for jam sessions were private clubs and dance halls. Here we have an instance, in Holiday’s memory at least, of a jam session in a domestic environment, which suggests it was a usual occurrence.

In her interview with Kuehl in 1971, Armstrong gave two versions of events surrounding the song’s genesis. Firstly, she said that after she had written the music, Holiday encouraged her to meet up with Arthur Herzog.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 117. See also Jimmy Rowles’s comments in Placksin, *Jazzwomen*, 109 and O’Meally, *Lady Day*, 141.

<sup>208</sup> Billie Holiday, “Willis Conover Interviews Billie Holiday,” *Metronome*. February 1957, 25.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 184.

Armstrong then says that she played the music whilst Holiday sang Herzog's lyrics for her, which intimates that somehow Herzog had already received a copy of the music. This version suggests that even though Holiday was still a young singer, at the beginning of her career, she had developed sufficient knowledge of the jazz community, which she used to good effect, to point Armstrong in the direction of a respected lyricist. However, in the same interview, Armstrong herself immediately discounted this version of events with the words, "No! Here's how it went," as if remembering what really happened. She then explained that she had actually gone to see Herzog with the young Carmen McRae (1920-1994).<sup>211</sup> Then, on another occasion when the group of friends were having dinner at the home of Helen Oakley, she said that she played the song, and McRae sang it; when they had finished, "Lady was sitting there with tears in her eyes, and she said 'Renie, I want to make that song.' And I said, 'Lady, you know it's yours.'"<sup>212</sup>

At the initial stages of the song's composition, Armstrong provided the location (her home), the food and drink, and the song itself. Later, on another social occasion – dinner at Helen Oakley's – McRae, Holiday and Oakley all appeared to have collaborated to bring the song to the public's attention. This is an excellent example of how women working together were able to utilise and effectively circumvent obstructions, such as Goodman's opinion on the song's commercial viability, to get original work out to the public. Despite Goodman's negative opinion, Holiday went ahead and recorded it anyway, with her own small group under her own name, on July 5<sup>th</sup> 1939.

In retrospect, it is possible to recognise also the creative influence of the more mature Irene Armstrong on the younger Holiday. In the context of a discussion of the influence of Popular Front cabaret on Holiday's performance style, Michael Denning argues that Holiday did not only adopt the work of her friend – a mutual debt which is acknowledged when Holiday sings, "thanks for this song" in Armstrong's "I'm Pulling Through" – but she also began to compose songs herself and recorded in 1939 and 1940 what he

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<sup>211</sup>Oakley, "Irene Kitchings," 182.

<sup>212</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 184.

describes as “women’s laments”: “Everything Happens for the Best,” “Long Gone Blues,” “Fine and Mellow,” “Our Love is Different,” and “Tell Me More and More and Then Some”<sup>213</sup> (Appendix 2). According to Denning, these songs signalled an innovative form of creative expression for Holiday, which would ultimately result in standards such as “God Bless the Child” (1941), and “Don’t Explain” (1944) (Appendix 2).<sup>214</sup> Thus, he regards Holiday’s relationship with Armstrong, as being is a crucial one, if the songs are treated as being like Armstrong’s songs, “dramas of desire, tales of resignation and assertion.”<sup>215</sup> For Denning, “the 1939-40 love songs of Holiday and Kitchings [Armstrong] have a richer palette: ‘our love is different,’ Holiday sings. The word ‘hope’ is crucial to her finest recording of a Kitchings’s [Armstrong’s] song, ‘I’m Pulling Through’ in which she is echoed by Lester Young’s solo.”<sup>216</sup>

It is for this reason that Denning makes the case that, just as it is now generally acknowledged that Holiday’s collaboration with Teddy Wilson on the Columbia recordings was an important period in her career, that her collaboration with Armstrong was probably just as significant.<sup>217</sup> Although Arthur Herzog wrote the lyrics for Armstrong’s slow tempo “I’m Pulling Through”, the words beautifully encapsulate the nature of Armstrong and Holiday’s mutually supportive friendship.

*And you taught me how to carry on  
Thanks for the lift in time  
And thanks for this song.*<sup>218</sup>

Therefore, it is possible to speculate that Herzog had been aware of the nature of the women’s relationship or had been encouraged to write words, which reflected it.

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<sup>213</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 344.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

From the above it is apparent that close reading of the Holiday material provides evidence that Holiday was part of a network of women artists and jazz insiders who supported each other emotionally and creatively, and thus it can be seen that she collaborated with women as well as men within the jazz community.

This situation has significance for modern scholars wishing to write about Holiday and her relationships with other females within the jazz world. A relatively contemporary writer, Clarke, whose biography on Holiday was published in 1994, provides an example of the continued downplaying of the importance of Holiday's female fellow travellers, and the perpetuation of women's marginalisation in the dominant discourse on the history of jazz. In his biography, Clarke discusses events, which occurred between Holiday and her accompanist, the astute and intelligent Memry Midgett, who toured with her in 1953 and 1954. When starting to work with Holiday, Midgett immediately identified the singer's major problems as being the parasitic nature of the economic relationship, which existed between Holiday and her husband Louis McKay, and with her agent Joe Glaser.<sup>219</sup> Midgett suggested that Holiday be paid directly after performing (which she agreed to); that she fire her "self-centred" agent, Joe Glaser (she initially agreed to this, then backed off); and that she stayed off drugs (she tried to do this, but weakened).<sup>220</sup>

With Midgett's support, a severely malnourished Holiday began to gain the confidence to use her own money and spend it on clothing for herself. Clarke however, chooses to dilute Midgett's testimony by inserting a defence of McKay's behaviour in an apparent attempt to censure the views that Midgett expressed to Kuehl when she was interviewed. According to Clarke, Midgett's age, race and gender were impediments to a correct understanding of the situation, rather than the very factors, which would have given her the insight and empathy to understand properly, Holiday's

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<sup>219</sup> Clarke, *Billie Holiday*, 376-377.

<sup>220</sup> Dave Newhouse, "Oakland Woman Played for Billie Holiday", *Mercury News*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010. [http://www.mercurynews.com/columns/ci\\_16761096](http://www.mercurynews.com/columns/ci_16761096) Accessed August 1st, 2016; "Memry Midgett Obituary" *East Bay Times*, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/eastbaytimes/obituary-print.aspx?n=memry-midgett> Accessed August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

predicament. In Clarke's view, "Memry was only twenty-three years old in 1954; she had got close to Lady because she was a black woman, but from a completely different sort of background, and didn't use drugs or drink very much; these very differences meant that she did not understand what she was involved with."<sup>221</sup> This dismissal is one of the many examples of the exclusionary masculinist policing of the historical record committed by Clarke and other writers in jazz.

The increasingly toxic relationship between Midgett and McKay meant that she was eventually forced to stop working for Holiday.<sup>222</sup> At the time of her interview with Kuehl in the early 1970's, Midgett was still clearly disappointed that Holiday had died before her divorce was finalised, with the result that all of her estate had been left to McKay.<sup>223</sup> Throughout her life, Holiday's finances had been challenging, but her death resulted in a resurgence of interest in her work, and by the end of 1959, the accruing royalties were estimated to be \$100,000, with McKay as the sole beneficiary.

Perhaps to counter Clarke's negative views of Midgett, Blackburn devotes an entire chapter of her book to Kuehl's interview with her, providing us with a more complex and nuanced understanding of her character and testimony than does Clarke.<sup>224</sup> Blackburn's book effectively counterbalances Clarke's approach, and provides the evidence that Kuehl collated other testimonies from female friends and colleagues of Holiday, such as Claire Lievenson, the dancer and entertainer Ruby Helena, and the trombonist Melba Liston.

Clarke's own view on who were Holiday's best friends is revealed in the caption to one of the photographs in his book, which shows Count Basie with six musicians who had been members of the band from 1939 to 1943.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>222</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*. 259.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 259-260.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 249-260.

<sup>225</sup> In the photograph are *Left to right*: Dickie Wells, Buddy Tate, Count Basie, Buck Clayton, Jo Jones, Freddie Green and Earle Warren. Photograph taken by Nancy Miller Elliott. In Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, between 148 and 149.



Figure 2. Count Basie with six band musicians. Photography by Nancy Miller Elliott.

Clarke's caption says "Some of the best friends Lady ever had." This may certainly be the case, but they were certainly not the *only* best friends Holiday had. A picture of Holiday surrounded by contemporaneous female artists may send out a different kind of message to later generations of women.

To sum up, Clarke's work highlights the possible problems arising from the lack of awareness of gender and power issues in male biographies of female subjects – the most serious being the denigration of female perceptions and standpoints – as well as the value of the evidence provided by female testimonies. This failure to recognise the importance of Holiday's network of female colleagues and friends is one of the factors which supports the perpetuation of her historical persona as the sole female genius in a sea of suits, a portrayal which is similar to the previously discussed presentation of female vocalists in the swing era and the portrayal of exceptional women in

the dominant jazz discourse.<sup>226</sup> This representation was perhaps an accurate one for Holiday when in performance mode, but it is not valid as soon as one attempts a holistic examination of the singer's music and career both on and off the stage.

Female relationships could be imaginary as well as practical, and constructed in acts of musical homage as well as in face-to-face collaboration. The song "Taint Nobody's Bizness if I Do" (Appendix 2) is discussed here because of the links and influences it reveals about the vocal styles of the blues women and their counter cultural ideology on Holiday. Holiday recorded the song on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1949 with Buster Keating and his Orchestra for the Decca label as a tribute to Smith, who had originally recorded it in her earliest recording session in February 1923.

The song is an eight-bar vaudeville "blues," which, after it was recorded by Anna Meyer and the Original Memphis Five in 1922, became an early blues standard. On her recording, Smith is accompanied by the pianist composer Clarence Williams (1908-1965). The song became one of Smith's most popular numbers on the road, and the singer Ruby Walker remembers it as "having had a particular mesmerizing effect" on audiences.<sup>227</sup> Chris Albertson interprets this as indicating that besides the beauty and power of Smith's voice, the song was considered symbolically important because "[a]udiences also liked Bessie's defiance, which came through in many of her songs, but perhaps nowhere as forcefully as on 'Tain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do.'"<sup>228</sup>

In Smith's recording, the piano provides a six bar introduction and a rather static basic accompaniment. But the limitations of the piano playing

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<sup>226</sup> Tucker, 2001-2, "Big Ears," 385.

<sup>227</sup> Chris Albertson, *Bessie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 43.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43. Interestingly, Cavin argues that an important hallmark of the voodoo queen was the defiance, pride and vivid symbolism which she considers is reminiscent of the compositions of the blues women of the 1920's and she cites an old voodoo song which was originally sang in patois as an illustration of this. Cavin, "Missing Women," 10. Appendix 2.

are not foregrounded, as the song is all about the power and passion of Smith's life, which is expressed by the power and passion of her voice.<sup>229</sup>

The slow and steady tempo allows Smith plenty of time to enunciate the words and for her audience to take on board the provocative nature of her statements. And it is important to remember that the lyrics were meant to be shocking, particularly as she introduces the song by cocking a snook at religious conservatives by crossing over the dividing line between the religious and secular.

The vocal quality of Smith's voice is resonant and sonorous, with an emphasis on sustained vowel sounds. She offers up her characteristically big sound throughout the recording without variations in volume or intensity. The vowel sounds are used to display the intensity of her feelings and demonstrate her subtle control over pitch via the use of slides, glissandi and blues notes. The vocal space Smith occupies is mid-range for a female voice; she focuses on the G above middle C as a point of reference. The melody spans the range from the A flat above that G, down to the B flat below middle C, thus a mere seventh in tonal space. However, Holiday still makes use of a subtle interplay of intonation within that narrow range.<sup>230</sup>

"Tain't Nobody's Bizness" was Smith's first recording, but when Holiday recorded it in 1949 she was already a mature artist. Like Smith, she made the song a regular part of her repertoire. Holiday's tribute plays with the fact that many people in her audiences would already be familiar with Smith's version. However, whilst Holiday plays homage, she also provided a contrast to her mentor, both instrumentally and vocally, by producing something innovative, which modernises the song to fit the swing template.

Listening to both versions, one is immediately stuck by the fact that the quality of Holiday's voice differs from that of Smith's. As already discussed, Holiday was conscious of the fact that Smith's big sound was not a realistic goal as her own voice was lighter and therefore less powerful.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Albertson is even more damning in his critique of William's piano playing describing it as "robotic" (Ibid.).

<sup>230</sup> Burns, "Feeling the Style," 7.

<sup>231</sup> Holiday, "Willis Conover Interviews Billie Holiday" 24.

Vocally, Holiday was faced with the challenge that her voice might be submerged by the wall of sound, the main feature of the swing orchestra. Fortunately, because of the advances in microphone technology that had taken place by the time Holiday had commenced her career she was liberated from the burden of having to produce a big sound and was therefore free to focus on other aspects of the music.<sup>232</sup>

Despite her lighter voice, she is never overwhelmed by an orchestra with the instrumental balance tipping in the favour of the horns. But that is also because the horns punctuate the end of her lines: they do not play across each other, apart from quiet chords to back her up. Holiday focuses on playing around with the rhythm and nuances of the words. In contrast to Smith's version, the intensity of emotion in the lyrics is transmitted by the horns, rather than by the vocals. The horns transform what (on Smith's version) was Williams' rather plodding piano introduction into a strident and urgent soundscape. Like Smith, Holiday sings the verses of the second part of the song a cappella and the horns make interjections, as did Williams, as if to highlight certain words and phrases. For example, after the words "If my friend ain't got any money" there is an interjection and another after "And I say take all of mine honey." Describing the use of this technique by Louis Armstrong on Smith's rendition of "St. Louis Blues," Alyn Shipton argues that "[i]nterjections between the vocal phrases" – what Buck Clayton described earlier on in this thesis as "filling up the windows" – "is both an emphatic and assertive commentary on the lyrics and a lament which is sufficiently powerful in its own right."<sup>233</sup>

Perhaps Holiday took the decision to record the song a minor third lower than Smith did in order to bring her performance of it closer to the more heavy feeling of Smith's vocal sound.<sup>234</sup> The refrain, "Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do" also provides Holiday with the opportunity to sustain some long vowels, imitating the quality of Smith's voice. Besides their

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<sup>232</sup> Lockheart, "History of Early Microphone Singing," 379.

<sup>233</sup> Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 135.

<sup>234</sup> Burns, "Feeling the Style," 9.

difference in vocal quality, Holiday's version has more fluidity and uses unpredictable rhythms and accents to replace the more conventional rhythmic arrangement of Smith's version. According to Burns, Holiday succeeds in lifting the work out of its original classic blues context by,

introducing musical gestures that belong to a different time and socio-musical context...The effect...is that Holiday's expression is more introspective...more musically nostalgic (given that it is an homage to Smith and that it is a late-career recording for Holiday), her subjectivity revealed in her through disruption of musical expectations.<sup>235</sup>

In light of Burns's comments, it would be useful to consider Holiday's performance in the context of Georgina Born's examination of the musical assemblage, wherein she builds on and develops an approach initiated by Theodor Adorno who argued that that music is potentially a form of praxis, that is, that it is also a form of political action.<sup>236</sup>

Born points out that the jazz assemblage in particular is focussed on the moment of performance, which is "grounded in aesthetics of collaborative improvisation...in which the interaction is at once musical and social." However, it is also captured in the moment as a commodity by the creation of a recording. This means that jazz, like other recorded popular music, is able to be disseminated and recognised beyond its original time and location. Importantly for Born, "it becomes the aural means of educating and socializing other musicians and later generations, who are thereby empowered to create something new or to cover, re-work or transform the original."<sup>237</sup> She argues that if the ideas of the anthropologist Alfred Gell are connected to cultural history, it is possible to recognise that for artists, broader discourses of time can be internalised in creative agency and powerfully inform their intentions. In other words, "[d]iscourses of time are entangled in and inform agency."<sup>238</sup> Born's ideas are useful when linked with

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>236</sup> Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>237</sup> Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity. *twentieth-century music* 2, no.1 (March 2005): 27.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 24.

concepts such as Signifying and the double-discourse in African-American music.

Contemporary female singers wishing to venture into the emotional terrain of this song face difficulties. It has often been accused of sanctioning female masochism or violence against women, because the versions sung by Smith and Holiday contain the words,

*Well, I'd rather my man would hit me  
Than for him to jump up and quit me  
Ain't nobody's business if I do  
I swear I won't call no copper  
If I'm beat up by my poppa.<sup>239</sup>*

The jazz singer Susannah McCorkle has written about this problematic aspect of the lyrics. In her performances, she made the decision to “stop singing lyrics that romanticised cruelty and dependence” by “not glamorizing masochism.”<sup>240</sup> Clearly, no one would want to disagree with this, but the situation is complex, as writers such as Stacy Holman Jones and Davis have also argued that because of Holiday’s use of “ironic edginess” in her treatment of her material, a song like “Nobody’s Biz-Ness” can only be treated as a song of defiance and celebration of freedom.<sup>241</sup> How can this be?

The song contains a range of extreme actions, which the singer says she has the right to undertake to demonstrate her freedom as an individual. According to Davis, when using her voice, Holiday was able to transform songs from their composer’s original intent and “convey a sense of deliverance and release as if she is challenging the accepted gender roles within love relationships.”<sup>242</sup> The views of Jones and Davis can appear mystifying until one actually sees footage of Holiday in performance. Her performance of “Don’t Explain” on *Art Ford’s Jazz Party* television

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<sup>239</sup> Taint Nobody’s Biz-Ness is the sort of song where the lyrics and hence the extreme actions are often changed by vocalists in performances to suit themselves or their audiences.

<sup>240</sup> Susannah McCorkle, “I Swear I Won’t Call No Copper If I’m Beat Up By My Poppa,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1994, 33.

<sup>241</sup> Jones, *Torch Singing*, 88; Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 176.

<sup>242</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 176.

programme, from July 17, 1958, is delivered with an air of defiance, in complete contrast to the lyrics, which appear to be offering unconditional forgiveness to an adulterous partner. One realises that what really mattered to Holiday and to the classic blues singers of an earlier generation was not always so much the lyrics, but the emotions being transmitted and shared communally with their audiences. In other words, there were occasions when performance attitudes could override or convey meaning contrary to the statements in the lyrics.

Smith and Holiday's treatment of the song can be better understood in the context of the notion of "Signifying" or indirect (hidden) expression, of which irony is an important component. "Signifying" is a vernacular practice going back decades, which was theorised by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in a literary-critical context. It is rooted in Black vernacular culture, the institution of slavery and the need to create a "private yet communal" collection of acts of speech which function as a double-voiced metadiscourse – texts that talk to (and often critique) other texts. It therefore constitutes a playful performative discourse that speaks and comments on culture, politics and aural and written texts, and can disturb the silence about that which is unspoken outside of the performance. Its crucial importance as a *modus operandi* is realised when one understands that Signifying is a performative practice available to anyone who wishes to communicate information about and contra ideology, discourse, and difference.<sup>243</sup> If Gate's description of signifying practice is taken on board, then it can be argued that "Nobody's Biz-Ness" "signifies" because it oscillates between a latent surface meaning, and a less obvious inner one, that is, between that which can be said and that which cannot yet be uttered. Most importantly, it suggests that Signifying still has a viable and necessary function at the time of the recording because oppressive conditions, which brought it into, use still exists within society.

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<sup>243</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xiv, xxv, 46-47. See also Dana L Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2, no.2 (1999), 178-179 where she discusses how in interviews with African-American mill workers, speakers gesture toward what cannot be uttered in the context of an oppressive situation.

In “Nobody’s Biz-Ness,” all the things which society deems to be essential to a person’s existence – life itself (she is prepared to jump into the ocean), respectability (she is prepared to dance on the ceiling), religion (she is prepared to enjoy secular activities after going to church, money (she is prepared to give away all the money that she has) – count as nothing if, as a human being she is not given to freedom to make mistakes in these areas. Underpinning the singer’s determination to carry out the extreme actions in the song is what is unsaid, which is that the ability to make choices and mistakes is fundamental to the human condition and that has to come before anything else. It is the only necessary requirement, and certainly must come before the pressure, power and opinions of those “folks” referred to in the first verse, which can symbolise individuals or oppressive forces in society as a whole. Holiday thus signifies upon the politics of respectability inherent within the values possessed by a bourgeois segment of society, which she was largely marginal to, as a jazz musician and working class African-American. Her performance also has echoes of a historical period when because of slavery African-American men and women did not have the freedom to make *any* decisions at all, however sensible or impractical. This explains why Davis argues that Holiday in her material is able to convey a sense of deliverance and release; that she is “able to project in her music the female strength she seemed chronically incapable of achieving in her own life.”<sup>244</sup> According to Davis, “[t]he visions of women’s independence and autonomy that flow from her music may indeed have helped – at a time when feminist consciousness had not been popularly and extensively articulated – awaken women to their worth and the potential the prevailing society denied them.”<sup>245</sup>

Holiday may have taken up the song in the same spirit of defiance as Smith. During the period it was recorded, she had twice got away, relatively unscathed, from the clutches of the law, who had wanted her and her then partner John Levy incarcerated for alleged drug procession. Therefore, the words could have been interpreted by her audiences as representing her

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<sup>244</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 176.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

defiance towards the American State and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in particular.<sup>246</sup> The song served to reinforce her “notoriety.”<sup>247</sup>

Sadly, “Tain’t Nobody’s Bizness” was one of the songs that provided the full stop to both Holiday’s recording and performing career. It was one of the two songs she sang at her very last performance, which was held at the Phoenix Theater in Greenwich Village on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1959, before her extreme frailty caused her to be led from the stage.

A public persona linked to glamour and defiance, which had been a source of strength for Black women in the entertainment business during the 1920s, had become downright dangerous during the 1940s and 50s, and may even have acerbated the American state’s attempts to oppress Holiday. Blackburn describes Kuehl’s interview with Colonel George White, who worked for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics during these decades and who considered that Holiday had brought her arrest upon herself because she was so ostentatious. “She flaunted her way of living, with her fancy coats and fancy automobiles and her jewellery and her gowns – she was the big lady wherever she went and a good deal of resentment was generated.”<sup>248</sup>

In conclusion, close reading of the Holiday material reveals that she used individual and group strategies in order to build her career and bring new material to her audiences. I have chosen to include in my examination of Holiday women in her milieu that are usually relegated to the footnotes in the dominant jazz histories to make it clear that she was linked into a network and generation of women as gifted and talented as herself. Thus, making visible the females who also contributed to Holiday’s career not only provides a counter-balance to the dominant discourse, it also further illuminates our understanding of her life and music. It makes it apparent that she was part of a group, which successfully managed to negotiate and struggle to achieve an artistically viable space for women within the jazz “fraternity.” Most importantly, reading the Holiday material in this way helps

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<sup>246</sup> “Capsule Comments,” *Down Beat*, January 13, 1950, 7.

<sup>247</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 232 .

<sup>248</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 219.

us to get beyond the limiting “exceptional” or “always emerging” trope common to those discussions of women in jazz.<sup>249</sup> In any investigation into jazz history that works with Tucker’s injunctions to ask, “where are the women” and “why and how did they manage to both exist in, and disappear from, jazz history?” we have the opportunity to discover new information and move away from predictable riffs.<sup>250</sup> This new knowledge reveals that masculine hegemony of the jazz community was not total, as some women did manage to occupy and manage spaces as active agents, and not merely as victims.

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<sup>249</sup> Tucker, “Big Ears” 385.

<sup>250</sup> This idea that the dominant discourse in jazz history can be likened to predictable riffs permeates much of Tucker’s work.

## Chapter 4

### Reframing Billie Holiday as a Creative Agent

*“She was a great artist, but creative – no.”* Arthur Herzog Jr.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction: Holiday as “Composer,” “Songwriter” or “Creative Agent.”**

Little attention has been paid to the fact that Holiday composed and co-composed a significant number of songs. (For the list of these songs, see Appendix 3). Yet, according to Will Friedwald “[t]he forties...saw Holiday’s greatest flowering as a songwriter, and considering that music has produced only a few individuals who can both sing and write...it’s unfortunate that this aspect of her work hasn’t received much attention.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to provide that attention, and, in keeping with the themes and methods so far established in this thesis, to make special use of the category and experience of gender in discussing and evaluating that work.

However, before I begin this examination of Holiday’s agency in the creation of music and lyrical material, it is important to discuss the ways in which she might be defined as a “composer,” as a “songwriter,” or perhaps as neither: these terms have been ascribed particular cultural values within the disciplines of classical musicology, popular music and society as a whole, and their use is not value-neutral. These distinctions arose from a historic segregation of musical practices and repertoires that dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, and the inception of the modern music industry.<sup>3</sup> John Howland writes that, as the twentieth century progressed, a popular view of American musical culture developed, this resembling

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke, *Billie Holiday*, 188.

<sup>2</sup> Will Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America’s Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 134-135.

<sup>3</sup> This is the subject of the historian Lawrence W. Levine’s work, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass./London, Harvard University Press, 1988).

a hierarchical pyramid of cultural and social privilege and aesthetic value, with European classical music (“good” music) forming the very pinnacle of this relationship, and the vast quantities of commercial Tin Pan Alley popular song and most jazz being thought of as the lowest musical idioms in this social order (even below “folk” music).<sup>4</sup>

The term “composer,” then, is problematic: not just because it is strongly identified with that “European” classical music tradition, but also because of its being imbued with associated cultural privileges and hierarchies – of musical style, but also of race and gender – that have been the subject of sustained contemporary critique, including in this thesis.

However, the alternative term, “songwriter” – long in use in the worlds of popular music – is similarly difficult to press into service in a study of Billie Holiday’s creativity: while less “grand” than the image summoned by the term composer, it can still be marked by exclusion, as Rupert Till argues. In contemporary popular music, Till suggests, the term is mainly associated with white musicians. He notes that even though the concept of the contemporary singer-songwriter had roots in the performative oral traditions of folk and African-American culture, the “[i]ntegration of the folk-singer-songwriter into an institutionally controlled music recording industry has seen it adopt hegemonic characteristics,” resulting in African-American musicians such as Ray Charles, James Brown and Nina Simone being defined as performers within a genre – such as soul, funk or jazz – rather than as singer-songwriters.<sup>5</sup> As a solution to this problem, he suggests a reframing of the term singer-songwriter as a genre, rather than as an activity. If Till’s ideas are taken on board, then it is possible to recognise that the integration of the blues cultural tradition within the commercial recording industry – and that industry’s increasing hegemony within the music sector over the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has created the conditions making it possible for the disregarding or even

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<sup>4</sup> John Howland, *“Ellington Uptown” Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, and the Birth of Concert Jazz* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 263.

<sup>5</sup> Rupert Till, “Singer-Songwriter Authenticity, The Unconscious and Emotions (Feat. Adele’s ‘Someone Like You’),” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, eds. Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 295.

erasure of the long tradition of African-American women as songwriters from mainstream music history.

The birth of the “confessional” female songwriter is generally dated to the late-1960s.<sup>6</sup> But Holiday – and the other female songwriters I will discuss in this chapter – got there first. In this reading they can be seen as important precursors of the female singer-songwriters later to emerge across other popular music forms.<sup>7</sup> Many of the female blues performers of the 1920s were prolific songwriters, writing on average about a third of their material. Dahl argues that through Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith, a small but significant thread of women singers continued to write their own material, and she places Holiday as an important part of this tradition.<sup>8</sup>

The term “songwriter,” then remains useful, despite its exclusions and genre-identifications. However, it will not suffice in describing the creative work of Holiday’s that is the subject of this chapter, and this is owed to common associations and assumptions that have grown up around the use of the word within the Tin Pan Alley environment from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. These associations see songwriters producing songs, often in great number and very quickly, with little concern for or control over subsequent interpretation. This clearly does not sufficiently encompass all the most recognisable features of a jazz creative practice like Holiday’s, in which the writing, arranging, performing and improvising of a song’s materials represents a spectrum of activity.

In light of this, it is worth reconsidering and perhaps rehabilitating the role of “composer” – not least because the term was in common use among jazz musicians and critics during the period Holiday was working. Of course, this term as commonly understood and used, is no better prepared to account for that spectrum of creative activity: the role of “composer” is often seen as

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams, Introduction in *Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> See David R. Shumway, “The Emergence of the Singer-Songwriter” in *Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, 11-20.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Dahl, “JAZZHERS: A Partial HyperHERstory of Women Popular Songwriters and Jazz Composers: Lady Writes the Blues.” *NewMusicBox*. Web magazine from the American Music Centre., June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002: 2 <http://www.newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=38tp03> Accessed September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

being defined by non-collaborative, highly prescriptive modes of musical creation. As Magee points out in his analysis of the complexities arising in the application of the term “composer” to Fletcher Henderson (1897-1952), while the difference between a composition and arrangement can seem relatively straightforward – with a composition generally treated as an original work, and an arrangement as a new version of an existing work – in jazz, this distinction becomes “blurry.”<sup>9</sup> Magee cites Porter and Ullman, who write that “[j]azz arrangers usually create so much new material for their arrangements that there is really no difference between arranging and composing.”<sup>10</sup> Eileen Southern further complicates our understanding of the relationship between arrangements and original contributions in jazz, maintaining that “[i]n a more conventional sense, the jazz composer was the jazz arranger, who built the original theme into a musical composition before bringing it to the band rehearsal. The talent lay in writing music that fitted in with the style of the band and of the individual soloists.”<sup>11</sup> As Magee concludes, “[t]he distinction between composer and arranger, composition and arrangement, and their implied hierarchy, are precisely the kinds of differences that African-American music making itself continually challenges.”<sup>12</sup>

Southern’s words above allude to the fact that jazz compositions have often been developed not only collaboratively, but also with particular playing colleagues of the composer in mind. These colleagues/contributors have often been accomplished soloists, with their own distinctive voices. Howland makes clear in his discussion of the composing methods employed by Duke Ellington (1899-1974) that

[a] team approach to the creative process was...very much the norm in big band jazz, where creative collaboration could include score contributions and refinements by band members, the individual improvisational components in a score, the

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Magee, “Fletcher Henderson, Composer: A Counter-Entry to the “International Dictionary of Black Composers” *Black Music Research Journal*, 19, no.1 (Spring 1999): 62. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779274> Accessed March 16th, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Porter and Michael Ullman with Edward Hazell, *Jazz: From Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993), 461. Cited in *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Norton and Company, 1997), 401.

<sup>12</sup> Magee, “Fletcher Henderson, Composer,” 63-64.

contribution of improvised and paraphrased solos (where a player elaborated upon a pre-composed passage in a score) that became set score materials over time, the unique instrumental voices in any given orchestra, and so on. This was Ellington's compositional milieu.<sup>13</sup>

The arranger, composer and orchestrator Luther Henderson Jr. (1919-2003), who worked with Ellington, periodically felt that “Ellington’s genius...was knowing how to project himself through other people...He heard things in others, collected their stories and retold them incorporated into himself, into his music. That’s why his band and his bandsmen really were his instrument.”<sup>14</sup>

A similar situation can be said to have prevailed within the Fletcher Henderson orchestra. In his own analysis, Magee also considers the collaborative nature of the creative efforts underpinning it. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that “as casually collaborative as the music making may have seemed, it did have a centre of gravity, and that was Henderson himself.”<sup>15</sup> The same was true of the Ellington orchestra and of many other jazz ensembles through history, but this partly explains why, in a “team-based” creative process, it can be all too easy for participants’ roles and contributions to be erased and forgotten.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, on their most basic level, jazz compositions are often linked with the idea of a performative situation of some kind, rather than being

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<sup>13</sup> Howland, “*Ellington Uptown*,” 264. Cited in Katherine Williams, “Improvisation as Composition: Fixity of Form and Collaborative Composition in Duke Ellington’s *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*,” *Jazz Perspectives*, 6, no. 1-2: 239. DOI: 10.1080/17494060.2012.729712 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17494060.2012.729712>. Williams in her analysis of *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* by Ellington, first performed in 1937, seeks to underscore the collaborative nature of the Ellington Orchestra repertoire by pointing out the nature of the various high and low level contributions made by band members.

<sup>14</sup> Barry Singer, “Bridging the Worlds of Broadway and Jazz, Outside the Limelight,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2000, AR29. Cited in Howland, *Ellington Uptown*, 264.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Magee, *The Uncrowned King of Swing: Fletcher Henderson and Big Band Jazz* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press Publishers, 2005), 174.

<sup>16</sup> The circumstances surrounding the creation of “[Take the] A Train” (1939), the signature tune of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, is one of the most well-known examples of this in jazz. “[Take the] A Train” is now acknowledged to have been written by the pianist, composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967), and not, as it used to be assumed, by Ellington. (Howland, “*Ellington Uptown*,” 266.

produced in the abstract and for an unknown future performer. Georgina Born observes in her discussion of the jazz assemblage that the practice “entertains no split between ideal musical object and mere instantiation, no hierarchy between composer as Creator and performer as interpreter of the Word.”<sup>17</sup>

Of primary importance in defining these specific, passing performance situations, is improvisation, which has always been central to jazz practice – and here is a final complication in the notion of “composer.” Southern, in her discussion of the vocal orientation of early jazz and the music’s stress on individualism, points out that in the jazz tradition and the traditional repertory of the blues, “[a] traditional melody or harmonic framework may serve as the takeoff point for improvisation, but it is the personality of the player and the way he or she improvises that produces the music.”<sup>18</sup> According to Berliner, jazz improvisers fundamentally devote their lives to a kind of slow-motion composition, in which “improvisation” materials are assembled through study and preparation, and slowly combined – or composed – into a highly personal repertoire of musical approaches, accessible during improvised performance.<sup>19</sup>

In this respect, Linley’s definition of composition – “[a] term usually referring to a piece of music...or the process by which composers create such pieces. Etymologically, it suggests *putting together*” – is open-ended enough to remain an entirely viable one in the jazz context.<sup>20</sup> Magee also makes the case for concepts of composer and composition that are stripped of their “exalted connotations.”<sup>21</sup> In his preferred definition, derived from *The*

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<sup>17</sup> Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 27.

<sup>18</sup> Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 367-368.

<sup>19</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 492.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Linley, “Composition” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), 599. *The Oxford English Dictionary* definition also reinforces the notion of “putting together” in its general definition of the term. It states that composition is “1. the action of putting together or combining; 2. the fact of being put together or combined; 3. combination (of things as parts or elements of the whole). *The Oxford English Dictionary Vol.111*. Prepared by J. A. Simpson & E.S.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 624-625.

<sup>21</sup> Magee, “Fletcher Henderson, Composer,” 63.

*American Heritage Dictionary* (1992), “composition” is defined as “the combining of distinct parts or elements to form a whole.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Magee contends that if this definition is taken on board, it is possible for composition to be treated as indistinguishable from arrangement, and with collaborative and performative creative elements acknowledged: in effect, he widens the scope of what works can be treated as compositions, and of who can be called a “composer.”

It is apparent from the above discussion that whilst common understandings of the words “composer” and “songwriter” may adequately correspond with the way music is created in classical and much popular music, the use of either term in a jazz context presents us with difficulties. My solution in this chapter is to use *both* the terms “composer” and “songwriter” in my descriptions of Holiday’s creative agency. I have established that “songwriter” is not broad enough in scope to describe Holiday’s creative work, and like Magee I am reluctant to eliminate entirely the use of the term “composer” from the area of African-American music practice. However, because of the conceptual limitations I have discussed, I will be using them with great care, and sometimes – that is, when the common associations and conceptual baggage attached to the “composer” or “songwriter” become either too troublesome or too inadequate to illuminate a particular part of the investigation, or when I wish to take a global view of all these activities – I instead make use of the term “creative agent” to describe Holiday’s music-making.

In sum, it would be more useful for us to rethink Holiday (and many of her musical colleagues) as shuttling between all of the terms employed above, and as being creative in ways which none of them alone can adequately describe. As I argue, Holiday’s approach to songwriting can only be clearly understood if it is perceived as being indivisible from her techniques as a performer, arranger, improviser and even “team-leader.” And like many jazz musicians, she was constantly improvising, recreating and transforming given musical material she was working with, with the result that she was creating new songs out of the songs created by others. However,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

it is important to note that, while the conceptual fluidity we can generate for each of these creative roles is useful for our purposes here, such thinking did not and still does not easily map on to mainstream or legalistic ideas about the status of the composer, whether as a cultural figure or holder of copyright. Some of Billie Holiday's attempts to negotiate that quandary will be explored below.

### **Billie Holiday's Creative Agency**

We know that Holiday wrote songs throughout her career because of the existence of posthumously published musical material. Twelve of the songs she wrote were recorded by her and some of them, for example "Billie's Blues (I Love My Man)" (1936), "Fine and Mellow" (1939), "God Bless the Child" (1941), "Don't Explain" (1945) and "Now Baby or Never" (1949) remained an important part of her repertoire throughout her career. At least three of them – "Left Alone" (1959), "Preacher Boy" (1962) and "Who Needs You?" (1960, 1961) – were published posthumously, and Nicholson has information on one song, "Lost at the Crossroads of Love" that has so far not been published.<sup>23</sup> Holiday is credited as the sole creator of six of almost twenty songs, the rest being collaborations.

For the rest of this chapter I will be focussing on four of the six songs where Holiday is credited as being the sole creator, as well as discussing important aspects of her collaborative practice. Close readings of "Billie's Blues" and "Long Gone Blues" (1960, 1962) provide opportunities for an analysis informed by the conditions of gender within which they were created, and an examination of "Fine and Mellow" and "Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)" (1940) make it possible to link gender issues to questions of the nature of appropriation in jazz and popular music. "Lost at the Crossroads of Love" has not been included simply because it has not proved possible at this stage to obtain the words or music of this unpublished work; and "Stormy Blues" recorded in 1954, the last blues to be both created

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 295.

and recorded by Holiday, has not been considered as it raises themes covered in the other songs discussed. Secondly, I will be making an examination of key aspects of Holiday's collaborative practice and considering whether it can be usefully elucidated by Joe Bennett's "seven models of collaborative practice."<sup>24</sup> Finally, I will be discussing the linkages it is possible to make between our knowledge of Holiday's songwriting and the ideas first raised in chapter two around ideas of intersectionality and an African-American women's standpoint, linking the suppression of the intellectual and cultural contributions of Black women to the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual and Foucault's theory of subjugated knowledge.

It is often hard to work out, from the distance of so many years, the informal and ad hoc arrangements which frequently underpinned the creation of many of the songs Holiday co-wrote. Nevertheless it is important to remember that for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writing a song and producing a recording were often entirely separate processes. The work of the songwriter would result in the publishing of sheet music which could be interpreted by professional musicians or the general public; for their part, music publishers were concerned to ensure that royalties for songs were protected and administered.

Individuals treated as songwriters were thus often freed from the need to concern themselves with the technicalities of the recording process and so were able to focus on what it was possible and necessary for them to notate, that is, the melody, harmony and lyrics. Therefore, in order to get her music to the market, Holiday had to surmount the fact that she could not notate her musical ideas because, as already has been mentioned, she worked almost exclusively by ear, having received her education "on the job" by listening to recordings and fellow musicians.

It is important that Holiday's approach to creating music, as well as reasons why her work as a creative agent and arranger is not often discussed is considered. Holiday's friend, the comedian and tap dancer James "Stump"

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<sup>24</sup> Joe Bennett, "Collaborative Songwriting – The Ontology of Negotiated Creativity in Popular Music Studio Practice," *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, Issue 5, Conference papers, (July 2011).

Cross, in an interview with Linda Kuehl described how Holiday seemed to magically and successfully negotiate her way through the world of notated music:

She was a band singer. She had little melodies that she'd give to each musician. "Here you are...Here you are...Now come, sing with me!" It was so pretty, like she was sending out sparks. She never scrambled. She never hurried...Lady inspired everybody because she had a knack with a lyric...She had no great knowledge of music or reading musical notes. She just knew it!..There must have been a Lyric Angel who came down from the clouds and said, 'Here, Lady, you get 'em!<sup>25</sup>

In their analysis of Holiday's performing style, Crowther and Pinfold point out that if forced to focus on what was most valuable in her arsenal of techniques, they would have to say that it was her ability to "spontaneously compose music, subtly or even dramatically restructuring melodies in a manner that was as equally imaginative as the very greatest instrumental improvisers."<sup>26</sup> This point is made with even more clarity when they comment that Holiday's originality "lay entirely in her restructuring of the notes within the natural harmonies of a song."<sup>27</sup> Crowther and Pinfold seem to be suggesting that Holiday did not merely improvise, but also possessed the ability to (re)compose or rather, recreate the material she had to work with.

Thus Holiday's performance style not only involved the transformation and recreation of individual melodies but also, like many blues artists before and contemporaneous with her, the revision and reshaping of ready-made narratives, and the use of phrases and lyrics already in the public domain. It is important to acknowledge the complexity of Holiday's changing relationship with the blues genre, as it can appear contradictory. Even though Holiday never regarded herself as a blues singer, as a working-class African-American she was nevertheless culturally imbued with the genre. In the blues tradition, raw material on life, death and

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<sup>25</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Crowther and Pinfold, *Singing Jazz*, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold. *The Jazz Singers: From Ragtime to the New Wave* (London: Blanford Press, 1986), 90.

courtship rituals was constantly being reshaped and recycled to meet the needs of particular audiences and changing times. Holiday was therefore first and foremost an improviser of ready made material whose original author was simply known as Anonymous. She could be regarded as being, in effect, a sort of human sampler in her jazz practice. Her career is an example of this approach to songwriting, which in various guises has long been an integral part of the African-American tradition of music making.

Holiday performed in this way despite the fact that her career took place within the confines of a music industry where, as Keith Negus points out, the recognised author of a work is privileged when it comes to the evaluation of the work on the basis of economic and cultural factors: as identifiable individuals or collaborators, they are “legally recognised, economically rewarded, and socially acclaimed as the creators of a musical work.”<sup>28</sup>

This conflation in Holiday’s work between the performance practices of artists within the jazz and blues tradition – which Southern’s earlier comment on the linkages between performing and composing articulates – and the arrangements devised by the music industry to recognise particular individuals and groups as authors in order to clarify their economic rights, made it possible for her to consider that she was the creator of her performance of “Strange Fruit” even though legally, for copyright purposes, the words and music are attributed to Abel Meeropol.<sup>29</sup> I will be exploring this subject in detail in the final chapter. These differing notions around the concepts of authorship and creativity will also be discussed when I examine Holiday’s collaborations with fellow songwriters and musicians later on in this chapter. But it is important that the tensions existing between concepts of authorship and creativity in existence at the time are acknowledged, as they had implications for the way Holiday functioned as a creative agent and was either credited or not credited for material she created.

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<sup>28</sup> Keith Negus, “Authorship and the Popular Song” *Music & Letters*, 92, no.4 (2011): 607 and 610.

<sup>29</sup> Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 337.

Unlike many earlier African-American artists, Holiday emerged as a musician during a period when it was economically and culturally viable to turn to Tin Pan Alley melodies and rhythms and transform them into blues-like phrases, rather than turning blues phrases into songs. It was the nature of the raw material she had to work with and what she did with it which made Holiday an original creative agent and performer. During this period, her approach to the musical constructs of Tin Pan Alley was also one of the reasons why, as I have already mentioned, she sounded so different from her contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> Between 1933 and 1944, Holiday, along with other musicians, was part of a project initiated by the producer John Hammond which aimed to produce African-American covers of white popular songs for the juke boxes which were rapidly increasing in number in Black neighbourhoods. As Hammond commented, “[w]e tend to forget what a shocking impact Billie’s sound and style had at the time, once she was on records.”<sup>31</sup>

Stated accounts in her autobiography and biographies of the origins of the musical material Holiday created are revealing, as they show that she generally went through a three step procedure. Firstly, she would begin by playing with a musical phrase, such as one reminiscent of the song “St. James Infirmary,” or a verbal one like the expression “God bless the child”. What Michael Denning describes as “vernacular commonplaces,” that is, the everyday language of ordinary people, always lay at the heart of her songs. For example, in “God Bless the Child,” which he considers to be her most political song, she made use of commonplace folk expressions: “[s]ince the world began/ The old folks say/Everything happens for the best.”<sup>32</sup> Secondly, as we have already observed, Holiday would take her musical ideas and phrases to someone like the lyricist Arthur Herzog, her arranger Danny Mendelsohn at Cafe Society, or fellow musicians: people who could notate them and put them into the symbolic language of music notation for her.

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<sup>30</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> John Hammond with Irving Townsend, *John Hammond on Record* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 209.

<sup>32</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 346.

Finally, she would remake her songs again with her singing.<sup>33</sup> Her approach exemplified the collaborative process in jazz, during the period of her career, previously discussed.

### **Gender, Jazz and Creative Agency**

Using gender as a mode of analysis, it is possible to make links between views about Holiday's work and how the act of creation is coloured by perspectives on gender. The works of Lucy Green and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi are particularly useful as they help to illuminate the reasons why Holiday's work as a songwriter and arranger does not form part of her historically projected image.

Earlier on I examined how, in jazz and swing bands, the freedom of women to sing did not automatically represent a release from patriarchal definitions of femininity, as their role could both reproduce and affirm this definition. Green has argued in her examination of women who take on a creative role in both classical and popular music that, unlike singers and instrumental performers, those defined as composers represent an even stronger challenge to patriarchal definitions of femininity: "[t]he idea of a woman mentally manipulating or controlling music is incommensurable and unacceptable, because women cannot be understood to retain their dependent, bodily femininity at the same time as producing a cerebral and potentially autonomous work of genius."<sup>34</sup> Green is using these terms ("autonomous" and "genius") ironically, but they are the kinds of terms that have guaranteed the supposed worth and veracity of a male-authored Western musical canon. According to Green, this is why historically in many Western cultures – even though women have been allowed to sing and to a limited extent play instruments – there have been taboos, restrictions and limitations placed on their compositional activities.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 113.

Women have of course both resisted and colluded with societal regimes which sought to exclude them from musical activities. It must also be remembered that whilst many have been prohibited, ridiculed or even written out of history, others have been praised and celebrated for their ability to write music. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), for example, is now recognised as being the first well-known major female composer in the history of Western Europe. Nevertheless in the past, and for much of the twentieth century, the ideology persisted that “[m]usic delineates masculinity, a male mind, a man behind the music; and this has become so normal and acceptable that we do not even notice its presence, until something happens to break it.”<sup>35</sup>

Holiday had a career during a period when limited stereotypical constructs were imposed upon African-American women; the addition of “composer/songwriter” to the “songstress” persona preferred by her record company, the tabloid press and mainstream society of her day was simply not acceptable. She was creating music in a period before female songwriters in mainstream popular music – such as Nina Simone, Carole King or Joni Mitchell – were in a position to enjoy easier public acceptance and less societal critical prejudice.

In our examination of the type of approaches Holiday adopted in order to bring her work to audiences, we are immediately confronted with the many popular “myths” surrounding the concept of creativity.<sup>36</sup> This is particularly the case within the field of songwriting, as this aspect of the creative process is often shrouded in mystery. As Margaret A. Boden explains, thinking on creativity is commonly given to “inspirationalist” and “Romantic” terms of reference. “Inspirationalist” ideas of creativity are firmly embedded within Western culture, and link creativity to the supernatural, seeing creativity “as essentially mysterious, even superhuman or divine.” On the other hand, the “Romantic” view tends to be less extreme, claiming that

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Keith Negus and Michael Pickering “Creativity and Musical Experience” in *Popular Music Studies*, eds. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (London: Arnold, 2002), 178.

“creativity – while not actually divine – is at least exceptional,” as creative individuals are believed to be gifted with a specific talent which others lack.<sup>37</sup> Familiar tropes of the “Romantic view” are the “organic” art form, the artist-as-genius, the “authentic” artwork, and the cult of originality.<sup>38</sup> For the Romantic artist, “intuitive talent is innate, a gift that can be squandered, but cannot be acquired.”<sup>39</sup>

Avoiding these pitfalls, Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Approach Model can be used to deepen our understanding of Holiday’s approach to songwriting and individual creativity. In this model what is described as “creative” is never the result of individual action alone; rather it is the product of

a set of social institutions, or *field*, that selects from the variations produced by individuals that are worth preserving; a stable cultural *domain* that will preserve and transmit the selected ideas or forms to the following generations; and finally the *individual*, who brings about some change in the domain, a change that the field will consider creative.<sup>40</sup>

Although Csikszentmihalyi believes that these domains are validated by a field (i.e. a field of experts), his system also gives a role for the individual creator. If the individual invents field-validated material which then survives to join the domain, then they can be described as being truly creative.<sup>41</sup> According to Csikszentmihalyi, the personal trait of “creativity” is not what determines whether a person will be creative:

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<sup>37</sup> Margaret A. Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (London: Routledge, 2004), 14-15. See also Phillip McIntyre, *Creativity and Cultural Production: Issues for Media Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4, 13 and 15; Phillip McIntyre, “Communication and the Creation of Media Content: A Practitioner-Based Enquiry Study of Popular Music Songwriting” (2010):2. <http://hdl.handb.net/1959.13/933391> Accessed July 23, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Duncan Heath and Judy Boreham, *Introducing Romanticism* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2005), 172.

<sup>39</sup> Boden, *Creative Mind*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, “Society, Culture, and Person,” 325.

<sup>41</sup> McIntyre has very usefully provided representations of the Systems Approach Model as it applies to creativity as a whole and songwriting in Western popular music. McIntyre, “Communication and the Creation of Media Content”, 3.

[w]hat counts is whether the novelty he or she produces is accepted for inclusion in the domain. This may be the result of chance, perseverance, or being at the right place at the right time. Because creativity is jointly constituted by the interaction among domain, field, and person, the trait of personal creativity may help generate the novelty that will change a domain, but it is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for it.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, creativity can be viewed “not as something happening within a person but in the relationships within a system.”<sup>43</sup> This social or relational model of musical relationships is akin to those I have been outlining throughout this thesis, and it is one that I will now explore further in the context of songwriting. With this sociality foregrounded, it becomes possible to understand Holiday’s creative role as a part of the jazz community; she was fully cognisant of the ideas which constituted that domain, and possessed highly attuned knowledge of what the “field of experts” (i.e. her audiences, record buyers and fellow musicians) would have wanted and expected from her. By providing them with this material she fitted in with the part of Csikszentmihalyi’s theoretical construct which allows space for, and places a value on, the generative input of the individual.

### **“Billie’s Blues”: Composition or Improvisation?**

Most commentators considering Holiday’s musical output regard “Strange Fruit,” examined in the final chapter, as her most political offering. However “Billie’s Blues” can be considered almost as important as a cultural contribution, since, thirty years before either Second Wave feminism or Black consciousness, it provides evidence that the intellectual seeds of these movements were already germinating within the most popular of African-American art forms. Griffin has an extremely useful discussion on its political dimensions.<sup>44</sup>

Accounts of the creation of “Billie’s Blues” are interesting because they reveal the interchangeability of the processes of improvisation, composition

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<sup>42</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Perennial/Harper Collins, 1996), 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, 134-138.

and performance in Holiday's work. At a recording session in 1936, it transpired that nobody liked a tune that had been chosen for the fourth side, and so the producer, Bernie Hanighen, suggested that Holiday sing a blues to replace it; "Billie's Blues" was "improvised on the spot."<sup>45</sup> Clarke's description is worthy of note as it raises the issue of whether it would matter if Holiday had already sung pieces of "Billie's Blues" previously while working it out. It could be that a framework of composition which is limited in time could affect traditional analyses of ideas about what composition is and how it works. In addition, his description also illustrates the fact previously discussed, which is that in jazz, the terms "composition" and "improvisation" are often not considered entirely inseparable from each other.

However, any discussion of the nature and interlinking of composition and improvisation would be incomplete without consideration of their relative status within the jazz community. Holiday was performing during a period when songwriters such as Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and George Gershwin had achieved great popular acclaim. Nevertheless, Green argues that within the jazz community, "improvisation has more status than notated composition, spontaneity more than theoretical or technical know-how."<sup>46</sup> This perhaps partly explains why female instrumentalists such as Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mary Lou Williams were able to get a toe-hold into their profession, because as women educated in piano and music theory, they possessed useful skills which many of the early jazzmen were lacking; it should come as no surprise that in these circumstances "women were more acceptable in the role of composer or arranger than that of improviser," and also that "women composers working with notation were in some cases acknowledged to be more skilled at this task than the men in the bands for which they worked."<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, Holiday – as far as we know – did not use musical notation, even though she kept chord charts and certainly knew her chord

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<sup>45</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 110.

<sup>46</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

changes. This is intimated by Count Basie's comments about how she worked with his band.<sup>48</sup> In *LSTB* she does state that she had a piano in the flat she shared with her mother in Harlem, but there is not any evidence available to show that she knew how to play it or read music.<sup>49</sup> The fact that she was able to learn by ear and have a career was possible because, particularly during the early years of the tradition, jazz was as much an oral as a written tradition. The jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams made this point succinctly in her description of the work of Erroll Garner, when she pointed out why she liked his playing: "[t]o me, he is the Billie Holiday of the piano. Some musicians put him down because he does not read music or indulge in a lot of senseless modern progressions. But these are not the important things in jazz."<sup>50</sup>

Because women in jazz were not excluded from the role of composer and arranger – if only because this role was regarded as being of lower status than the ability to improvise – in the relatively informal environments of rehearsals, jam sessions or even recording sessions, it would not have been considered unusual to ask a vocalist to create some musical material, particularly when exigencies occurred such as that which resulted in the need for the recording of "Billie's Blues." However, it is also important to keep in mind that even though this provided an opportunity for women, in the context of the differing statuses allotted to composition and improvisation in jazz, "[s]uch licence and acknowledgment contain and perpetuate the age-old relegation of women to the less important, since supposedly less creative and authentic, aesthetic tasks."<sup>51</sup> The likelihood is that this may be another reason why Holiday's songwriting skills have yet to be sufficiently acknowledged. In the jazz community within which she operated, they were considered a useful adjunct to her vocal skills, rather than a necessity.

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<sup>48</sup> Basie, *Good Morning Blues*, 200.

<sup>49</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, 366.

<sup>51</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 108

Even though Holiday is credited as the writer of “Billie’s Blues,” like many songs in the blues tradition it contains lyrical material from the “public domain,” and this is perhaps one of the reasons for the songs original success and enduring popularity.<sup>52</sup> Within the blues genre, lines and stanzas recur in the songs of many singers. In performance, these lines and stanzas are modified, sometimes radically, but they are still recognisable as being similar to other material within the tradition. This is a feature of the blues which African-American audiences would have expected and even appreciated. Nevertheless, according to John Barnie, in performances “it is rare to find one singer reproducing *exactly* the blues of another. A close relationship exists between many blues, but it is not that of a copy (even an imperfectly remembered one) to its original.”<sup>53</sup> The likelihood is that Holiday had sung all or parts of “Billie’s Blues” live before at performances or jam sessions, but we only have her recordings of the studio sessions as evidence. However she may have sung “Billie’s Blues” differently on different nights and to different audiences, and in this regard, despite the source’s limitations, it is important that we remember her stated views on the need for originality in jazz in *LSTB*.<sup>54</sup>

“Billie’s Blues” was originally recorded in on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1936 on the Vocalion record label, and, despite the fact that it was “a filler,” it has become known as one of Holiday’s classics. Nicholson, in his own analysis of Holiday’s ten most recorded “live” performances from 1948 to 1959, places it at the very top of a list of fifteen recordings.<sup>55</sup> I will be discussing three versions in particular: the original 1936 studio recording (hereafter “BB1”); a version recorded on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944 (hereafter “BB2”); and finally a “live” version recorded at Carnegie Hall on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 (hereafter “BB3”). (The lyrics for the original and 1940s versions are in Appendix 2). All three

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<sup>52</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> John Barnie, “Oral Formulas in the Country Blues,” in *Write Me a Few of Your Lines: A Blues Reader*, ed. Steven C. Tracy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 201. Reprinted from *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1978): 39-52.

<sup>54</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 292.

recordings provide evidence to show that Holiday constantly reworked, adapted and developed her musical material, as well as showing how she matured and progressed as an artist over the ten-year period.

Holiday rarely sang the formal twelve-bar blues and, as already mentioned, her sacking from the Count Basie orchestra revealed her ambivalent relationship with the tradition. According to Burnett James, Holiday's style and emotional sensibilities were not of the sort which could prosper within the more static formula of classic blues. He argues that Holiday "needed the kind of tunes she could work her will on, those she could take and refashion to her own musical and emotional ends."<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, something of her contradictory and complex relationship with the blues as a tradition can be ascertained from the fact that out of the six songs Holiday wrote both the words and music for, four are blues.

The 1936 original of "BB1" was devised as a dance tune for the jukebox market. It begins with a strident introduction featuring the skilfully intertwined and harmonised lines of Artie Shaw's clarinet and Bunny Berigan's trumpet. The tempo is "medium-up" (mm=118), and even though the lyrical material is hard hitting and despondent, the joyfulness of the music – with boogie-woogie interjections from Joe Bushkin's piano, spirited obligatos from the trumpet, and an ensemble energy that constantly pushes forward – has the effect of subsuming the meaning of these words. In this recording we hear the assurance, confidence and happiness of the young Holiday at the very beginning of her career. This was her first recording session under her own name; she had provided the music; she had provided the words: the musicians were all playing her tune. Is it any wonder that this version of "BB1" is so exhilarating?

In "BB2" it can be argued that the lyrics are beginning to gain precedence as her utilization of them has become more nuanced. In contrast to the original version, the atmosphere engendered by the musicians is more

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<sup>56</sup> Burnett James, *Essays on Jazz*, (London: The Jazz Book Club by arrangement with Sidgwick & Jackson, 1962), 56. Nevertheless, other writers have demonstrated the capacity of the blues to communicate humour, satire and irony and the deepest layers of meaning, such as Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 25-27; Daphne Duvall Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920's* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 111.

subdued with a slower tempo (mm=82) and a hornless and much less busy ensemble texture, and so the words are more foregrounded and clearly comprehensible. “BB2” presents a singer – or a singer’s persona – newly keen and able to imbue her words with bittersweet knowledge of life and relationships. The confidence remains, but a languid, almost passive delivery suggests a new degree of subtlety and complexity in the singer’s response to the experiences she narrates. Perhaps to reflect this, Holiday has chosen to adapt and change some of the lyrics of the original recording as one would a well-loved dress which no longer fits; she seems to feel that she had outgrown the first verse of the original and so has made the necessary changes.

Finally, “BB3” the “live” version recorded at Carnegie Hall on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1946. This has many similarities with “BB2,” but it has been included because of the evidence it provides of Holiday’s interaction with an audience. The changes she chose to make between the different versions reflect the fact that for her, making music was not a static process. She always felt free to make adaptations and changes in her performances over a lifetime and evidence of this is provided in the live recording.

“BB1” is in Bb, one of the standard blues keys, but “BB2” and “BB3” are in the much less common Db and A major respectively. These different choices of key suggest two things about Holiday. Firstly, she was not afraid to use a wider range of keys than was normal within the blues tradition; secondly, when working in collective ensembles, she was assertive enough to ensure that the key chosen was one she was comfortable with as a vocalist at that point in her career. Buck Clayton’s comments on Holiday are revealing. He said that:

Billie’s pitch was in such a key that the trumpet player had to play high or low for her...Normally *Body and Soul* was played in middle range, but with her you had to play high or low. If it were in the key of B flat, Billie would sing it in F. And it was hard to play for her. She changed the original key; sometimes I would have to play it so high that the trumpet would screech. So then I would have to play it low. There was no middle ground with Billie...I had more fun playing with her than with any of the others.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Leslie Gourse, *Louis’ Children: American Jazz Singers*, (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1984), 84.

Clayton's account shows ensemble members being to some extent voice-led, when often, as I have already discussed, in Swing bands, the voice part was treated as the least important part of the texture.

A look at the changing lyrics of "Billie's Blues" shows a similar openness to change and adaptation as circumstances dictate. In the 1936 version the words for the first verse are

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

With these words, Holiday (or her singing persona) is simply describing the situation. She loves her man, and feels sad when he treats her badly. By the 1940s however, she had changed the words of the beginning to "I love my man, I'm a liar if I say I don't." These are still undeniably traditional blues lyrics, but Holiday uses them to be more openly passionate and bluntly honest about her own contradictions, as she is now forced to admit to herself that she loves a man who is unsuitable for her. In the last line of the first verse in "BB2," in contrast to the 1936 version, the singer boldly states "But I'll quit my man, I'm a liar if I say I won't." Holiday now provides a proactive solution (that is, leaving her man) in order to remedy a bad situation. But, as noted above, her delivery of these words compared with "BB1" is actually more world-weary, thus seemingly undermining their stated intention. This is one of the ambiguities or even contradictions between stated and performed meaning that gives Holiday's music (and persona) its intriguing, almost unfathomable depth.

The existing power dynamics of the relationship described are also clearly expressed in the words of the second verse, added in the 1940s, when she baldly states: "I've been your slave ever since I been your babe." The reality of the relationship is diametrically opposed to what Davis has described as the "masculinist notions of romantic love" often disseminated in the media and literature.<sup>58</sup> In the real world of relationships Holiday has

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<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 170.

created, she asserts that enough is enough: “before I’ll be your dog I’ll see you in your grave.” Denning interprets the words, “I’ve been your slave ever since I been your babe / But before I’d be your dog, I’d see you in your grave” as allegorical of the experience of social oppression which many of her audiences would have recognised.<sup>59</sup>

The verse beginning “My man wouldn’t give me no breakfast” – in which Holiday runs through a list of reasons why she is leaving her lover – is included in all versions. The words have been compressed to fit the music, as there are twice as many syllables allocated to fit the amount of musical material allotted for each verse; this creates interest and diversity of phrasing and rhythm between verses. In part out of rhythmic necessity, these words are also performed in a more staccato manner, this heightening the feeling of tension and activity in contrast to her previously more legato rendering. Yet the verse never sounds rushed, and she pauses at the end of each short phrase to allow listeners to digest the torrent of information detailed by the lyrics.

The list of things Holiday’s lover refuses her covers all life’s absolute basics, the things required in order to survive: food, clothing and shelter. She is therefore not making the decision to leave him because of differences of opinion; she *has* to leave him in order to ensure her survival as a human being. The list is also important because, as it continues, the lover’s actions appear more extreme and even pathological, particularly when she relates that “he had the nerve to lay a matchbox on my clothes.” I have interpreted her clothes as a symbol for her worldly goods, and the words “But I had a long, long way to go” as revealing that before the downturn in her fortunes, she had felt herself able to making some kind of progress. Her lover’s actions could thus be deemed to have brought an end to her possibilities for any advancement. The words could also be interpreted as describing the psychological journey needed to be undertaken before she could free herself from such a damaging relationship.

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<sup>59</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 344.

This psychological complexity is deepened by further lyric adaptations. It may not have been the first time she had used it when performing, but by the 1940s, Holiday had added another verse, beginning, “I ain’t good looking and my hair ain’t curled.” These words originate from the blues tradition and could almost be said to form part of the DNA of the cultural knowledge base of African-American women. Tucker, in her discussion of a short film made by the International Sweethearts of Rhythm in 1946, reveals that similar words to Holiday’s were performed by the band’s lead vocalist, Anna Mae Winburn. In the film, Winburn sings “I ain’t good-looking, and I don’t have waist long hair/I ain’t good looking, and I don’t have waist-long hair/But my mama gave me something that can take me anywhere.”<sup>60</sup>

This is perhaps the most powerful verse, as here Holiday is reviewing her own attributes against her society’s cultural and racial biases. In both of the 1940s performances, Holiday lays back on the word “I” and embellishes it mellismatically, lengthening, emphasizing it, almost “testifying” in her mode of presentation, so that the audience is in no doubt that the woman before them is the subject of the song. Holiday states simply that she does not match up to the dominant society’s standards of beauty and by doing so makes the song totally inclusive for her listeners: the song’s “I” is at once rendered deeply individual (it is Holiday’s own story) and deeply social (herself and her experiences are positioned as unexceptional and like those of many others).

This verse also has resonances of W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues” which Holiday would have known through Bessie Smith’s hugely popular 1925 recording; it might even be considered to be a form of call and response over the generations in relation to Handy’s creation. In Handy’s song, the woman laments that “Twant for powder an’ for store-bought hair, De man ah love would not gone no-where.” Despite his bad treatment of her, the woman in Handy’s song makes it clear that “I’ll love ma baby till the day ah die.”<sup>61</sup> However by Holiday’s generation some things had moved on. In Handy’s

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<sup>60</sup> Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 172.

<sup>61</sup> W. C. Handy, *Blues: An Anthology. Complete Words and Music of 53 Great Songs* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 82-85

song, the woman blames another woman as the cause of her troubles with her man, who eventually leaves her.

Yet Holiday chooses not to lay the blame for her relationship troubles on another woman, but fairly and squarely on her man. In addition, by her powerful emphasis in performance on the word “I”, she transforms the apparently negative connotations of the phrase into truly positive ones. Using Gates’s theorising of the concept of “Signifying,” the song can be considered in the context of it being a gesture toward what is being suppressed about African-American beauty. Thus when she sings “I ain’t good-looking and my hair ain’t curled” she is indirectly, but proudly, articulating that she is an ordinary woman (like her listeners) without the wish or the money to transform herself using the artificial accoutrements of women anxious to get and keep a man at any price: that she is beautiful as she is. To say this directly would have been difficult on a cultural and political level during a period when Caucasian standards of beauty were considered the default ideal. By “Signifying” she subverts the original surface meanings in order to transform what could have been considered weaknesses; taking possession of the criticisms in order to obliterate their hold over her and transforms them into powerful symbols and a source of strength. Holiday is maybe not going so far as to state that “Black is beautiful,” yet she does indicate that expressions of Black beauty and pride were perhaps more widespread in the 1930s and 1940s than is commonly appreciated.

This sentiment is underpinned by the fact that she considers that her real power consists in the “something” handed down to her by her foremothers. Tucker, in the context of Winburn’s own rendition of the song in the film, throws further light on what this “something” (a staple of the blues tradition) could be. She argues that in the blues material of the 1940s, this “something” “could be read as race pride with artist’s mothers as valued transmitters of their African-American cultural heritage,” and that for later audiences “the idea of a matrilineal transmission of culture would also resonate...Most likely, it would be embraced as an affirmation of women’s culture.”<sup>62</sup> Thus this “something” could be interpreted as being the feminine

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<sup>62</sup> Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 173.

knowledge, wisdom and fortitude handed down by one's foremothers. If Tucker's ideas are applied to "Billie's Blues," the "something" which will keep Holiday going, and surviving, is ultimately of more value than the dominant society's superficial notions of ideal beauty.

Holiday's criticism of men who treat women badly is more clearly articulated in the final verse, in which she again recycles material from the blues tradition. Here, Holiday confidently runs through a list of her own qualities, making it clear that she is considered attractive by other men and can make alternative choices. These qualities contrast with the list in the third verse following on from the words "My man wouldn't give me no breakfast" where her lover's attributes can only be judged negatively because of his unpleasant actions.

The blues and jazz singer Blue Lu Barker (1913-1998), a contemporary of Holiday, has a similar verse in her song "New Orleans Blues" (recorded for the Decca label 1938-1939), and it would be useful to compare the two versions of this traditional material to see what the singers made of them. Barker sings:

*Now some like me 'cause I'm happy  
Some because I'm snappy  
A very few think that I've got money  
Lord one did and told me  
Mama you were built for speed  
And if you put that all together  
I've got everything a good woman needs.<sup>63</sup>*

Holiday sings in both her original and later versions:

*Some men like me 'cause I'm happy  
Some 'cause I'm snappy  
Some call me honey*

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<sup>63</sup> *Red White and Blues: Women Sing of America*. Rosetta Records – RR1303 Vinyl LP Compilation (1980).

*Others think I've got money  
Some tell me Billie  
Baby you're built for speed  
Now if you put that all together  
Makes me everything a good man needs.*

Rosetta Reitz, in her discussion of Barker's "New Orleans Blues," raises points similar to those made by John Barnie about the blues genre in general at the beginning of this chapter. Reitz writes that "If the words seem familiar, it is because these phrases are the common language of the blues. One of the challenges is to use classic lines in an individual way. This acknowledges the oral tradition and carries it on. It is in this dynamism, each artist's individual interpretation, that has kept the blues from remaining static."<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, the major difference between Holiday and Barker's versions is that although both songs are concerned with describing loss and abandonment by lovers, Holiday's is more critical of the male gender. In Barker's song, these lyrics do not constitute her final verse, and her song has a happy ending pleasing to both male and female audiences: she eventually finds "a man who could love me." For Holiday, this verse is final, and after providing a list of her own excellent qualities she packs a final punch with the words "Now if you put that all together/Makes me everything a good man needs." Her ending is in fact more open-ended: there is no closure of narrative, and no sense of romantic fulfilment.

In Holiday's version, the crucial phrase is a "good man," which suggests subtle criticism of those men who are not "good." And in a world where men were deemed to be freer to make choices between different types of women, Holiday reveals that she too can be picky, and has the wisdom to separate out the wheat from the chaff; this is what is positive about her ending, the gaining of wisdom. The truth to which "Signifying" gestures toward is that it is possible for her to possess her excellent qualities, this wisdom, but still not be acceptable to males. Nevertheless, Holiday changes

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<sup>64</sup> Rosetta Reitz, *Red White and Blues*. Liner notes.

our notion of what constitutes a fairy tale end by emphasising the fact that perfection already exists in the acceptance of the qualities she already possesses. Unlike Barker, she does not describe a search for love, but rather expresses the realisation that she is already loveable, that you can love yourself just as you are, with or without a man. Thus, the song is nourishing, particularly for the many African-American women in audiences who heard it and could appreciate Holiday's signifying on an ancient wisdom in the context of the spiritual and psychological sensibilities within the lyrics. The song takes the listener on a journey from despair to what would now be called empowerment, and despite the fact that we are dealing with a recording, the song rests on the understanding of there being emotional interaction between a performer and their audience.

Advice to other women is a staple among women's blues themes, especially advice on how to handle men. During the migration from the South to the north of America, with African-American culture in a state of rapid change, women affected by the impact of this situation on their relationships would be tuned into the song's underlying empowering message. According to Daphne Duval Harrison: "[h]ard times or abandonment required women to fend for themselves, armed with cynicism and an extraordinary drive to achieve economic and personal independence."<sup>65</sup> In a society in a state of flux, where women often felt tossed by the wayside, Holiday's songs offered concrete and powerful advice on why women should extricate themselves from untenable relationships and also on how they could do so with dignity and power.

Holiday's ability to take her listeners through contrasting emotional registers is also recognised by Griffin, who notes that listeners

think of blues as a sad music. [But Holiday's] blues songs, like "Fine and Mellow," "Billie's Blues," are actually among her most upbeat songs. They are the songs where she's most assertive about what she's going to tolerate, and what she's not going to tolerate. What she shares with the Blues Queens is really in that sense of, not I'm sad therefore I sing sad songs; but that I'm singing these songs in order to exercise the

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<sup>65</sup> Harrison, *Black Pearls*, 64.

sadness right. You're going to leave this particular ritual feeling much better than you did when you came in.<sup>66</sup>

Holiday knew her audiences, and like the earlier generation of blues singers was able to bring a sense of reality to the recording that would have struck a chord with her listeners.<sup>67</sup>

Holiday's second created work, "Long Gone Blues" was not such an important part of her repertory as "Billie's Blues," but it contains features worth discussing here because they reveal how she was able to integrate feelings of subtlety and intelligence in her performances within the basic template of the blues template in contradiction to Burnett James view expressed earlier. "Long Gone Blues" was recorded March 21<sup>st</sup> 1939, but was not released until the middle of 1947. The song is topped by Tab Smith's lead soprano saxophone and tailed by a powerful plunger solo on the trumpet by Oran "Hot Lips" Page.

The first verse has Holiday trying to communicate with her lover, as she asks:

*Talk to me baby  
Tell me what's the matter now?  
Tell me baby,  
What's the matter now?*

The empathic intelligence of the song first becomes apparent in that verse's last two lines:

*Are you trying to quit me baby?  
But you don't know how?*

These words immediately launch us into the world of complex adult emotions. Holiday is able to acknowledge that the relationship has ended but

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<sup>66</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin interview in *Billie and Me: A Celebration of Billie Holiday. Programme Three. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Wise Buddha Productions. Originally broadcast on BBC Radio Two.

<sup>67</sup> Harrison has a discussion on the emotional interaction between the Blues Queens and their audiences. (Harrison, *Black Pearls*, 23).

also partially attempts to manage its demise by second guessing her lover's feelings. The verse is thus a demonstration of Holiday's possession of a level of emotional wisdom which in effect gives her lover the "permission" to leave and demonstrates she has some control over how she feels about the situation. This emotional sophistication must inevitably have been contrasted in the minds of her audiences with the ineptitude of a lover unable to properly communicate. The implied criticism of her lover emerges more forcefully in the second verse where we have the origins of the second verse of the 1940s version of "Billie's Blues."

*I've been your slave  
Ever since I've been your babe  
I've been your slave  
Ever since I've been your babe  
But before I'll be your dog  
I'll see you in your grave.*

These words were possibly added by Holiday to "Billie's Blues" once it became apparent that "Long Gone Blues" was not going to be released for some time. The climax of the song can arguably be said to reside in this verse as the third verse is clearly more reflective.

In the final verse Holiday considers the effects of her actions. One of this song's strengths is the fact that it is capable of multiple interpretations: Nicholson for example believes that its main theme is the singer's active sexuality.<sup>68</sup> This is certainly a possibility, but there are other viable readings. Any interpretation is very much dependant on what one understands by the word "love." Firstly, the word "love" in the first four lines of the third verse might refer to the individual who is her lover, in which case we have a situation where Holiday's essential "goodness" (i.e. "I'm a good gal") is counterposed to the "wrongness" of her lover. Secondly, Holiday could again be affirming that she is basically a good person, but "love" might be understood to refer to her ways of loving, (i.e. of being in love) which she now

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<sup>68</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 116.

understands as being dysfunctional or unhealthy for her. Both these explanations highlight the singer's ability to retain her self-esteem in the death throes of an important relationship.

With this in mind, it is possible to also consider two possible interpretations of the last two lines of the third verse:

*I'm a real good gal,  
But my love has gone.*

Again the interpretation hinges on the understanding of the word "love." Firstly, "love" might (as already mentioned above) refer to her actual lover; in which case, the lines powerfully affirm Holiday's positive attitude toward herself, despite her lover's departure; and there is again the implied criticism of the kind of man who would leave "a real good gal." However, the word "love" could also be equated with Holiday's emotions. Thus, if it is accepted that an interpretation of the first four lines is that her way of loving "is all wrong," it becomes possible to admit that her "love" (i.e. the feelings she originally had for her lover) have now disappeared once she has considered their effects.

"Long Gone Blues" provides us with another example Holiday's innovative use of the blues form, as like "Billie's Blues" it counters the sometimes submissive representations of women contained within many blues songs with early twentieth century origins. Davis, for example, points out that even though much of the blues material performed by Rainey and Smith emphasise their strength and equality, this was not the case for all the songs in the tradition. In her discussion of "Sweet Rough Man," a song about a violent relationship, Davis suggests that "[t]he women in the song assume a stance which is at once 'normal' and 'pathological'. It is pathological to desire to continue a relationship in which one is being systematically abused, but given the prevailing presumptions of female acquiescence to male superiority, it is 'normal' for women to harbor self-deprecatory ideas."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 32.

It could however be argued that this is a rather too contemporary, analytical interpretation of a song, which is after all, over seventy years old. Yet there is some evidence that Holiday's own audiences were sometimes, like those of Smith and Rainey's in earlier generations, able to "dig deep" and interpret her words and performances in the context of the underlying issues and concerns within their own relationships. The journalist William Dufty has provided us with a graphic account of the reactions Holiday was able to arouse in audiences which he received in information when in conversation with a Philadelphia club owner. The club owner initially apologized to Dufty for failing to book Holiday five or six times a year even although she was his all-time favourite performer: "[b]ut there was always trouble. He talked as though I should know what he was talking about," wrote Dufty. "It wasn't race – the club was...integrated – and it wasn't drugs. It was sex." As the club owner explained:

A guy brings his wife or his girlfriend. A chick brings in her man. They have a few drinks...Lady comes on. Sure, she's beautiful. But I've had better looking chicks singing in here and they don't cause any trouble. Lady does her number. Sure she's sexy. But she don't work at it like some of them...Billie don't do nothing. She just sings *Love for Sale*. Or anything. Some man at a table of four starts looking at her. His wife has had one drink too many...Ice starts rattling and purses start banging and chairs start scraping and people start coming apart. Why, I've seen as many as twenty-seven fights start in one week while Lady's here. She really stirs things up. It doesn't happen with Ella or Dinah or Sarah or Della.<sup>70</sup>

Dufty's perceptive description – even if elaborated – suggests the powerful effects an evening in the company of Holiday could produce in her audiences.

To ascertain why Holiday's recordings of the blues proved to be popular, it is also necessary to consider her creative material in the context of the historic use and function of the blues form within the African-American community. According to Sherley Anne Williams the early blues singers created an atmosphere which made it possible for analysis to take place, and "helped to solidify community values and heighten community morale in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." The necessary analytic

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<sup>70</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 455-456.

distance with the material was achieved through the use of verbal and musical irony, a mode seldom found in the singing of spirituals or gospels. The blues therefore made possible a complex interweaving of the general and the specific and of general and group experiences. Williams alludes to the communal nature of the relationship between the blues singer and blues audience when they speak of the audience which assumes “we” even though the blues singer sings “I.”<sup>71</sup>

Williams is portraying in her discussion of the blues the idea and functions of what Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, following Benedict Anderson, have described as “musically imagined communities.”<sup>72</sup> Gilroy has elaborated on this type of approach in his work on the importance of music and artists to the formation of Black identities in diasporic communities. He suggests that Black identity “remains the outcome of activities associated with language, movements, and expressed feelings,” and that “these significations are condensed in musical performance...In this context they produce the imaginary effect of an internal racial core or essence by acting on the body through the specific mechanisms of identification and recognition produced in the intimate interaction of performer and crowd.”<sup>73</sup>

Like Davis and Harrison, Williams therefore notes that performances of blues songs were an important part of the discourse of sexual relations within the Black community, a community which even though still devastated by the historical effects of slavery was undergoing rapid social changes during the experience of migration from rural to urban economies. The blues made it possible for advice on how men and women should treat each other, to still come through during chaotic times, and therefore were not always used as an entertainment of escape or fantasy and sometimes directly

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<sup>71</sup> Sherley Anne Williams, “The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry” in *Chants of Saints: Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art and Scholarship*, eds. Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 124-125.

<sup>72</sup> Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, “Introduction” in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, eds. *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity and the Challenge of a Changing Same,” *Black Music Research Journal*, 10, no.2 (1990): 127.

represented and articulated events.<sup>74</sup> Simon Frith notes that, according to Paul Oliver, the blues

was “a genuine form of expression revealing America’s gaunt structure without a decorative façade.” In its treatment of love and sex the blues was “forthright and uncompromising” ...Blues were expressed in realistic words, uninhibited words, words which were “a natural transposition of the everyday language of both users and hearers”...the blues was a “tough poetry,” a “rough poetry.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, for many women in particular, it was possible to turn to the blues to gain useful knowledge about their emotional and relationship concerns. According to Harrison, even though women’s blues were often created by others, usually men, “they represented a distinctly female interpretation...They introduced a new, different model of black women – more assertive, sexy, sexually aware, independent, realistic, complex, and alive. Though the themes they addressed were universal, their renditions linked them to other women who identified with the realities of which they sang.”<sup>76</sup>

It is within this type of cultural environment that the blues songs created by Holiday need to be understood, as because of the emotional information expressed within them, she utilised them in a way which retained their original communal functions. Davis, in her own discussion of the songs performed by Rainey and Smith, argues that some of their material prefigures the consciousness raising of the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s as they were responsible for the dissemination of attitudes towards male supremacy that have feminist implications.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, with respect to Holiday’s work, it is apparent that if the concept of Signifying is applied to her blues material, that at the very least, patriarchy is being challenged because of the assumed empathic and sympathetic relationship between performer and audiences. However, all of these things are heard through a

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<sup>74</sup> For example “Backwater Blues” (1927) written by Bessie Smith and “Homeless Blues” (1927) by Porter Grainger.

<sup>75</sup> Simon Frith, “Why Do Songs Have Words?” *Contemporary Music Review*, 5, no. 1 (1989):84.

<sup>76</sup> Harrison, *Black Pearls*, 111. Also Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 409.

<sup>77</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 55.

further veil of performed, layered ambiguity, which enables messages of confidence and fortitude to be safely sounded and delivered through phraseology that suggests an interiority more complex, and perhaps less sure.

### **Gender and Attribution: Or, How to Get Paid for Your Own Work**

Another blues, this time in F major, was Holiday's next created work. "Fine and Mellow," initially recorded on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1939, started out as the B side of "Strange Fruit." In fact, it has been argued that the popularity of "Fine and Mellow" helped to make "Strange Fruit" the equivalent of a top-twenty hit and, for the rest of Holiday's career, the song remained a popular part of her repertoire.<sup>78</sup> The song came to be even more appreciated by a later generation when it was featured, eighteen years after the original recording, in the CBS broadcast, *The Sound of Jazz*. This programme, first broadcast in 1957, provides rare footage of Holiday in performance; she is shown performing this song surrounded by jazz luminaries such as Count Basie, Thelonious Monk and Lester Young.

Griffin gives over an entire chapter to a description of Holiday's performance on *The Sound of Jazz* and an analysis of the song itself.<sup>79</sup> Nicholson has described *Fine and Mellow* as a blues number with the theme of "unrequited love."<sup>80</sup> Griffin however provides what I believe to be the most perceptive interpretation. She emphasises that, like "Billie's Blues," "this is not the sad blues of an abused woman, sitting, waiting for her man to abuse her further."<sup>81</sup> Her analysis raises themes similar to those already discussed in the sections on "Billie's Blues" and "Long Gone Blues." Because of this, I

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<sup>78</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 169; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 292.

<sup>79</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 193-197.

<sup>80</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 115.

<sup>81</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 197.

have decided instead to focus on the subject of its creation, which I believe throws into sharp relief matters relating to gender and attribution.

An account of the song's genesis given was related to Linda Kuehl between 1970 and 1972 by Milt Gabler, one of Holiday's producers, and is reproduced in Clarke's book. Gabler's account makes it obvious that he felt no compunction in blowing his own trumpet:

I asked her if she had gotten her blues lyrics together. She had a little piece of paper, like the side of a bag, and she had written down some standard verses – 'I love my man' – that you find in a lot of blues. I say, 'We need a kicker to make it different than any other blues.' We couldn't just call this 'Billie's Blues No.2', which is probably what would happen today...I came up with the verse 'High-drape pants, stripes are really yellow/Kisses me, makes me really mellow.' And that became the title, the kicker to make it different...I think it was the first modern blues session, really.<sup>82</sup>

Gabler further emphasizes his influence on "Fine and Mellow" by describing how he then chose to arrange it. "I had the saxophones play a riff behind her that Tab Smith sketched out, and rambling piano and Frankie Newton's muted trumpet, like Joe Smith would play behind Bessie Smith. An A-&-R man's stuff is only as good as his memory."<sup>83</sup> He next makes it clear to us that his largesse did not have any boundaries as he also provides us with a comprehensive description of how he ensured that that the music was copied off the 78 record by a musician, and sent to the Registrar of Copyrights in Washington D.C. in order to ensure that Holiday received royalties.<sup>84</sup> Thus, in Gabler's account, the focus is on his intervention to make the song a hit, and also on his generosity in assigning rights to the artist. Over the two page description in Clarke's book, Holiday's contribution is reduced to Gabler's three word description of her providing "some standard verses." The fact that Holiday came up with the idea for the song, wrote most of the words and all of the melodic line, and then along with the other musicians at the recording session provided the definitive artistic interpretation, is not commented

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<sup>82</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 170. Gabler also wrote an article describing the song's genesis when he was President of the Commodore Record Corporation. "A Lady Named Billie and I" which is in *The Billie Holiday Companion*, 81-89.

<sup>83</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 170.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

upon. Whether he intended to or not, Gabler's account serves only to belittle Holiday's creative abilities.

Gabler's account of the origins of "Fine and Mellow" brings into focus what Griffin has described as the "white male authorities" who controlled Holiday's career.<sup>85</sup> Certainly in Griffin's list of these figures, Gabler comes out as being essentially decent. She notes that he, for example, encouraged Holiday to pursue a different style in the late thirties and early forties, and this ultimately ushered in her "torch singer" period and some of her most popular recordings.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he wielded a certain amount of power over her career options, and the use or perhaps misuse of this power continued even after her demise, as Holiday was not around to provide her own version of events with respect to the creation of "Fine and Mellow." Gabler was able to present himself as a knight in shining armour, and the reader of Clarke's book is meant to feel grateful that Holiday received any royalties at all for work she had undertaken herself. There is not an appreciation that the royalties for the song should have been hers by right because she initiated and wrote the words and music. In fact, there is even the supposition in the narrative, that because Gabler, added or changed a line or two, and was the producer, that it was perfectly within his rights for him to put the song forward as his own creation. This is evidently Clarke's own interpretation of the situation, as writing in praise of Gabler, he notes that "Gabler, who could have taken a co-writing credit or even kept the whole thing for himself, had seen to it that Lady got royalties on that song for the rest of her life."<sup>87</sup>

The song "Fine and Mellow" also comes up in Nicholson's discussion of Earle Warren Zaidins, Holiday's attorney during the last years of her life.<sup>88</sup> According to Nicholson, it is now generally acknowledged that Zaidins was incompetent, and took advantage of Holiday whenever he could. Within the

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<sup>85</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 99.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>87</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 171.

<sup>88</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 215.

catalogue of disasters, Nicholson narrates in his biography that when Zaidins came to register Holiday's own musical work with BMI he only forwarded two songs, which meant that Holiday lost foreign and domestic royalties on more than a dozen others. In addition, even though he was responsible for auditing her royalty payments, he failed to notice that Holiday was achieving only a fraction of her royalties for the popular "Fine and Mellow," instead of the one hundred per cent she was entitled to.

The account of the creation of the song "Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)," created less than a year after "Fine and Mellow," provides evidence that Holiday was perhaps becoming a little more astute in her dealings with individuals within the music industry, particularly with respect to ensuring that she received credit for music she had generated. It indicates that, at least with respect to one particular song, she was able to turn the tables on her detractors.

"Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)" was recorded on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1940. It never became popular, yet the recording provides an excellent example of Holiday's ability to seemingly disconnect the lyrics from the rhythm and make them float along somewhere behind the beat. Roy Eldridge's strident trumpet contrasts with Holiday's laid back performance in this slow number. Throughout, she has a musical conversation with Lester Young on tenor sax, and Teddy Wilson provides a delicate and understated solo which preserves, rather than overrides, the relaxed, almost languid feel of the song. An account of the song's creation was provided by the songwriter, Arthur Herzog, to Linda Kuehl during his long correspondence with her between 1971 and 1976.<sup>89</sup> Holiday collaborated with Herzog on other songs such as "God Bless the Child." The account reveals that like many of her songs, Holiday played around with musical and verbal phrases as part of her creative process. For Holiday, the song began as a musical echo of "St. James Infirmary."

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<sup>89</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 10.

Herzog informs us that he was at home with Danny Mendelsohn, when Holiday came rushing in to see him.<sup>90</sup> It was about this occasion that Herzog used the words quoted at the beginning of this chapter. According to Herzog, “She said to Danny, ‘Danny, I’ve got a great tune, take it down for me! And she sings, da daing ‘St. James Infirmary.’ So Danny says, ‘Yes Billie, it’s a great tune, but it’s ‘St. James Infirmary’. ‘Oh Danny, bend it a little for me, bend it.’”<sup>91</sup>

Herzog next relates how Mendelsohn arranged the song, and also how Holiday collaborated with Herzog on the words. Herzog was then rather annoyed when, “[s]ix months went by, and there’s a record out – ‘Tell Me More’, words and music by Billie Holiday, accompanied by the Billie Holiday Orchestra – of which there was no such thing, of course. There it was. ‘Danny, what are we going to do about this? This idiot friend has done this to us.’”<sup>92</sup>

This account is worthy of note because it reveals that Herzog, despite the fact that he must have benefited financially from his collaboration with Holiday, could still be disparaging in his estimation of her creative abilities. He appears to ignore the fact that Holiday had in effect commissioned the song and even told them how to write it; and fails to understand Holiday’s approach to songwriting which, as has already been discussed, meant that she often created new material by revising and reshaping ready-made narratives and musical phrases. Ultimately for Herzog, it appears as if being creative meant being able to notate and arrange musical ideas, not the ability to generate original musical ideas (albeit it from existing material) in the first place. Also, he appears to have associated Holiday’s wish to work on the song

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<sup>90</sup> Holiday had begun working with Mendelsohn in 1938 from the outset of her successful run at Café Society, backed by Frankie Newton’s band. She was always careful in her selection of songs, and so had ensured that Mendelsohn prepared arrangements of numbers she had been working with during previous years. In the previous chapter I mentioned comments made by John Williams, which provided evidence that Holiday ensured that she was fully prepared and in control of the material used in performances. (See Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 112).

<sup>91</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 188.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

with an arranger as a lack of creativity on her part, despite the collaborative nature of the jazz medium.

It might be useful to observe about this episode that – even though Holiday arrives with the raw material for an arrangement (the melody) and definite ideas of how she wanted the song to sound like, and asks Mendelsohn to do what was generally expected of him (arrange or rearrange a tune or composition) – her contribution should be considered so unimportant by Herzog. The description is also particularly interesting because, generally speaking, the creator/s of original words and music are often considered to have a higher status than the arranger/s. But in this account, Mendelsohn's arrangement (or rather his ability to notate the arrangement) is privileged by Herzog over Holiday's original ideas and music.

In order to put Holiday's creative agency into context, it would be useful to compare her approach to composition with that of another jazz vocalist. Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) was a contemporary of Holiday's who, during the early part of her career, worked within the Swing big band environment. As close readings of the accounts of her creative practice reveal, like Holiday she also worked collaboratively and used pre-existing material when constructing songs. In May 1938, Fitzgerald recorded "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" with the Chick Webb Orchestra. The song was based on a nursery rhyme dating back to 1879. The tenor saxophonist Teddy McRae (1908-1999), a member of the Chick Webb Orchestra, recalled when interviewed in 1981: "[t]hat was Ella's own thing...It was her own idea. That was her thing that she would sing up in Yonkers...Her and some kids would do...we had nothing to do with that. We called Van [Alexander] to put it down on paper for her and Van made the arrangements."<sup>93</sup> As Holiday may have done with "Billie's Blues," McRae's description suggests that Ella worked on the song in performances before having it notated. The arranger and composer Van Alexander said when asked about the arrangement:

I was terribly busy at the time...so I did nothing about the tune. But Ella approached me again after about a month and I went home and put the melody and her lyrics together, copying all the parts myself, and took it to Webb. He rehearsed the song for

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<sup>93</sup> Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald*, 57.

about an hour in the afternoon and that very night, from the Savoy, he broadcast it. And that's how "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" was popularised.<sup>94</sup>

The song had a hugely positive effect on the fortunes for Fitzgerald and the Chick Webb Orchestra. After reaching number one, it stayed in the charts for a total of nineteen weeks. Furthermore, the song made the Chick Webb Orchestra a national attraction and Fitzgerald the most popular female vocalist in America. In 1940, Fitzgerald became one of the youngest members of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).<sup>95</sup>

This description of the creation of "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" reveals not only that Fitzgerald (perhaps like Holiday) worked on and developed her musical material in performance before getting it notated – but also that she worked collaboratively, and that as a female, there did not appear to be any barriers to be overcome by her when making creative contributions to the band's repertory. In fact, it appears as if the band leader, Chick Webb, positively welcomed her contribution. In an interview with Loren Schoenberg in 1991, the double-bassist Beverly Peer (1912-1997) recalled that Bob Stephens, the recording engineer at Decca, did not want to record the song because it was based on pre-existing material. But, Peer said, "Chick started to pack up his drums and forced the issue. If he hadn't bothered there'd be no 'Tasket'."<sup>96</sup>

The account of the creation of "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" reveals that Holiday was certainly not unique in her collaborative approach, which as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter was an inherent feature of African-American music making during this period. The song "Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)" also demonstrates that Holiday, like Fitzgerald was able to create something new out of pre-existing material. The fact that the song sounded similar to something else in the blues tradition did not mean she would not be able to do something original with it, and its similarity to

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<sup>94</sup> Information from liner notes album for the album *Swingtime* ST1007. Cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Many of the songs, Fitzgerald is credited with composing, by herself or in collaboration with others were like "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" novelty numbers as she was commercially minded in her approach. Nicholson explains that, "from time to time" she would "come up with an original composition which she felt sure would provide that elusive hit." (*Ibid.*, 191).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

“St. James Infirmary” might even have been regarded by her as a positive, rather than a negative, since she was probably focussing on how she could make it sound when personally communicated to her audiences. Again this episode also highlights differences between African American musical culture and Tin Pan Alley on the nature of composition and the divergence in attitudes towards the use of traditional lyrics versus ones credited with a single author. Interestingly, even the usually overtly critical Clarke admits that the strong blues feel of the song and “its lingering resemblance to ‘St. James Infirmary’ doesn’t hurt a bit, so that it sounds as though you’ve heard it before, but can’t remember where...it’s an unusual love song and a nice record.”<sup>97</sup>

These accounts of the creations of “Fine and Mellow” and “Tell Me More And More (And Then Some)” have provided us not only with more information on the rather treacherous waters Holiday was forced to navigate as a female artist in the music business, but also with the evidence that she developed skills necessary to surmount some of the hurdles placed before her to ensure that she received some credit for her ideas. As Leslie Gourse points out “[t]oo often writers have stressed Billie’s miseries and neglected her happier moments. Her success by itself was a great joy and a triumph. She knew how good she was and what her just desserts should have been and sometimes she was able to demand them.”<sup>98</sup>

## **Holiday’s Collaborators**

It was inevitable that, once Holiday had become an accepted part of the jazz community, as an up and coming singer she would attract the attention of songwriters keen to write for and with her, if only for the reason that sheet

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<sup>97</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 189.

<sup>98</sup> Leslie Gourse, introduction to Bud Kliment, “A Crucial Engagement” in *The Billie Holiday Companion: Seven Decades of Commentary*, 30.

music that was associated with a popular singer sold more than that which was not. As Joe Bennett reminds us, songwriters may choose to work with other songwriters or artists because the benefits of collaboration often outweigh the disadvantages, the main one being the possibilities of a better income. This explains why the practice of distributed and shared creativity has been such an integral part of the modern music industry.<sup>99</sup>

Holiday's collaborators were Arthur Herzog, Albert Bryce Morgan, Jeanne Burns, Buster Harding, Mal Waldron, Curtis Reginald Lewis and Herbie Nichols. I will be discussing key aspects of her collaborations, as well as evidence I have discovered that Holiday may have used a pseudonym. The lyrics of three of the twenty-one songs credited to Holiday, besides those where she is credited as being the sole composer, were written by her collaborators: these are "Don't Explain" (1944) and "Somebody's on My Mind" (1949) with Arthur Herzog Jr.; and "Say I'm Yours Again" with Albert Bryce Morgan (1936). On two occasions she is credited with writing the words and her collaborators the music: "The Lady Sings the Blues" (1956) with Herbie Nichols, and "Left Alone" with Mal Waldron (published posthumously in 1959). With the other nineteen songs it is generally unclear how the music and lyric writing tasks were divided up in the act of collaboration. (Information on Holiday's collaborations is in Appendix 3).

A range of collaborative songwriting models have been usefully codified by Joe Bennett, and his models will be considered alongside the existing tensions between ideas of authorship derived from the blues tradition and the privilege accorded to the author in the context of commercial music, which I have already discussed and will be returning to in the final chapter.<sup>100</sup> Bennett's system relates to the contemporary music industry, but his descriptions of the seven most commonly utilised collaborative models are also applicable to the period in which Holiday was writing.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Bennett, "Collaborative Songwriting", 6.

<sup>100</sup> Negus, "Authorship and the Popular Song," 607 and 613-614.

<sup>101</sup> Bennett, "Collaborative Songwriting," 3-4.

### **Bennett's Seven Models of Collaborative Songwriting (2011)**

1	Nashville	Acoustic guitars/piano. Minimal technology
2	Factory	Geographical location with staff songwriters, (e.g. Tin Pan Alley in the late 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> century).
3	Svengali	Where the artist is one of the co-writers, even though their input may vary from a small contribution (i.e. a title) to a substantial one (i.e. a complete lyric)
4	Demarcation	Here a lyricist provides finished lyrics for word-setting by a composer or the composer provides music for a lyricist to write the words for. In this case, the two parties need not actually meet up
5	Jamming	When a band creates live ideas in the rehearsal or studio space, (e.g. riffs, titles etc.)
6	Top-line writing	A completed backing track is supplied by a “producer” to a top-line writer who supplies melody and lyrics
7	Asynchronicity	The co-writers frequently or constantly work separately but do not necessarily define clear or exclusive creative roles

Holiday's work with her collaborators can be considered in the context of all the above models. With Top-line writing, the technology to provide individual artists with portable backing tracks in the forms of tapes or in a digital format was of course not available. But it is possible to consider the bands and accompanists Holiday worked with as supplying a kind of “live” backing track, which she responded to by providing the melody and lyrics. The genre known as Nashville was also not in existence for most of Holiday's career, but certainly working at the piano, with a minimal use of technology, was a common, if not *the* most common method utilised by songwriters.

## Arthur Herzog

As already noted in chapter three, during Holiday's residency at Café Society she worked for a time with Arthur Herzog Jr. (1900-1983), who was then a staff writer with the music publishers E.B. Marks.<sup>102</sup> Herzog is credited as being the composer of more than twenty songs, but today it is his collaborations with Irene Armstrong and Holiday that he is best known for.<sup>103</sup> As Holiday's collaborator he is credited with writing the words and music for "God Bless the Child" (1941), the lyrics for "Don't Explain" (1944), and the lesser known "Somebody's On My Mind" (1949).

In chapter three I have already considered Holiday's musical aesthetics, which she described in her autobiography and interviews. These reveal that many of her recordings were chosen or written because they were reflective of her emotions and life experiences. She used events in her life as raw material; in fact, as previously discussed, she felt that the whole basis of her musical individuality revolved around her attitude to feelings and emotions in the songs she chose to sing. Discussing her musical aesthetics, she argued that "[i]f you can find a tune and it's got something to do with you, you don't have to evolve anything. You just feel it and when you sing other people can feel it too...Give me a song I can feel, and it's never work. There are a few songs I feel so much I can't stand to sing them, but that's something else again."<sup>104</sup>

Milt Gabler was previously criticised for downplaying Holiday's songwriting abilities, but he also made the revealing comment that "Some songs she wrote herself and on some... she collaborated with Arthur Herzog Jr., but to my knowledge the ideas were basically the way Billie felt and spoke."<sup>105</sup> Holiday, as a working class African-American, would begin to build

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<sup>102</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 164.

<sup>103</sup> Information from <http://repertoire.bmi.com/writer.asp?fromrow=1&torow=25&keyname=HERZOG%2...> Accessed, March 1st, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 39.

<sup>105</sup> Milt Gabler "A Lady Named Billie and I," in *The Billie Holiday Companion*, 83.

up her songs by playing around with verbal phases which arose from her everyday experiences and (vernacular) speech patterns.

“Don’t Explain” which became one of her signature songs, supposedly arose out of an incident when Holiday’s husband came home one night with lipstick on his collar and they both had an argument. She reported: “I saw the lipstick. He saw I saw it and he started explaining and explaining. I could stand anything but that. Lying to me was worse than anything he could have done with that bitch. I cut him off, just like that. ‘Take a bath, man,’ I said. ‘don’t explain.’”<sup>106</sup> What Holiday found most reprehensible was not the fact that her husband was probably sleeping with another woman, but that she was being lied to about it.

To many songwriters, the path Holiday then followed is entirely familiar if the subjects they choose to write about are linked to their emotional life. Holiday, of course, found it difficult to forget about the incident and get the words out of her head. She said:

[b]ut that night struck in my crop. I couldn’t forget it. The words “don’t explain, don’t explain,” kept going through my damn head. I had to get it out my system some way, I guess...Soon I was singing phrases to myself. Suddenly I had a whole song. I went downtown one night and sat down with Arthur Herzog; he played the tune over on the piano, wrote down the words, changing two or three phrases, softening it up just a little. This is one song I couldn’t sing without feeling every minute of it. I still can’t.<sup>107</sup>

Bearing in mind that Herzog has been credited with writing *all* the lyrics, Holiday’s account is interesting, particularly the words “Suddenly I had a whole song.” She describes Herzog’s contribution as being the changing of two or three phrases to “soften” and perhaps ameliorate the song a little. It does seem as if Holiday means by having “a whole song” that she had the words and lyrics, and at Herzog’s flat she had sung the melody which he played and presumably underpinned with appropriate chords. Therefore, as far as Holiday was concerned she had presented Herzog with “a whole song” and he had notated it. Later, because of his knowledge of the music

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<sup>106</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 105.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

publishing industry and his job as a staff songwriter, Herzog succeeded in getting the song published. His contribution appears to be mainly concerned with his ability to do this and to the few changes he recommended.

Holiday's account suggests agency, as she is the mother of the idea for the song and thus the creator of the words and music. Herzog plays the role of midwife on this occasion. It is tempting to speculate how different the song might have sounded if Holiday had had the ability to write down the music she had been carrying around in her head without Herzog's intervention. One cannot help but think that if this had been the case, we might even have ended up with a harder hitting version of "Don't Explain." One also wonders why, if Holiday was so involved in the creation of the lyrics, she was not credited along with Herzog with writing them.

"Don't Explain" was one of the first songs Holiday recorded with a string orchestra.<sup>108</sup> On November 8<sup>th</sup> 1944, Holiday recorded two versions by Toots Camarata, Decca's musical director. Then on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1945 she recorded Camarata's arrangement again, this time with the Bob Haggart Orchestra, at a slightly slower tempo. Despite the fact that Herzog is credited with writing the words, Holiday must still have perceived the song to be a work in progress, as there are differences in both the lyrics and tempo between these two versions. She also recorded "Don't Explain" more than ten years later for Verve, on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1954; this version was made with a small group, and it is interesting to note that the lyrics she used on this occasion were almost identical to the very first Decca version.

The song "God Bless the Child" was another song created out of the raw material of Holiday's life, particularly the economic difficulties being experienced by both Holiday and Herzog due to some of the aftershocks of the Great Depression. What's more, it is interesting as it brings to the fore some of Holiday's conflicting views about religion. The song takes the typical AABA format; the original key is Eb major, shifting to the relative minor during the B section.

In her autobiography, Holiday describes helping her mother out financially in the setting up of a small café, but how on the one occasion when

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<sup>108</sup> The first two had been "Lover Man" (1944) and "No More" (1944).

she had asked Sadie for money she had been turned down flat. Holiday said that “[s]he was mad with me and I was mad with her. We exchanged a few words. Then I said, ‘God Bless the child that’s got his own,’ and walked out.”<sup>109</sup>

Like the rest of her songs, it was built up by her use of vernacular language, which here is heavily influenced by folk and biblical traditions. When Herzog asked her what the expression “God bless the child” meant, Holiday replied, “That’s what we used to say – your mother’s got money, your father’s got money, your sister’s got money, your cousin’s got money, but if you haven’t got it yourself, God bless the child that’s got its own.”<sup>110</sup>

In the song, this became

*Them that’s got shall get  
Them that’s not shall lose  
So the Bible says  
And it still is news  
Mama may have  
Papa may have  
But God bless the child that’s got his own  
That’s got his own.*

During the same period Herzog was also facing difficult times in the music business. When, in 1940, The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) asked for improved royalty rates for songs played on the radio, the vast majority of U.S. radio stations and all three radio networks boycotted them by refusing to renew their ASCAP licences, and radio broadcasters founded a competing royalty agency, Broadcast Music Incorporated, (BMI). During the strike, bandleaders and songwriters were able to register their work with BMI in order to get their songs played on the radio.<sup>111</sup> According to Herzog, “[i]n those days the only things that got on the

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<sup>109</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 89.

<sup>110</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 191.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

air were things like ‘Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair,’ things in the public domain. I figured, if I don’t belong to ASCAP maybe I can get a song on radio.”<sup>112</sup>

In any event, besides the strike, the life of most staff writers working for music publishers had always been economically precarious. The average staff writer was often written out in ten years, and then had to resort to selling their titles and ideas to those who replaced them for fees ranging from \$25 to \$50.<sup>113</sup> Even though the earnings from Herzog’s collaboration must have been divided between him and Holiday, a percentage of his earnings would go to the publishers E. B. Marks because he was their employee.

In her autobiography, Holiday describes the song’s gestation, as usual integrating it with her feelings and emotion:

I stayed sore for three weeks. I thought about it and thought about it. One day a whole damn song fell into place in my head. Then I rushed down to the Village that night and met Arthur Herzog. He sat down at a piano and picked it out, phrase by phrase, as I sang to him. I couldn’t wait to get it down and get it recorded. I told him about the fight with Mom and how I wanted to get even. We changed the lyrics in a couple of spots, but not much.”<sup>114</sup>

Again, like “Don’t Explain,” her account suggests that Holiday needed to get the song notated and recorded, to get it out of her system. However, although she recognised the value of Herzog’s skills, from her own standpoint she still considered the song as being her creation, even though his version of events was different; as he claimed “I wrote the words and the music Danny [Mendelsohn] took it down.”<sup>115</sup> But it is important to realise that Holiday uses her account of the writing scene to establish her own agency, and from her own standpoint, as much as she established the collaborative effort.

In the description of their collaborative effort, we discover that Herzog had wanted her to use the expression “Water Boy” within the song, but

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>113</sup> Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and its Business, The First Four Hundred Years: Volume III From 190 to 1984*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 102.

<sup>114</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 89-90.

<sup>115</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 191.

Holiday refused to do this as she felt unable to write a song which had nothing to do with her own experience of life. Also Herzog had not originally understood what the expression “God bless the child that’s got his own” meant anyway. Herzog claim that “I wrote the words and music” could be interpreted not as providing the ideas for the music and lyrics, but the physical act of writing Holiday’s ideas down. Also, Herzog’s assertion that they only changed one note half a tone does make it appear as if he was presented with a complete or almost complete song. However, he appears to use the comment that “[s]he has never written a line of words or music” (i.e. that he actually notated the song to enable it to be published) to justify his actions.<sup>116</sup> He does make it sound as if he is doing Holiday, rather than both of them a favour, despite the fact that without Holiday, the song could not have existed. However, a close reading of Holiday’s autobiography makes it impossible to treat Holiday’s work as merely an adjunct to Herzog’s own songwriting abilities, particularly as it is only his collaborations with Holiday and her friend Irene Armstrong that have become recognised jazz standards.

“God Bless the Child” was initially recorded by Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra for Columbia on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Throughout, the lyrics are permeated with a hard-edged cynicism. Yet it is a song which even though it had its origins in a personal incident between Holiday and her mother she has succeeded in making more universal in scale, as it encompasses the realities of vulnerability and powerlessness experienced by those in an economically dependant relationship on others. Will Friedwald describes it as “[n]ot a religious song, but a song about religion that’s both sacred and profane, it describes, in poetically abstract fashion, how man’s knowledge of God has no effect on his treatment of other men.”<sup>117</sup>

From the beginning with the words:

*Them that’s got shall get  
Them that’s not shall lose  
So the Bible says*

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 135-136.

*And it still is news*

Holiday states that what she is singing about forms part of the ancient wisdom within the Bible. She is probably referring to verses such as Matthew 13:12 which states: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”<sup>118</sup>

Nevertheless, the song can be interpreted as a critique of aspects of the Christian message and even of idealised concepts of the institution of the family itself as within it the most heavily criticised are those “rich relations” who hand out crusts of bread to meet basic needs but use this act of giving as a form of social control over poor and dependant family members. In effect it describes a passive-aggressive approach to the giving of charity within the family context. Holiday’s persona makes it clear that she is aware of the subtleties and duplicities which can underpin the act of giving and the suffering this causes for the powerless. Holiday had herself experienced the realities of this type of situation. As a child in Baltimore she had often been left in the care of, and thus had been dependant upon, various members of her extended family for food, clothing and a roof over her head, whilst her mother was away working as a maid.

From the evidence available about Holiday and Herzog’s collaborative relationship, it appears to encompass Bennett’s Nashville model – incidentally showing how this was a practice that, whatever Bennett’s nomenclature, was time-honoured even before that genre came into being – because in songwriting sessions, melodies and chords were picked out on a piano. But Holiday always worked in ways closer to the Factory method because of Herzog’s employment as a staff writer for E. B. Marks, the Svengali; because Holiday as an artist co-wrote material with him and Top-line Writing, particularly during live performances, when with different musicians she would be free to improvise minor changes to the lyrics and

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<sup>118</sup> Matthew 13:12. (King James Version). There are also verses with a similar message in Matthew 25:29, Mark 4:25, Luke 8:18, Luke 12:48 and Luke 19:26.

melody line. This historical complication shows the limits of Bennett's clearly defined (but not historicised) categories.

### **Albert Bryce Morgan**

We now turn to two further collaborators, Albert Bryce Morgan and Jeanne Burns. Undeniably, the precise nature of their writing partnerships with Holiday throws up more questions than answers as their actual working relationship with her is now clouded in mystery. The likelihood is that they were both registered as staff writers at some stage with the music publishers E. B. Marks, (the publisher of most of Holiday's sheet music) Albert Bryce Morgan (1896-1963) was a well-known regional musician from Pennsylvania, who is now most commonly appreciated as a singer and creator of mining ballads.<sup>119</sup> He was employed throughout his life as both a professional musician and miner. Largely self-taught (having had only five formal lessons), he became an orchestra leader, pianist, an accordionist and a singer and composer of popular, as well as folk and mining songs.<sup>120</sup> The material he wrote reflected the changing economic and social conditions of the Pennsylvanian anthracite mining region.

Except for a period in the army, he lived his entire life in and around the town of Tamaqua in Pennsylvania, combining his work as a miner and musician. Morgan had started his working life picking up slate down the mines at the age of twelve and except for his army period spent the rest of his life in the mines working in various positions, such as a fan turner, mule driver, loader boss and foreman. He rose to the level of a mining safety engineer, a position he held until his retirement.

Morgan had been born into a musical and mining family: his father David Morgan was a Welsh immigrant who was also a popular singer of mining ballads. After returning from the First World War, Morgan organised

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<sup>119</sup> This information on Albert Bryce Morgan has been provided by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 'Miner Musician: Albert Bryce Morgan' <http://173.203.96.155/node/2471>

<sup>120</sup> For example, Morgan has twenty-eight song titles registered with Broadcast Music Incorporated.

the Broadway Melody Dance Band with himself as the pianist. The group later changed its name to the Alpine Syncopators in 1923 and remained popular throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1920 Morgan also formed the Coaldale Quartet, which focussed on mining songs and traditional ballads. Later in 1944, he organised an octet called the Old Company Singers who performed in miner's clothing and were well-known in the anthracite community, making many appearances at mining and safety meetings. However the Old Company Singers disbanded in 1954 when the Lehigh Navigation Coal Company ceased operations. Today, Morgan is best known for the song, "Union Man," which he can be heard singing because it was recorded by the folklorist George Korson in 1946, and is included in the Library of Congress recordings of anthracite mining songs.<sup>121</sup>

However in 1936, when he would have been about forty, and Holiday, twenty-one, he submitted two songs co-written with Holiday, "Say I'm Yours Again" and "Close Dem Eyes, My Darlin," to the Registrar for Copyrights in Washington D.C. (This information is contained in Appendix 4 and 5). Also in 1936 Morgan registered for copyright "What Can It Be That's Wrong with Me?" which states that it was co-written with a William Holiday, but more about this later.<sup>122</sup>

A date stamp on the sheet music for "Say I'm Yours Again" reveals that the song was registered for copyright by E.B. Marks in 1936, which suggests that Morgan may have been working as a staff-writer for the organisation. Both Morgan's and Holiday's names are on the sheet music (Morgan for the lyrics and Holiday for the music), and they are also credited as the writers by Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI) and Carlin Music, who now own the assets of the

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<sup>121</sup> *Folklore of the Union States from the Archive of Folk Songs AFS L16*. 'Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miners' Recorded and Edited by George Korson, 1947, Recording Laboratory Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington 1976. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number R59-578 re. B4 – *Union Man*. Sung by Albert Morgan. Recorded in the Newkirk Tunnel Mine, Tamaqua Pennsylvania, 1946 by George Korson. The song is also available in George Korson, *Pennsylvanian Songs and Legends* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 393 It can also be listened to on [www.youtube.com/watch?v=81YtG-v05rs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81YtG-v05rs).

<sup>122</sup> I only have a copy of the handwritten sheet music for "Say I'm Yours Again", provided for me by Carlin Music.

publishers E.B. Marks. However, none of the material Holiday wrote with Morgan was ever recorded.

Morgan is not referred to in any of the autobiographical and biographical material on Holiday and Holiday is not mentioned in the material on Morgan provided by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, which is based on newspaper articles and clippings (some unidentified) and email communications with a nephew, Albert E. Morgan. It is therefore unclear when and even if Holiday and Morgan ever met up to write these songs, but he may have met Holiday or even heard her perform in Harlem clubs. The BMI information reveals that throughout his life as a songwriter, he collaborated with a range of other publishers and writers.

One option that certainly has to be considered is that the songs could have been wrongly attributed to Holiday by the publishing company, perhaps in an attempt to obtain more sales by linking them to a popular performer. This was a period when writers were churning out songs on an almost industrial scale because of the money which could be made from the sheet music market.

As already mentioned, Morgan registered for copyright the song “What Can It Be That’s Wrong with Me?” and credited a William Holiday as the co-writer. We may speculate that this was a pseudonym for Billie Holiday. As a child Holiday was a devoted fan of the screen actor Billie Dove, claiming “[I] don’t think I missed a single picture Billie Dove made. I was crazy for her...eventually I borrowed her name.”<sup>123</sup> Also, Holiday had been given the nickname Bill, a shortened form of William by her father Clarence. In *LSTB* she is shown stating: “[m]y father had started calling me Bill because I was such a young tomboy. I didn’t mind that, but I wanted to be pretty, too, and have a pretty name. So I decided Billie was it and I made it stick.”<sup>124</sup>

Holiday was using William as a nickname whilst working with Basie in 1937 and they both appeared to enjoy playing around with the fact that they shared the same first name. According to James “Stump” Cross, “To Count

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<sup>123</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 13-14.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Basie she was William. She'd call him Bill and he'd say, 'Yes, William!'<sup>125</sup> Holiday appears not to have minded having a masculine sounding name and may even have decided on it as a nick-name in order to fit into the mostly male environments she worked within. In chapter three I mentioned how she would be the only girl in baseball team and would go roller-skating through the streets with her baseball friends.<sup>126</sup> Yet, she also wanted her stage name to be "pretty" and so feminised it.

If we accept that "Say I'm Yours Again" was written by Holiday, and the information provided by BMI and Carlin Music appears to support this, then arguably it is too much of a coincidence for William Holiday to be anything other than a pseudonym for Billie Holiday, particularly as all three of the songs were registered over such a short period of time, between February and May 1936.

The copyright information for "Close Dem Eyes My Darlin" and "Say I'm Yours Again" gives Holiday's first name as Billy rather than Billie. However, she was called Billy Holiday on her first debut at the Apollo Theater on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1934, and artist's names were frequently misspelt on the Apollo adverts.<sup>127</sup> In fact, it wasn't until after her second appearance at the Apollo, on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1935 that Holiday finally settled on her surname, changing it from Halliday to Holiday, her father's surname.<sup>128</sup>

Arguably, the most effective way to find out whether the music for "Say I'm Yours Again" and "Close Dem Eyes My Darling" was written by Holiday is to try to ascertain whether it bears any resemblance in style and structure to the rest of the material she wrote. But the problem we face is that Holiday's artistic *raison d'être* was the deconstruction of notated music. It also needs to be taken on board that Holiday might not have been able to work directly with Morgan, and may simply have been given the lyrics to work on. Also of interest is despite the fact that Morgan was working as a musician, the copyright information makes it clear that the music for all

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<sup>125</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 144.

<sup>126</sup> O'Meally, *Lady Day*, 65-66.

<sup>127</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 53-54.

<sup>128</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 17.

three songs was written by Holiday. It has already been mentioned that Morgan only received a limited amount of formal musical training, and Holiday probably did not know how to notate music, and so other hurdles need to be surmounted, such as, who notated the music, and when?

“Say I’m Yours Again,” with its AABA structure, fits the template of much of the material emanating from Tin Pan Alley during this period. Unlike the majority of songs written by Holiday, and “Billie’s Blues” of the same year, it is not a blues. It is in an easy key to play and sing (C Major); there is a twelve bar introductory verse (which was a common feature of songs originating in musical theatre), followed by two choruses of thirty-two bars in total. The sheet music does not suggest a tempo, but the use of dotted quavers suggests a swing feel.

Of course, just because “Say I’m Yours Again” is not a blues, does not mean that the music was not written by Holiday. As a vocalist, Tin Pan Alley material was Holiday’s bread and butter. Because of this, it is probable that she would be more than capable of putting one of these song types together, despite not being able to notate it.

## **Jeanne Burns**

Holiday’s only songwriting collaboration with another female was with Jeanne Burns (1911-1982), but very little information is available about her despite the fact that her ASCAP membership reveals her to have been a prolific composer. With Burns, Holiday is credited as being her collaborator on the songs “Who Needs You?”(1960) and “Preacher Boy” (1962), which because they were published after Holiday’s death, she never recorded.

Burns studied music at the Malikh Music Conservatory where she focussed on harmony, composition, ear training and piano.<sup>129</sup> At the age of sixteen she started writing songs for the Cotton Club reviews. “Lady with the Fan,” which was often performed by Cab Calloway, is perhaps the most well-

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<sup>129</sup> Information from *The ASCAP Biographical Dictionary of Composers, Authors, and Publishers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Daniel I. McNamara (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1952), 13.

know of her material from these.<sup>130</sup> She also wrote classical music, “To My Beloved,” and “American Women’s Marching Song,” the official song of the New York War Savings Staff, Women’s Volunteers of the U.S. Treasury, as well as five pieces for piano, under the collective title of *San Francisco Sketches*.<sup>131</sup> She can also be heard singing two of her own compositions, “I Got a Need for You” and “Jazz O Jazz,” in a live performance recorded at the Hotel President in New York in 1935 with Adrian and his Tap Room Gang, one of the groups formed by the bandleader Adrian Rollini (1903-1956) during the 1930s. She married and later divorced Jerry Arlen (b.1912) the younger brother of the songwriter Harold Arlen (1905-1986), which is why ASCAP has her material listed under both the names of Jeanne Burns and Jeanne Burns Arlen.

In his autobiography, Cab Calloway (1907-1994) describes how, in 1930, Harold Arlen and the lyricist Ted Koehler (1894-1973) began writing songs for the Cotton Club reviews, but Burns’ contributions are not mentioned.<sup>132</sup> However, the fact that she was obviously a part of Harold Arlen’s milieu suggests that this was the way she got involved in writing for the Cotton Club. In 1952 she set up and ran the Burns and Saxon Music Publishing Company with David Saxon (1919-1973).<sup>133</sup>

It is highly probable that, like the rest of Holiday’s songs, both “Preacher Boy” and Who Needs You? are closely linked to events which occurred in her emotional life. According to Chilton, Holiday had initially met her last husband, Louis McKay, in 1935, when they had had a casual

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<sup>130</sup> A performance of *Lady with the Fan* by Cab Calloway can be viewed online. *Cab Calloway –The Lady with the Fan 1933* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmrJMC\\_NCMg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmrJMC_NCMg)

<sup>131</sup> The “Music –As Written” section of *Billboard*, November 12, 1949, 41, for the Detroit area, informs us that “J. J. Robbins and Sons has published *San Francisco Sketches* by the young American composer, Jeanne Burns. The titles include *The Smog Rolls in, Riding the Crazy Cable Cart, Top of the Mark, A Tourist Visits Chinatown* and *Southside after Dark*.”

<sup>132</sup> Cab Calloway and Bryant Rollins, *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 93. The “Music – As Written” section of *Billboard*, January 12, 1952 informs us that Jeanne Burns with Dave Saxon set up their own publishing firm, Saxon-Burns Music Company.

<sup>133</sup> Information from <http://composers-classical-music.com/a/ArlenJeanneBurns.htm> Accessed September 15th, 2016.

friendship. Sixteen years later, in 1951, they met up again, when Holiday was performing at the Club Juana in Detroit. Within a fortnight, she had appointed him as her personal manager and adviser. Soon afterwards she announced that they were married, even though this was not actually the case, as she was still legally married to her first husband, Jimmy Monroe. Whilst they remained together, Holiday was in love with McKay.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship was a stormy one, and even though they did succeed in living together for several years, by 1958 he had left her and returned to live with his previous family in California. When she discovered that McKay had once been a preacher she wrote the song “Preacher Boy” in his honour.<sup>135</sup> It is rarely recorded, but the musicians Isobel Campbell and Bill Wells have provided an instrumental version on an album which is mainly devoted to material Holiday wrote herself.<sup>136</sup>

The lyrics for “Who Needs You?” suggest that Holiday may have begun to work through her feelings for McKay and find some measure of emotional independence. She eventually filed for divorce and Howard Lucraft’s column in the October 18th, 1958, edition of *Melody Maker* has as a headline “Singer Billie Holiday plans to file a divorce suit against estranged hubby Louis McKay, before she leaves for a Paris nightclub engagement.”<sup>137</sup> Perhaps as a reflection of events going on in her life, the song’s words are reminiscent of the more positive and assertive mindsets of her earlier works, such as “Billie’s Blues. The song was recorded after Holiday’s death by another of John Hammond’s “discoveries” Aretha Franklin, who he believed possessed “the most dynamic jazz voice I’d encountered since Billie,”<sup>138</sup> and it formed part of

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<sup>134</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 170.

<sup>135</sup> Television interview with Mike Wallace on the *Night Beat* programme, originally broadcast on August 8, 1956. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jd4k168wS3A> Holiday also mentions McKay’s past as a preacher when describing a racist incident she experienced aboard a plane. (Holiday, *LSTB*, 171).

<sup>136</sup> Bill Wells and Isobel Campbell, ‘Preacher Boy’ on the CD, *Ghost of Yesterday*, (The Creeping Bent Organisation Ltd, 2002).

<sup>137</sup> Howard Lucraft, *Melody Maker*, October 18, 1958, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Hammond with Irving Townsend, *John Hammond on Record*, 346.

Franklin's debut album for Columbia, *Aretha: With the Ray Bryant Combo*, in 1961. The album was produced by Hammond, arranged by J. Leslie McFarland and marketed as a jazz album even though for this song, Franklin plays gospel-style piano.

We do not know how Burns and Holiday collaborated on these songs or even if they ever met each other. The possibility exists that the music and lyrics for these songs could have been found amongst Holiday's effects after her death and passed on by McKay to E.B. Marks to be tidied up. We are in the realms of speculation, but Burn's major contribution to the "tidying up" process may well have been the decisions made about the time signatures, as both "Preacher Boy" and "Who Needs You" are in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time.

### **Musical Life at Café Society (1938-1939).**

An important collaborative songwriting model codified by Bennett, not yet mentioned, is jamming, which occurs when musicians are creating live ideas whilst rehearsing or at jam sessions. Even though Holiday's working methods can be interpreted through the prism of other models, the jamming model could be said to have come to the fore during her residency at Café Society as she was in contact with her musician collaborators on a more or less daily basis. I will now be discussing Holiday's collaborations with fellow musicians, during this period, particularly the musical material she created with Sonny White and Tab Smith. They, along with most of the musicians on her studio recordings during this period, were members of Frankie Newton's band, the house band at Café Society.

Before her arrival at Café Society, Holiday had achieved a certain level of popularity in Harlem, but was still virtually unknown outside. The residency at Café Society therefore made it possible for downtown audiences to see her perform and helped to consolidate her reputation. She experienced a period of financial security owing to the residency, as well as a close working relationship with Frankie Newton (1906-1954).<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 65.

The club had a free-wheeling ethos and atmosphere. Its owner Barney Josephson (1902-1988) had set it up to be the antithesis of many of the other Manhattan nightclubs, and so it was patronised by “New Dealers,” free thinking people, writers, actors, musicians, teachers and lecturers.<sup>140</sup> It prided itself on its liberal credentials and the fact that it was not racially segregated, either front of house or behind the scenes. In contrast, venues such as the Cotton Club, although featuring Black performers, barred Black customers except for the occasional celebrity who would be allowed to sit at an out-of-the-way table.

For the romantic ballad, “Our Love is Different,” Holiday collaborated with Sonny White (1917-1971), R. Conway and Basil G. Alba.<sup>141</sup> “Our Love is Different,” which was recorded on July 5<sup>th</sup> 1939, is not one of the better known songs in Holiday’s repertoire and has received mixed reviews from contemporary critics.<sup>142</sup>

Like much of her material, the lyrics may have been a reflection of what was going on in Holiday’s personal life as she developed a close personal relationship with White, the pianist and arranger for the house band, during the residency. At one point it was even thought that they were going to be married.<sup>143</sup> White’s gentle and laid back personality was an accurate reflection of his playing style. The record producer Bill Weibacher, described him as “a quiet man who approached the studio piano as if it were a foreign object, unknown to him. He then played it in a diffident and restrained physical attitude.”<sup>144</sup> Similarly, Johnny Simmen, in an obituary written in response to the news of White’s death from cancer, said “[c]’était un homme paisible, parlant peu et qui préférait laisser la parole à son

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<sup>140</sup> Gabler, “Lady Named Billie and I,” 84.

<sup>141</sup> Despite extensive searches I have not yet been able to locate any information on R. Conway and Basil G. Alba.

<sup>142</sup> Brooks, “Songs of Billie Holiday” 100; Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 117.

<sup>143</sup> *Melody Maker*, May 20, 1939, 9.

<sup>144</sup> Nat Pierce, Liner Notes, *The Complete Master Jazz Piano Series* (Mosaic, 140, 1992).

piano.”<sup>145</sup> In the same obituary Simmen noted that : “[u]ne écoute attentive de ses disques révèle que si l’influence de Teddy Wilson ressort nettement dans les figures de main droite, ce que Sonny fait avec sa main gauche est très personnel: ses harmonies et son phrasé sont très différent de ceux de Teddy. Leur toucher aussi, est différent.”<sup>146</sup> By the time White began working with Holiday up at Café Society, the singer had already produced numerous recordings with Wilson for the Columbia label, so it is perhaps understandable why she was appreciative of a piano style with which she was already familiar.

Weibacher gives us some indication of the ease with which it may have been possible for Holiday to work creatively with White and put song material together. He noted that in his recording sessions with him in the studio, White only needed to play a song through once to have a finished take.<sup>147</sup>

Holiday’s co-writer on “Everything Happens for the Best,” recorded on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1939, was the alto, soprano and tenor saxophonist, arranger and bandleader, Tab Smith (1909-1971). From the start of his career in 1927, Smith had led and been a member of various small bands, and when Holiday first got to know him at Café Society he was an important member of Newton’s band. Perhaps his most prestigious recording date with Holiday was the April 20<sup>th</sup> 1939 session for the Commodore label with Newton, when he was one of the musicians on the recording of “Strange Fruit.”<sup>148</sup>

Smith had been arranging and writing new songs from the beginning of his career. According to Red Richards (1912-1998), a long time pianist for Smith, he was an excellent arranger.<sup>149</sup> The bassist Johnny Wilson provides us with an interesting account of Smith’s composing techniques in the early days of his career which indicate that like many jazz musicians, he learnt on

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<sup>145</sup> Johnny Simmen, “Sonny White, 1917-1971,” *Bulletin du Hot Club de France*, no.212, (1971): 8.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Pierce, “Liner Notes,” 8.

<sup>148</sup> Mike Penfold, “The Forgotten Ones – Tab Smith,” *Jazz Journal International*, xxxv/10 (1982): 8.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Carr, “Liner notes,” *Joy! At the Savoy*, (Saxophonograph 509, 1986).

the job. “Tab was arranging then but he couldn’t put the number of notes in each bar, he’d just write all the notes out and you’d have to follow the time. But he turned out to be a good arranger, he did a lot of things in Frankie Newton’s band. He did a lot of things for Basie too.”<sup>150</sup>

At the recording session for “Everything Happens for the Best” Newton was ill and was replaced by Hot Lips Page (1908-1954). Critics generally accept that the song is rather too clichéd to be as successful as, say, “Billie’s Blues.”<sup>151</sup> Nicholson lays both the strong and weak features at the door of Kenny Kersey (1916-1983), whose comping at the piano is unimpressive, even though he contributes a Teddy Wilson-inspired solo.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, it is Smith who emerges as the most memorable musician on the recording, producing a distinctive soprano-sax solo for the session.

Even though the precise circumstances under which these two songs were composed are not known, it is interesting to note that Holiday and her collaborators are credited with the words and music for them both. This signals that they may have been developed out of the rehearsals and informal jam sessions they would all be taking part in.<sup>153</sup> From our close reading of the Holiday literature it is possible to conceive of Holiday having the ideas for some lyrics and a tune and asking the musicians she was getting on so well with to put down the lyrics and harmonies, as she did with Herzog and Mendelsohn. Due to the collaborative nature of jazz, White and Smith could well have suggested different lyrics and harmonies. On the other hand, Holiday might have felt inspired to write a song influenced by notes, riffs and chords she heard being produced by White and Smith and/or the other band members. We have already discovered from Weibacher how quickly White was able to put together musical material in recording sessions, and know Smith was constantly arranging and writing down new songs throughout his career. “Whatever the precise dynamics of the relationships – which, fluid as

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Brooks, “Songs of Billie Holiday” 99.

<sup>152</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 116

<sup>153</sup> Dan Morgenstern, “Foreword,” *Café Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People*, by Barney Josephson with Terry Trilling-Josephson, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2009), xii.

they were, are by definition lost to history – it was undoubtedly a fertile and productive period of collaboration for all of them.

Because of the close working relationship Holiday experienced with the members of Frankie Newton band, it is also important to consider how, within jazz, the emotional interactions between the members of a group and/or individuals can affect the composition process and the development of musical ideas. This is an important aspect of the genre examined by Ingrid Monson. Monson argues that much of the jazz literature emphasises the competitive quality of the relationships between jazz musicians, but she argues that “it is also important to remember that solidarity and emotional bonds with other musicians are emphasized when players talk about what they love best about performing, what they love most about being a part of a musical community.”<sup>154</sup> In this regard, Monson is particularly interested in the way music contributes to the creation and maintenance of emotions and friendships, or conversely to feelings of animosity between jazz musicians.<sup>155</sup> But if Monson’s ideas are taken on board, then it provides a further complication in the use of Bennett’s system of songwriting codification to describe Holiday’s songwriting techniques, revealing as it does the complexity of the conditions giving rise to newly created work within the jazz genre. Bennett does not discuss emotional interactions between collaborators and because of this his system, with respect to jazz composition at least, can appear somewhat reductive.

## **Mal Waldron**

The importance of the emotional interaction between musicians and its effect on composition is exemplified in what is known about the collaborative relationship between Holiday and Mal Waldron (1925-2002), which he discussed in interviews. Born in New York, the composer, group leader and pianist was her accompanist from April 1957 until her death in 1959. After

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<sup>154</sup> Monson, “*Saying Something*” 177.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

graduating in composition from Queen's College, City University of New York, in the early 1950s, Waldron performed with various bands around New York, the most significant of these being Charles Mingus's Jazz Workshop, with which he worked for three years from 1954. When Waldron got the call to sub for Holiday's pianist at Pep's Musical Bar in Philadelphia in 1957 he was already working as a house pianist at Prestige Records, making albums under his own name and with others – such as John Coltrane – and was beginning to be recognised as a composer of some distinction.

As musical partners, Holiday and Waldron perhaps got on so well together because they shared comparable philosophical ideas about music making. In a 1976 interview Waldron stated that he “always play[ed] with my own feeling” and in a later interview commented that composing was “like music to me...If I don't breathe I'll die, and if I don't play music I'll die. It's my way of speaking, my way of communicating.”<sup>156</sup> His views replicate those of many musicians, but they were certainly similar to some of Holiday's stated attitudes towards music making in her autobiography.<sup>157</sup> Their friendship was probably further cemented by some of the hard times they went through together. For example, when the promoter Bruno Coquatrix pulled out of a brief European tour in 1956, Holiday and Waldron were forced to perform for a percentage of the door money at Paris' Mars Club in order to earn enough money for their fares home.<sup>158</sup>

From his various interviews it is apparent that Waldron was, for the rest of his life, not only grateful for receiving the call from Holiday – an experience he described as being one of the turning points in his career, “another step upwards” – but also conscious of what she had to teach him. He appears to have been an eager and willing pupil from the outset.<sup>159</sup> It is rare in the jazz literature to come across instances where singers can be said

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<sup>156</sup> Ira Gitler, “Mal Content on the Continent,” *Radio Free Jazz*, xvii, no. 10 (May 1976): 6; Lyne Darroch, “Nothing Limits Me Now,” *Jazz Times*, April 12, 1985, 14.

<sup>157</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 48.

<sup>158</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 218.

<sup>159</sup> Howard Cutler, “Mal Waldron,” *Cadence: The American Review of Jazz and Blues*, 14, no.5 (May 1988): 10; Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 174.

to have influenced the style and work of instrumental musicians, yet this occurred in the musical relationship between Holiday and Waldron, for he was prepared to attempt to adapt his playing style to suit Holiday's requirements.<sup>160</sup> He was of course heavily influenced by the bebop and hard bop genres then current in the New York club scene. Nevertheless, he had initially aspired to be a classical pianist, and was imbued with the music of composers such as Chopin, Bartók, Brahms, Bach and Satie. This left a life-long imprint on his personal style and piano technique. He claimed that Holiday gave him many helpful hints, and "told me I wasn't playing funky enough, and from that day on, I worked at playing more and more bluesy and earthy for her."<sup>161</sup> He also emphasised what Holiday had taught him about the use of words with music, recalling that he "learned a lot about space from Billie, and about phrasing, and knowing the words of a ballad before you play it."<sup>162</sup>

In the album liner notes to *Left Alone: Mal Waldron at the Piano Plays the Moods of Billie Holiday*, his instrumental tribute album to Holiday released in 1959, Waldron describes the nature of the support he received from the singer:

[s]he always encouraged me so much in my music. I know whenever we'd work a club date, there'd always be trio sets; she'd sing and the trio would come on. She always sat out there and listened. It might look as if she was talking or something else, but she was so aware that when I'd come down she'd tell me just what had happened during the trio set and what she felt I should have added or what came over so strong for her; that kind of encouragement.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Whalen discusses the snobbishness that existed amongst musicians in their attitude toward singers and their influence on their style. The percussionist Joe Harris (1926-2016) told her that Holiday and Charlie Parker (1920-1955) certainly knew each other. Because of this, Whalen argues that Holiday, who preceded Parker, must have influenced him and other bebop musicians, but that the "snobbishly superior attitude toward vocalists" of many in the bebop scene may have prevented them from acknowledging her. Whalen, "Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study," 235-236.

<sup>161</sup> Chilton, *Billies Blues*, 174. See also Blackburn, *With Billie*, 305.

<sup>162</sup> Bob Blumenthal "Mal Waldron," *Down Beat*, April 1981, 30; Ira Gitler, "Liner Notes," *Left Alone: Mal Waldron at the Piano Plays the Moods of Billie Holiday*, (Bethlehem Jazz, 1959; Cutler, "Mal Waldron," 12.

<sup>163</sup> Mal Waldron, "Mal Waldron: The Way He Remembers Billie Holiday," on *Left Alone*.

Unlike some of Holiday's colleagues, Waldron remained loyal to the end, and was critical of those who considered that Holiday's art had deteriorated with the changes she experienced vocally. He always believed that even though the younger Holiday had more energy, the mature woman delivered her art with more experience, saying: "[s]ure the voice was going, but the emotion and her *spirit* were as strong as ever. It was really equal in the end."<sup>164</sup> Perhaps this was a view only to be expected from a musician who accompanied her right to the end of her career.

Holiday and Waldron collaborated on "Left Alone" whilst on a cross country flight across America. Waldron explained that: [w]e were on a 'plane going to San Francisco. We had about seven hours to kill...So she decided she wanted to do a tune and she wanted it to be about her life."<sup>165</sup> Again, it is one of the songs that Holiday did not have the opportunity to record before she died; however an instrumental version of the song was recorded by Waldron in November 1957 and included on his tribute album issued after her death.

Waldron's accompanying style was always to focus on the chords rather than the melody line, which in this song allows space for the starkness and intensity of the melody and lyrics.<sup>166</sup> Thus his accompanying style was often discreet. Therefore, when working with Holiday and other vocalists, he was always the ideal accompanist, making it possible for the melody to come to the fore on its own accord, rather than using his piano technique to put the spotlight on his own ingenuity and skill.<sup>167</sup> Waldron went on to create two other tribute albums for Holiday, *Blues for Lady Day: A Personal Tribute to Billie Holiday* and *Left Alone Revisited: A Tribute to Billie Holiday*.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 208. Similar comments were made by Waldron in interviews with Roland Baggenaes "Mal Waldron," *Coda: The Jazz Magazine*, no.153 (February 1977): 3 and Blumenthal "Mal Waldron," 30.

<sup>165</sup> Mal Waldron, "Mal Waldron: The Way He Remembers Billie Holiday."

<sup>166</sup> Darroch, "Nothing Limits Me Now," 14.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> *Blues for Lady Day: A Personal Tribute to Billie Holiday*, (Freedom Records, 1972 (Album), Black Lion Records, 1994, (CD) and *Left Alone Revisited: A Tribute to Billie Holiday*, (with Artie Shepp), Enja Records, Enja 9141-1, 2002.

After Holiday's death, he began an association with Abbey Lincoln, who recorded a vocal version of the song with him for her album *Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead* (1961). Even though the song's words are despairing, Lincoln's performance is strident and assertive. This saves the song from being over-sentimental and makes possible an interpretation of it which lifts it from being merely about an individual's feelings to the more collective experience of being Black and a woman in America. Lincoln admitted to being heavily influenced by Holiday, and her album was a significant marker during a period when as an artist she was working to free herself up artistically in order affirm her individual identity as an African-American woman in the context of her commitment to Black culture and the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>169</sup> For Lincoln, Holiday's individual suffering was symbolic of the suffering experienced by African-American people in America historically. The main focus of the lyrics – that is, the recognition of emotional deprivation and loss, and the never ending search for fulfilment and completion – could be interpreted as providing a mirror of the suffering experienced by Black people historically in the U.S.A., thereby lifting the song out of the usual romantic love trope. Lincoln's treatment of "Left Alone" emphasised its collective rather than individual significance, as she did with others on the album. She explained that from her standpoint: "[i]n a way...all of these tunes are about Billie...They're all about us."<sup>170</sup>

## **Herbie Nichols**

Holiday's autobiography shares its title with the song "The Lady Sings the Blues," which she co-wrote with the pianist Herbie Nichols (1919-1963). As well as being a well-regarded pianist, Nichols was an extremely prolific composer and poet, but ended his life in relative obscurity, dying whilst relatively young of leukaemia. "The Lady Sings the Blues" is his most well-

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<sup>169</sup> During this period, Lincoln was President of the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage.

<sup>170</sup> Nat Hentoff, Liner Notes, *Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead*, 1961,

known composition. Less than half of the one hundred and seventy compositions in his personal catalogue have survived because of a flood in his father's Harlem flat, where his music and poems were being stored after his death.<sup>171</sup>

The music for "The Lady Sings the Blues" was in effect commissioned by Holiday, as it was closely connected with the circumstances surrounding the writing of the autobiography of the same name. Holiday's co-writer, William Dufty, set up the collaboration between Nichols and Holiday by arranging a meeting in his flat, the only other audience members being Dufty's wife Maely and their baby.<sup>172</sup> Holiday then wrote the lyrics to fit the musical material provided by Nichols. Nichols said that "'The Lady Sings the Blues,' originally called 'Serenade,' is a bluesy rhythmical tune in which one can almost hear the legendary strumming of the heart-strings. The great Billie Holiday, upon hearing it one night, fell in love with it and immediately began to make up her own earthy, inimitable lyrics."<sup>173</sup> The song therefore most clearly fits Bennett's "Demarcation" model of collaboration, as Nichols provided the music for Holiday to write the words for, and indeed "Svengali," as Holiday as an artist was one of the co-writers.

The song was recorded by Holiday on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1956 using an arrangement by the clarinetist Tony Scott. It is topped by a drum roll and highly dramatic trumpet call – which the singing responds to – unfolding into a standard 32 bar AABA form and ending with another drum roll. The compositional use of drums was a regular feature of Nichols's compositions, as he had developed a passion for African music. In his own instrumental version, he also finishes off with a drum roll.

Holiday's most famous recording of this song was the Carnegie Hall concert on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1956 which was tied in with the promotion of *Lady Sings the Blues*. On that occasion, Gilbert Millstein read excerpts from her autobiography. Millstein observed of the audience that "they loved her" and

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<sup>171</sup> Frank Kimbrough and Ben Allison, "Liner Notes," *Herbie Nichols: The Complete Blue Note Recordings*, Capital Records, 1997, BN 59352-2, 1997.

<sup>172</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 401.

<sup>173</sup> Herbie Nichols, "Liner notes" *The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Herbie Nichols*. Original liner notes for Blue Note 1519 issued in August 1957.

he was honest enough to admit that they could not have cared less about his readings.<sup>174</sup> She was applauded by both the audience and musicians when she came on stage. During her performance Holiday was in good voice and constantly interrupted by the audience applause and had to respond to at least six encores.

The economics the publishing world impacted on the title of the song. Holiday would have preferred *Bitter Crop*, the last two words of the song “Strange Fruit,” as the title of her autobiography. But this was not acceptable to her publishers, Doubleday, who insisted upon *Lady Sings the Blues*. Griffin’s examination of the situation clarifies why this battle over the book’s nomenclature was so important:

By calling her life story “Bitter Crop” she linked it to centuries of dispossession, oppression and terrorism, experienced by black Americans. She made her story part of that larger historical narrative. As such, readers might have approached the book with a very different set of expectations...Furthermore, the title singles her out as an individual with no connection to a history or a people and makes no commentary on the life she as a black woman was forced to live here.”<sup>175</sup>

“The Lady Sings the Blues” can be used to monitor the changing and varied aspects of Holiday’s voice and career. It was, for example, one of six songs she performed at the Newport Jazz Festival in Freebody Park in July 1957, a concert which resulted in rather mixed reviews. Her performance was recorded and released alongside Ella Fitzgerald’s on the album *Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday at Newport* in 1958.<sup>176</sup> Holiday’s voice sounded tired and was described by contemporary critics as “a shadow of the past” providing evidence of her “struggling with life.” *Down Beat* further commented, “[t]he thin, cracking voice quivered through the set in semi-recitative style.”<sup>177</sup> However, perhaps because, in retrospect, it is possible to appreciate what was original and different about her sound, criticism about

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<sup>174</sup> Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*, 138.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>176</sup> *Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday at Newport*. Verve MGV-8234.

<sup>177</sup> Review of Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday at Newport, in “1957 Newport Jazz Festival,” *Down Beat*, February 6, 1958, 24.

her vocal technique as she grew older is less harsh amongst critics writing after Holiday's death. When the transformation in her voice occurred, she focussed on providing powerful interpretations of songs. Clarke, for example, points out that on this occasion she was able to negotiate Nichols's sinuous melody on "The Lady Sings the Blues," and that the "roughness and tiredness in her voice adds to a memorable experience."<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, the album was to prove the final straw in the rocky relationship between Holiday and the Verve label, which subsequently ended her contract. The label owner, Norman Granz, in an interview with Nicholson, suggested that the underlying reasons for the split were personal ones associated with drugs and her "personality." "I think we did all we could together...She was very independent, very outspoken, but it helped to be a fan."<sup>179</sup>

To conclude this chapter, I would like to put something else into the "mix." According to Collins, the nature of Black women's cultural contributions to society can usefully be considered in the context of Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledge." Foucault describes subjugated knowledges as "those blocks of knowledge which were present but disguised," that is, "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity."<sup>180</sup> However Collins' use of the term subjugated knowledge differs somewhat from Foucault's. For her, Black feminist knowledge is not "naïve knowledge"; it has just been made to appear so by those who control the procedures for validating knowledge, that is, the knowledge gatekeepers.<sup>181</sup> Foucault also argues that subjugated knowledge "owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it."<sup>182</sup> Suppressing the

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<sup>178</sup> Clark, *Wishing on the Moon*, 404-405.

<sup>179</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 209. Norman Granz conversation with Nicholson, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1994.

<sup>180</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al, (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1980), 82.

<sup>181</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009, 311.

<sup>182</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 82.

knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to dominate. The seeming absence of any dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization.<sup>183</sup> Collins argues that the component of Black feminist thought that analyses the oppression of Black women partially fits this description, even though long-standing independent, African-derived influences within Black Women's thought do not form a part of Foucault's analysis.<sup>184</sup>

I have already discussed in chapter two how for Collins, the standpoints of African-American women are unique because of the intersectional combination of race, gender and class oppression they have faced, and that their intellectual and cultural contributions have been routinely suppressed. Her way of bringing these intellectual and cultural contributions to the fore is by reframing them, making use of Antonio Gramsci's idea of the "organic intellectual" alongside Foucault's theory. She deconstructs traditional notions of "the intellectual" to uncover a long and rich tradition of Black feminist thought, which has and still is being produced by ordinary Black women in their everyday lives. This is why she believes that the expression of Black feminist thought needs to be searched for in alternative institutional locations and among women not usually perceived as "intellectuals"; women who can be considered to be "organic" intellectuals in the Gramscian sense of the term. She therefore challenges the traditionally narrow concepts of academia, and argues that it is important that in the academic pantheon, the contributions of women not previously considered intellectuals are included, to make it possible for a multifaceted Black women's standpoint to be hammered out.<sup>185</sup> To illustrate this she discusses how Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual can be usefully applied to

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<sup>183</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009, 5.

<sup>184</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 18.

<sup>185</sup> Patricia Hill Collins "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought" in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, eds. Carole R. McCann & Seung-Kyung Kim. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 318-333.

the political and intellectual contributions to society made by the African-American feminist activist Sojourner Truth (d.1883). According to Gramsci:

[e]very social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.<sup>186</sup>

Thus academics are trained to represent the interests of the groups in power, whereas “organic” intellectuals depend on other factors, including common sense, but also represent the interests of their own group. For Collins, Truth was representative of an “organic” intellectual, but she would not have been recognised as such by the dominant group because her intellectual activities threatened the prevailing social order.<sup>187</sup>

Of particular interest to this thesis on Holiday is the fact that Collins has also stressed that musicians, vocalists, poets, writers, and other artists constitute a group from which Black women intellectuals have emerged. Musicians in particular have enjoyed close association with the larger community of African-American women constituting their audience.<sup>188</sup> She illustrates this in her examination of Alice Walker’s classic essay, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” where Walker highlights the significance of art and music in the lives of African-American women as modes of expression which must have facilitated their survival (even when corralled into limited spheres), enabling them to resist objectification, and links this to the importance of honouring their often unrecognised contributions to intellectual thought.<sup>189</sup>

Paul Gilroy uses a similar argument to Collins on the values attributed to musicians and artists within diasporic African communities. He writes that

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<sup>186</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 5.

<sup>187</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009, 17-18, 311-312.

<sup>188</sup> Collins, “Politics of Black Feminist Thought,” 333.

<sup>189</sup> Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems*, 33, no.6, Special Theory Issue (Oct-Dec., 1986): S23; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 1990, 13; Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: The Women’s Press, 1984), 231-243.

traditions invented during and after slavery have supported the development of a priestly caste of musicians and artists whose work has made possible the process of Black identity formation and enabled African-diasporic communities to deal with the crisis of modernity. Like Collins, he believes that these musicians and artists can be described as organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense as they largely operate without the benefits that flow from a relation to the modern state or from secure institutional locations within the cultural industries.<sup>190</sup> Gilroy proposes that the fluid relationships in contemporary popular musics between musicians, DJ's and audiences favour the ongoing formations in microcosm of collective identities.<sup>191</sup> Gilroy is writing about contemporary popular musics, but what he is proposing could be applied to blues and jazz. In this context it is possible to understand how musicians and artists were elevated as their skills were required as a survival mechanism in oppressed communities. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to appreciate how Holiday's socialisation as an African-American musician would have enabled her to consciously or unconsciously understand and actualise her role, both as an artist and organic intellectual in the performative context.

Close readings of the Holiday material reveal that the men around her often took credit for her work, and the negative associations with being female and a composer – that is the existence of hyper-masculinity within the jazz community and the fact that this community also reflected the unequal gender relations in the rest of society – made it easier for them to do so. The concept of the nature of appropriation is a contested one, the major difficulties being the attempts to determine when musical homage and respect becomes a musical “rip-off.”<sup>192</sup> An important issue in discussions of the concept of appropriation in popular music, has been its moral status, particularly with regard to borrowings from marginalised genres and/or

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<sup>190</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 76; Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic”, 111-136.

<sup>191</sup> Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic,” 111-136.

<sup>192</sup> Steven Feld “Notes on “World Beat”” in *Music Grooves*, eds. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Tucson, Arizona: Fenestra Books, 2005): 238-246; Born and Hesmondhalgh, eds., *Western Music and Its Others*.

disempowered social groups. In the U.S. in particular, the debates have focussed on white appropriations of Black music. Therefore, within popular music genres, when discussing the subject of music and appropriation, the issue is often linked to the appropriation of a racial or ethnic group's culture by another. Jazz is one of the most collaborative of genres, yet still it is possible to argue, if foregrounding gender as a mode of analysis, that appropriation of musical material from Holiday by some of the male colleagues she was surrounded by occurred because her musical contributions, and its depth and quality were not always sufficiently recognised for the reasons I have already discussed with respect to the nature of the jazz community.

If Holiday's contribution is viewed from this perspective, then it is possible to understand that she can be considered an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense of the term, as she was an individual passing on valuable information from a knowledge base developed by African-American women over the generations. In addition, if Foucault's contention that subjugated knowledge is generally opposed is taken aboard, then it is possible to understand how and why Holiday's creative agency was not always appreciated and valued by many within the jazz community, and wider society as a whole. It also raises questions about what this subjugated knowledge could tell us about the category of "composer," about where songs come from, and about the status of adapted traditional lyrics in relation to those credited with a single author. In short, it tells us how the legal regime of intellectual property as conceived in the West – and the various kinds of status that it brings to those deemed its authors – mirrors those hierarchies of power and discourse that Collins and Foucault discuss, and why, as was discussed earlier on in this chapter, it is difficult to adequately account for the nature of the creative agency Holiday utilised, or the meanings her work articulated. Because terms such as "composer" and "songwriter" have linkages with cultural hierarchies of power and discourse within our society, it explains why it can be difficult to linguistically define what Holiday was doing when she was putting music together.

Ironically, despite the gender inequalities existing within the jazz community, the likelihood is that Holiday had more straightforward collaborative relations with her fellow musicians. This would be due not only to the collaborative nature of jazz practice, but also because, as was discussed previously, a woman composing or writing songs would not always be seen as being a threat to male hegemony. The evidence reveals that where problems do occur, such as in the collaborative relationship with Herzog, it is because he was technically defined as a songwriter. For Holiday to be also defined as a songwriter on the songs where they collaborated, complicated the definition of the term. During this period, possessing the title of songwriter, however irregular or limited the financial awards, meant that one was inevitably plugged into the more commercial aspects of the music business, a music business where the identifiable author of a work was legally defined and presented financial opportunities. This situation contrasted with the collaborative and composition process of much of blues and early jazz, where who wrote what, where and when, was rarely very clearly defined. Holiday's compositions reveal how she not only made use of the emotional raw materials of her life to produce her songs, but also that of the talents and creativity of the other musicians and arrangers she was surrounded with and so, in contrast to the world of music publishing during this period in America, her songwriting is illustrative of the collaborative and sometimes informal nature of much jazz composition.

In the context of the main models of collaborative songwriting outlined by Bennett, this work illustrates how she made use of all the models. Bennett's ideas are useful as an aid in getting one to begin thinking about the range of collaborative processes in existence, but ultimately it would not be a good idea to overinvest in his system because he cannot adequately describe the complexity, range and even the ad-hoc nature of the collaborative process of much of the jazz composition which occurred during Holiday's career. I have used Monson's discussion on the need to consider the emotional interactions amongst musicians, and their contribution to the composition process, to add nuance to Bennett's system; but I could equally have used Berliner's massive work, which trawls the complexity of the subject of

improvisation and composition in the lives of more than fifty musicians over eight hundred and fifty pages.<sup>193</sup> It is important to remember that despite its limitations, in *LSTB*, Holiday always confidently presents herself, not only as a musician, but also as a songwriter in common with other musicians in her peer group. The fact that her autobiography provides detailed explanations of how and why she had put together songs such as “Don’t Explain” and “God Bless the Child” also reveals that she was entirely comfortable with the sobriquet of songwriter. Rarely-asked questions about her songwriting abilities surfaced in an interview with Willis Conover, who asked her which of the many songs she recorded she had composed herself. Holiday revealed herself to be proud of her creative abilities, and not slow in coming forward with positive views about the music she had written.<sup>194</sup>

Holiday was constantly recreating, composing and recomposing the material of Tin Pan Alley, so the likelihood is that she did not perceive her songwriting as distinct from the activity she entered into every time she recorded or performed in the recording studio or on stage. The problem for her is that others must have done so, for, except for the Conover interview, her songwriting skills are never foregrounded in articles or interviews, even though by the time her autobiography was published in 1956 she had written almost twenty songs. One can only come to the conclusion that this was the reason why, in her autobiography, Holiday presents us with a standpoint which chooses to emphasise her songwriting abilities. She was by this stage in her career in no doubt aware that if she did not do so, nobody else was going to do so, on her behalf. If the understanding that for African-American women, the impact of intersectionality on their lives renders them invisible in many spheres is applied to Holiday, it is possible to realise that the failure to acknowledge her creative agency as a composer/songwriter was certainly not unusual in the history of jazz or popular music.

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<sup>193</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*.

<sup>194</sup> Holiday, “Willis Conover Interviews Billie Holiday,” 25.

## Chapter 5

### “Strange Fruit”: Holiday as *Auteur* and Political Activist

“It was during my stint at Café Society that a song was born which became my personal protest.” Billie Holiday.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

After the previous chapter’s emphasis on Holiday’s role as a composer and songwriter, it may seem surprising to discuss “Strange Fruit,” since we already know that Abel Meeropol (1903-1986) wrote the original words and music.<sup>2</sup> But the purpose of this chapter, which again foregrounds gender as a critical concept, is to examine the ways in which Holiday could be regarded as a fellow collaborator and, if not the “author,” then the *auteur* of the song. After an examination of the historical lynching narrative and racial politics in America during the period of the song’s construction, I will discuss conflicting ideas of authorship which were then in existence, which “Strange Fruit” and the legal dispute it originated helps to illuminate. After an analysis of Holiday’s recording, and drawing on a concept of “auteurism” derived from film studies, the singer’s role as *auteur* is examined in the context of the symbolic spectacle of the Black woman singing in American culture.

It will be argued that the song’s political meaning may not consist simply of the textual “message” found in its lyrics, but in something closer to what Georgina Born has termed a “musical assemblage.” Born defines a musical assemblage as being “a particular combination of mediations (sonic, discursive, visual, artefactual, technological, social, temporal) characteristic

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<sup>1</sup> Holiday, (*LSTB*), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Meeropol had (supposedly) failed to copyright the song before Holiday recorded it because he did not think it had any commercial potential, and only learnt it had been recorded when a friend brought him the Commodore 78. See David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 68-69.

of a certain musical culture and historical period.”<sup>3</sup> Her approach makes it possible for us to consider the combination of the original created material, the performance context and role played by audiences in response to “Strange Fruit.” The concept of the assemblage has its origins in Theodor W. Adorno’s idea that music is potentially a form of praxis and a form of political action which can be revealed through an understanding of the music’s formal qualities as well as in the ways composers deal with the tensions existing between the material and external factors.<sup>4</sup> In the context of this discussion, this approach will enable us to consider whether Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” can be said to transcend what Evelyn M. Hammonds has described as “the problematic of silence.” In her work, Hammonds traces the historical, sexual and labour exploitation of Black women’s bodies and argues that they have been colonised and codified in culturally specific ways.<sup>5</sup> I will argue that Holiday’s auterism, and her assembling of the song and its contexts, interrupted such silence in the production of political meaning.

Two versions of “Strange Fruit”, a song which famously evokes the brutality of lynching, were recorded on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1939 by Holiday and the Café Society band on the independent Commodore label. According to the critic Leonard Feather, the Columbia record company, which Holiday was signed to, had refused to record it because they considered the lyrics to be inflammatory and were concerned that the label would be boycotted in the South.<sup>6</sup> Its controversial subject matter meant that the song was banned by many radio stations (including the BBC in the UK); yet it still became part of the mainstream jazz repertoire and Holiday’s most popular recording, by one

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<sup>3</sup> Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 8.

<sup>4</sup> Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn M. Hammonds, “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence,” in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, eds. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge: 1997), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Feather, liner notes, *Billie Holiday: Strange Fruit*, Atlantic Records SD 1614, 1972. Cited in Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 195.

account selling more than 10,000 copies in its first week.<sup>7</sup> It was intended to, and often did have, a devastating effect upon listeners, and in particular influenced the politically aware. The columnist Samuel Grafton wrote:

it will, even after the tenth hearing, make you blink and hold to your chair...Even now, as I think of it, the short hair on the back of my neck tightens and I want to hit somebody. I know who, too...if the anger of the exploited ever mounts high enough in the south, it now has its Marseillaise.<sup>8</sup>

As the writer Caryl Phillips points out, “[t]hose who heard ‘Strange Fruit’ in the late 30s were shocked, for the true barbarity of southern violence was generally only discussed in Black newspapers. To be introduced to such realities by a song was unprecedented, and was considered by many, including leftwing supporters of Meeropol, to be in poor taste.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Café Society’s audience demographic, described by David Stowe as “labor leaders, intellectuals, writers, jazz lovers, celebrities, students and assorted leftists,” ensured that “Strange Fruit” attracted the kind of people most likely to be receptive to its message.<sup>10</sup>

Meeropol’s personal papers contain dozens of letters attempting to establish his authorship and, long after his death, his sons are still at work on this task.<sup>11</sup> Although he had not initially written the song for Holiday, and other people including his wife, Anne, had sung it before he took it to her, according to David Margolick “so completely did Holiday come to own “Strange Fruit” that Meeropol... spent half a lifetime starting with the moment the song became famous, reminding people that it was really his

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<sup>7</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 68; Peter Daniels, “Strange Fruit’: The Story of a Song.” 8<sup>th</sup> February 2002. Mhtml:file:///D:\StrangeFruitthe story of a song-World Socialist Web Site.mht...04/06/13.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Grafton, “I’d Rather be Right” *New York Post*, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1939. Cited in Nancy Kovaleff Baker, “Abel Meeropol (a.k.a. Lewis Allan): Political Commentator and Social Conscience,” *American Music*, 20, no.1 (Spring 2002): 46.

<sup>9</sup> Caryl Phillips, “Blood at the Root’,” *The Guardian*, August 18, 2007.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/aug/18/jazz.urban>

<sup>10</sup> David Stowe, “The Politics of Café Society,” *The Journal of American History*, 84, no. 4, (March 1998): 1391.

<sup>11</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 25-26.

creation, and his alone.”<sup>12</sup> Yet Holiday’s recording ensured that the song was immediately associated with her in the minds of the public.

Because Holiday’s performance has come to be regarded as so authoritative, many other singers have found it difficult to recreate their own versions. Nevertheless, the song has been covered by other performers, and Fumiko Sakashita has even argued that there has been a Black feminist embrace of the song as so many Black female singers – including Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra Wilson, Dee Dee Bridgewater and India Arie – have recorded or else covered it for live performances.<sup>13</sup>

Holiday’s own attitude towards the song is plainly demonstrated in her autobiography. She said:

[i]t was during my stint at Café Society that a song was born which became my personal protest – “Strange Fruit.” The germ of the song was in a poem by Lewis Allen...When he showed me that poem, I dug it right off...He [Allen] suggested that Sonny White, who had been my accompanist, and I turn it into music. So the three of us got together and did the job in about three weeks. I also got a wonderful assist from Danny Mendelsohn, another writer who had done arrangements for me. He helped me with arranging the song and rehearsing it patiently.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the accusations levelled at Holiday – which said she had claimed to be wholly responsible for the original words and music – a close reading of this part of her autobiography suggests that she wishes to inform us that she is not choosing to take all the acclaim for the recording’s development and success. Holiday was full of praise for the help she received in crafting her version from Sonny White and the arranger Danny Mendelsohn, and clearly viewed it as a collaborative project created by a conversation between musicians, along with the material she was presented with by Meeropol.<sup>15</sup>

However, Holiday’s account also reveals that she considered the material she had been given by Meeropol to be incomplete, and that for the song to become her “personal protest” it required more work, as the phrases,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>13</sup> Fumiko Sakashita, “The Politics of Sexuality in Billie Holiday’s ‘Strange Fruit’ in *Gender and Lynching: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Evelyn M. Simien) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 104

<sup>14</sup> Holiday, (*LSTB*), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

“a song was born,” “a germ of a song,” “turn it into music” and “arranging the song” make abundantly clear. This account of the song’s genesis is lifted almost word-for-word from an interview she gave to the *PM* newspaper in September 1945. On that occasion, after Meeropol objected to the editor and what he considered to be the public slighting of his role as composer, the *PM* editors printed a response from Holiday in which she explained that what she was talking about in the interview “was the interpretation of the song that she had worked on.”<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to examine this dispute. Building on the arguments of earlier chapters – which described the mechanisms of collaborative jazz compositional methods, and showed how they habitually fell outside legal definitions of authorship offered by Western intellectual property laws – a new and theoretically informed approach will reframe this dispute and the song itself, moving the focus away from the production of the “text” and towards the production of a wider “context.” I will show how forms of compositional contributions were staged by Holiday, who acted not so much as the song’s author, but as its *auteur*.

## **Gender and the American Lynching Narrative**

By the time Holiday began singing “Strange Fruit” in 1939, the practice of lynching had been an established part of the social fabric of American life and culture for centuries, particularly in the South after the Civil War.<sup>17</sup> Evelyn M. Simien writes that like executions by guillotine during the French Revolution, they were

celebrated as a spectacular event and drew large crowds of people who tortured, burned alive, and dismembered their victims. Participants and onlookers left the scene with grisly souvenirs, mostly body parts, including genitalia. People fought each other for bits of burnt flesh, teeth, nails and hair. Photographs were taken, and

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<sup>16</sup>John Szwed, *Billie Holiday*, 215.

<sup>17</sup> Edwin Moore, “Strange Fruit is Still a Song for Today,” *Guardian Newspaper*, September 18, 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cfamerican/2010/sep/18/strange-fruit-song...05/06/2013>.

postcards were mailed to friends and family. Mothers held their babies in tow, standing next to the corpse of a dead body and smiling for a photo opportunity. Such a gruesome spectacle gripped the imagination and enjoyed widespread public approval with extensive media coverage in local and national papers.<sup>18</sup>

According to official figures, three lynchings were carried out in the year Holiday first sang “Strange Fruit,” but there were signs that many more occurred which were covered up and also that they were becoming increasingly brutal and sadistic. Margolick cites the words of a spectator who said: “[t]here used to be big mobs hunting for a nigger, but now you just hear about some nigger found hanging off a bridge.”<sup>19</sup> According to figures kept by Alabama’s Tuskegee Institute, between 1889 and 1940, 3,833 people were lynched in the US.<sup>20</sup> During the four years following the stock market crash in 1929, 150 Black people were lynched.<sup>21</sup> Paula Giddings also notes that “the news reports of the horrible crimes were made more vivid by the technological advances in communication and photography, and the sensationalism of yellow journalism.”<sup>22</sup>

A 1937 Gallup Poll revealed anti-lynching sentiments to be widely shared on the national level, the figures showing that seventy per cent of Americans supported federal anti lynching legislation. But a 1939 anthropological study discovered that sixty-five per cent of southern white respondents believed that lynching for rape was justifiable.<sup>23</sup>

In order to fully understand the import of Holiday’s decision to sing “Strange Fruit” it is important to consider two points. Firstly, even though lynching was rationalised by many within the white community as a punishment for the rape of white women and thus as a means of ensuring the protection of those women, in retrospect it can be understood to have

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyn M. Simien “Introduction,” *Gender and Lynching*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> Philips, “Blood at the Root.”

<sup>21</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History* (New York: International Publishers, New York, 1954), 480.

<sup>22</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Sakashita, “Politics of Sexuality,” 107.

functioned as a means of maintaining the status quo, that is, the socioeconomic and political hegemony of whites. Secondly, recent scholarship has demonstrated that historically, women have generally been erased from the literature on lynching, so the fact that Black women were also victims of lynching and rape throughout U.S. history has often been overlooked.<sup>24</sup> Hazel V. Carby has noted that the rape of Black women has never been as powerful a symbol of Black oppression as the spectacle of lynching.<sup>25</sup> When African-American women did put in an appearance within the mainly masculine narratives, they were usually presented as tragic characters or “collateral” victims; that is, they would end up being raped and lynched by whites because they got in the way when defending the men in their lives. According to Simien, Black women were lynched because they “lived under the shadow of [the] assumption that by virtue of their race, they were so morally deprived and violent that they seemed as dangerous as their male counterparts.”<sup>26</sup> Within contemporary newspaper accounts and oral testimonies, female lynching victims were described in racialised and sexualised terms as “fiends,” “assassins,” “prostitutes,” and “negress brutes.” “Collateral” victims discussed by Simien include Mary Turner, who was murdered by a mob when eight months pregnant (the Associated Press reported that she had made “unwise remarks” and had “flew[n] in a rage” about the lynching of her husband, saying that she would press charges against the perpetrators); and Laura Nelson, who confessed to shooting a sheriff in order to protect her son (she was seized by a mob, and both were lynched in Okemah, Oklahoma in May 1911, but not before Laura had been raped by several men).<sup>27</sup> These events illustrate that the use of rape and lynching can only be fully understood in the context of strategies for the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 115; and Simien, “Introduction,” 1-13 at 2 and 3. Examples of black female lynching victims can be found in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, (New York: Vintage, 1972), 161 and 162 and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African-American Women’s Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade,” in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, eds. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 150-153.

<sup>25</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39.

<sup>26</sup> Simien, “Introduction” 2 and 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2.

maintenance of power by the white community over the entire Black community, both males and females.

Carby's research reveals that many African-American female intellectuals writing in the last decades of the nineteenth century recognised that the rape of Black women was intertwined with lynching as a weapon of political terror and control.<sup>28</sup> Historically, Black feminists have challenged the dominant discourse and worked to disclose the true purpose behind the myth of the Black rapist, opposing white justification of lynching by focusing on the cases of lynching and the rape of Black women. For instance, Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) wrote in 1895 that "the same crime [rape] committed by white men against Negro women and girls, [wa]s never punished by mob or the law."<sup>29</sup>

Also, Carby's examination of the work of the nineteenth century African-American writer Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1935) illustrates that Hopkins perceived the real threat to white supremacy not to be Black sexuality, but the Black vote. Hopkins wrote in her novel *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900) that

[L]ynching was instituted to crush the manhood of the enfranchised black. Rape is the crime which appeals most strongly to the heart of the home life. Merciful God! Irony of ironies! The men who created the mulatto race, who recruit its ranks year after year by the very means which they invoked lynch law to suppress, bewailing the sorrows of violated womanhood!<sup>30</sup>

Hopkins recognised that the more Black men gained political and economic equality with white men, the more the excuse was used that they were a sexual threat to Southern women in order to contain and control Black

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<sup>28</sup> Hazel V. Carby, "On the Threshold of Woman's Era": Lynching, Empire and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory' in *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 301-316.

<sup>29</sup> Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record* (1895), reprinted in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster, (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1997), 127. Terborg-Penn considers that Ida B. Wells "was the most militant of the anti-lynching journalists, the only one to be run out of a city and lost her printing press for her attacks on lynching and the motivation for it...Male black leaders of the times limited their approach to the lynching problem to public outcries." (*African-American Women's Networks*, 149).

<sup>30</sup> Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (Boston, Mass: The Colored Co-operative Publishing Co., 1900), 270-271. (Reprinted New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

communities. Thus for Carby, nineteenth century Black feminists left as legacies “theories that expose the colonization of the black female body by white male power and the destruction of black males who attempted to exercise any oppositional patriarchal control.”<sup>31</sup>

Histories of anti-lynching movements have also tended to obscure the contribution made by Black women. For example, it is not generally foregrounded that the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, a NAACP-affiliated organization formed by Black women in 1922, greatly contributed to fundraising for the passage of the Dyer anti-lynching bill of the same year. On a political level, in many circumstances connected to the exposure of and attempts to overturn the practice, Black women activists persistently made female lynching and rape victims visible.<sup>32</sup>

As I will show, it is possible to view Holiday as one more woman in this line of campaigners. When Holiday first sang “Strange Fruit” in 1939, the subject of lynching was part of the public discourse: firstly because of mass demands that the Roosevelt administration support the enactment of a law against lynching, and secondly because of the emergence of the Popular Front’s broad left labour movement activism in the 1930s. Holiday’s message thus fell on receptive ears.

### **Abel Meeropol and Authorship**

During the period when he took “Strange Fruit” to Holiday at Café Society, Abel Meeropol was a prolific writer of poems, ballads, musicals and plays.<sup>33</sup> As well as being a political activist, he was also a school teacher living in the Bronx, and particularly involved in The Teachers Union Arts Committee for

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<sup>31</sup> Carby, “On the Threshold of Woman’s Era,” 315.

<sup>32</sup> Terborg-Penn, “African American Women’s Networks,” 159.

<sup>33</sup> Besides “Strange Fruit” Meeropol is best known as the writer of three other songs: “The House I Live In” (a call for racial tolerance co-written with Earl Robinson and sung by Frank Sinatra in a short film that won an Oscar in 1945); “Beloved Comrade” (written in 1936 to support the Spanish Republicans which was often sung in tributes to Franklin Roosevelt, who is said to have liked it); and “Apples, Peaches, and Cherries”, a song once recorded by Peggy Lee.

which he wrote sketches and songs. Meeropol had never received any formal music training, but taught himself the rudiments and was musically literate.<sup>34</sup> In an attempt to dissociate his writing from his teaching and distract attention from his extracurricular activities – which were attracting attention from the State because of his membership of the Communist Party – Meeropol chose to write under the pseudonym Lewis Allen, the first names of his two stillborn children. He probably also used a pseudonym because, in common with many Jewish people in the U.S. during this period, he was worried about anti-Semitism.<sup>35</sup>

In 1941, Meeropol was brought before the Rapp-Coudert committee, which had been set up by the New York State legislature in order to investigate alleged Communist influences in the public school system. The committee asked if “Strange Fruit” had been commissioned by the Communist Party, and whether he had been paid by the party to write it. During the 1950s he and his family moved frequently trying to evade a subpoena from the House of Un-American Activities Committee. The family also adopted the two children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who had been convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage and were executed in 1953: the adoption only increased the suspicion of the State.<sup>36</sup>

Meeropol was part of a generation politically radicalised by the Russian Revolution, the suffering (either experienced or observed) of the Great Depression, and by opposition to the rise of Fascism in Spain and Germany.<sup>37</sup> It was a turbulent period during which many artists, actors, musicians and writers were infused with revolutionary political and social ideas because they were concerned to bring about the genesis of a new society and culture, as well as the empowerment of the working class. American artists with similar beliefs and concerns were the composer, lyricist and librettist Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964), and the singer and Civil Rights campaigner Paul Robeson (1898-1976).

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<sup>34</sup> Baker, “Abel Meeropol,” 29-30.

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, “Blood at the Root.”

<sup>36</sup> Daniels, “Strange Fruit,” and Baker, “Abel Meeropol,” 7 and 63.

<sup>37</sup> Baker, “Abel Meeropol,” 26; Daniels “Strange Fruit.”

Nancy Kovaleff Baker suggests that because he was Jewish, Meeropol saw parallels between the treatment of Jews in Europe and African-Americans. His archive contains the words:

*I am a Jew  
How can I tell?  
The Negro lynched  
Reminds me well  
I am a Jew.*<sup>38</sup>

In a letter to Kuehl dated July 28<sup>th</sup> 1971, outlining the origins of “Strange Fruit”, Meeropol explained that in the early thirties he had come across a picture of a terrible lynching which haunted him and motivated him to write a poem. The likelihood is that this picture was Lawrence Beitler’s photograph of two Black teenagers, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, who had been lynched in Marion, Indiana on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1930.<sup>39</sup> He told Kuehl; “I wrote “Strange Fruit” because I hate lynching and I hate injustice and I hate the people who perpetuate it.”<sup>40</sup>

Baker suggests that Meeropol may also have found the idea for the imagery he used in “Strange Fruit” in the African-American protest song “Sistren an’ Brethen.” This was included within the anthology *Negro Songs of Protest* (collected and arranged by Lawrence Gellert). Meeropol owned a copy of this book which is in the Abel Meeropol Collection. The text of “Sistern an’ Brethern” had been published in *New Masses* in January 1931 and includes the words

*Yo’ head ‘tain no apple  
Fo’ danglin’ from a tree*

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<sup>38</sup>Baker, “Abel Meeropol,” 45.

<sup>39</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 36; Phillips, “Blood at the Root.”; Moore, “Strange Fruit is Still a Song for Today.”

<sup>40</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 29.

*Yo' body no carcass for barbacuin' on a spree.*<sup>41</sup>

Meeropol's text first appeared as a poem entitled "Bitter Fruit" in the January 1937 issue of *The New York Teacher*, a union publication.

For the first two years after it was written, "Strange Fruit" was performed to his own music by Meeropol and his wife Anne Meeropol and friends, and solely in left-wing political gatherings, meetings, benefits and house parties around New York. It was also sung on occasions by the African-American vocalist Laura Duncan (including once at Madison Square Gardens), and by a quartet of African-American singers at a fund raiser for the anti-Fascists during the Spanish Civil War organised by the Theatre Arts Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Laura Duncan also later sang it at rallies during the 1948 presidential campaign of the Progressive Party candidate Henry A. Wallace.

Within the Abel Meeropol Collection there are five main versions of "Strange Fruit" set to music. Firstly, there is a handwritten version on the verso of a programme for the Theatre Arts Committee political cabaret, dated November 13<sup>th</sup> 1938. Meeropol probably made this sketch at the cabaret and folded the sheet into four to take home in his pocket.<sup>42</sup> Meeropol made minor changes in a second handwritten version, which was published by the New Theatre League in 1939. Thirdly, shortly afterwards, The Teachers Union chorus performed "Strange Fruit" at a union meeting, and it may have been for this occasion that Meeropol's friend, Earl Robinson, arranged the work for mixed chorus. Robinson altered the melody and introduced more complex chords and a fuller harmony. He also made changes to the lyrics. After the words "Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees," Robinson inserted a phrase of music and text from the spiritual "Go Down Moses": "When Israel was in Egypt's land/Let my people go mmmm." The song concludes with the words, "Here is a strange and bitter crop/Strange Fruit/Hm." However, these alterations were abandoned in the two versions of "Strange Fruit" published by the Edward B. Marks Music Corporation in

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<sup>41</sup> Baker, "Abel Meeropol," 46.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

1940 after the commercial success of Holiday's recording. One was for solo voice by Meeropol, the other for mixed chorus in an arrangement by Lehman Engel. Besides the piano accompaniment, Engel's version features a dramatic use of the D flat ninth chord (a tritone substitute for the dominant harmony) which also appeared in the solo version and in Holiday's recording, and did not exist in any of Meeropol's earlier versions.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Clash of Traditions**

In retrospect it is possible to understand that Holiday and Meeropol's ideas about authorship originated from contrasting economic and cultural traditions around the role and status of the author in relation to musical works. I have already discussed how, as an African-American at the time Meeropol took "Strange Fruit" to Holiday at Café Society, Holiday had a flexible attitude to the recycling and transformation of already existing musical material. As previously mentioned, although she possessed an ambivalent relationship to the blues as a genre; her cultural sensibilities were greatly influenced by the tradition, in which the use of pre-existing material was common creative practice. This was the case, even though the location of her occupation, within the confines of a music industry formulated on a market model meant that her career was a reflection of the differing notions of authorship valued in these two spheres.

I have also considered how, within the popular music industry, there existed legal requirements for people to be defined as authors which resulted in economic and social rewards for their work, but that this approach often clashed with the values attributed to authorship within many folk-derived traditions like the blues. <sup>44</sup> I have also discussed how blues singers were used to drawing and borrowing phrases and themes from a community repertoire

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<sup>43</sup> For the rest of this chapter, any comparisons made between Holiday's and Meeropol's work will be with her April 20th 1939 recording and Meeropol's solo sheet music version, published in 1940.

<sup>44</sup> Negus, "Authorship and the Popular Song," 607; .

to the extent that they were able to refashion a new song whilst performing.<sup>45</sup> Thus within early blues, as in many folk traditions, the words and music from previous generations were deemed to belong to everyone and nobody at the same time; they were communal artistic property, part of the public domain. This explains why many African-American performers like Holiday were entirely comfortable with the idea that they could make use of existing material and freely adapt it. The development of the use of sampling in the 1970s would later further emphasise this important aspect of African-American culture.

As we have already observed, Holiday's creative approach did not just mean taking and repositioning materials in new compositional contexts – it also entailed the wholesale reinterpretation of finished songs as they were presented to her. Her raw materials were the songs of Tin Pan Alley, but she ultimately considered herself as being responsible for the invention of the final artistic creation, even if the final work did not always meet with the approval of the initial provider of the ingredients. Her approach is clearly illustrated by an observation made by the trombonist, Benny Morton, who described a recording session at which the writer of one of the songs turned up: “[h]e heard a playback of his composition and then said, ‘That’s a nice job, but it isn’t my tune.’ Billie said, ‘That’s the way I’ve done it. If you don’t like it we’ll just cancel it, we have several tunes here we could do instead.’ The man said, ‘Oh no, oh no.’ I can’t remember what the tune was, but it turned out to be one of Billie’s hit songs.”<sup>46</sup>

Holiday's approach was also clearly understood by William Dufty. In the bout of legal activity instigated by the publication of *LSTB*, Dufty rose in defence of his co-author, assertively informing Doubleday's lawyers that songwriters were always offering her their songs, and that it was usual, when she agreed to sing them, for her musicians to alter the lyrics and/or music to suit her performance style. He explained that “Holiday doesn't sing Cole Porter, or George Gershwin or anybody else's melodies like they wrote them. She does her own variations. If Allan wants to come into court with his sheet

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<sup>45</sup> Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 367-368.

<sup>46</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 111.

music, I'll bet we could play the Holiday record and if the melody was the same I'd eat the record."<sup>47</sup> He made the point that "nothing happened until Miss Holiday did the song, and did it her way, applying her own very formidable talents to it. Holiday doesn't sing songs; she transforms them."<sup>48</sup> Dufty's comments will be important to my argument, as they suggest that amongst Holiday's contemporaries, the blues and jazz traditions – with their inherent freedoms to recycle/recompose musical material – were proving difficult to accommodate legally within the commercial Tin Pan Alley environment. The dispute over who actually wrote "Strange Fruit" is closely connected to these issues linking authorship and the creation of artistic works, as well as the crucial questions broached by Negus in his work "Authorship and the Popular Song": "[w]hat is an author? What does an author do? What is entailed in the process of authoring?"<sup>49</sup>

In his own response to Roland Barthes essay "The Death of the Author," Foucault argues that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the advent of the author as a privileged individual occurred and that "[e]ven today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scissions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work."<sup>50</sup>

However, in the twentieth century, the creative contributions of performers came to be increasingly valued within the many forms of popular music and, in the twenty-first century, it is more commonly accepted that authorship may be heard in a song's performance as well as for example, in the sheet music (if there is any sheet music in the first place). Nevertheless, when making assessments of the economic and cultural worth of musical

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<sup>47</sup> Letter from William Dufty to A. D. Weinberger, Esq., October 21, 1956, 2. H. Dennis Fairchild Archive. In John Szwed, *Billie Holiday*, 216.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from William Dufty to Le Baron Barker, Doubleday and Co., October 26, 1956, 1. H. Dennis Fairchild Archive. In John Szwed, *Billie Holiday*, 216-217.

<sup>49</sup> Negus, "Authorship and the Popular Song," 608.

<sup>50</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-148; Michael Foucault "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Josué Harari (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 101 and 109.

material, music criticism and the discipline of musicology on the whole still preserve a privileged place for the song writer and not the interpreter.<sup>51</sup>

Responses to some of the questions raised by Negus might usefully be considered within the context of *auteur* theory. *Auteur* theory, an outgrowth of the cinematic theories of André Bazin (1918-1958) and Alexandre Astruc (1923-2016), was developed in the 1960s in order to create an intellectual framework for the critical analysis of the collaborative film process. Andrew Sarris argues that three approaches to cinematic production underpin the term. These he articulates as being, firstly, the values placed on the technical competence of the film director, secondly, the personality of the director, and finally the concern with the “interior meaning” of a film or scene, which he describes as being the tension existing between the director’s personality and his material.<sup>52</sup> Sarris believes that applying these ideas to the complexity of the cinematic process – which involves hundreds of people, from technicians to lawyers to publicity directors – makes it possible to understand how it is usually only the director who is credited with the ability and authority to impose their particular vision on a film, and therefore recognised as a singular figure who can be considered the author of a film (rather than, for instance, the writer of the screenplay). More recently, *auteur* theory has been applied to the study of popular music. McClary used aspects the theory when describing Madonna’s agency and self-representation as articulated via her co-writing and production skills. McClary is interested in writing about Madonna “as a creator of texts” but suggests that she may be best understood “as head of a corporation that produces images of her self-representation, rather than as the spontaneous ‘authentic’ artist of rock mythology.”<sup>53</sup> She challenges traditional ideas about authorship within musicology as she is able to impose her will on her musical material, regardless of an existing collaborative network of producers, engineers, other musicians and even mentors.

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<sup>51</sup> Negus, “Authorship and the Popular Song,” 607 and 610.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962” in John Caughin, ed. *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), 63.

<sup>53</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 149.

Howard S. Becker and Pierre Bourdieu have also introduced ideas on authorship which have proved useful to the understanding of how the concept may be applied to collaborative genres such as jazz. Becker challenges the notion that art is produced by unique individuals working alone and towards the beginning of *Art Worlds* baldly states that “Every art...rests on an extensive division of labour.”<sup>54</sup> For Becker, “works of art got to be what they were through a network of co-ordinated activities carried out by a lot of different people.”<sup>55</sup> Becker’s ideas therefore make it possible for us to recognise features involved in the creation of an art work that are not immediately apparent, for example, the use of certain types of technology, the accepted length of songs in popular music, or internal conventions resulting in the selection of certain scales and harmonies.

The unusually extended overture to “Strange Fruit,” more than a minute in length, is a case in point, as it provides us with an excellent example of how internalised conventions and the market might affect the final structure of an art work. Meeropol’s original sketch did not have an introduction, and the published sheet music has only four bars. However Holiday’s recording has an instrumental introduction consisting of Frankie Newton on trumpet, accompanied by tenor and alto saxophones, performing slowly and languidly for four bars, followed by a piano solo by Sonny White, backed by bass guitar and drums at a slightly faster tempo, for ten bars.

Various reasons have been put forward to explain the length of the overture, two of which relate to the presentation of the song to an audience. Commentators have argued that, as in classical music, it functioned in order to give enough time for audiences to settle down and focus on Holiday’s performance, and that it also served to heighten the dramatic impact when she made her entrance on the Café Society stage.<sup>56</sup> But Margolick highlights a more straightforward commercial reason: at one dollar each, Commodore recordings were more expensive than those of its mainstream competitors.

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<sup>54</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1982, 2008), 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 34; Becker, “Preface to the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition,” xii.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 113.

Milt Gabler, Holiday's producer for the "Strange Fruit" recording session, therefore asked Sonny White to improvise and create the long introduction because he was concerned that customers might feel they were being short-changed if the record appeared shorter than those of other recording companies. If added to this are other factors which contributed to the quality of the recording, such as the knowledge we have of Holiday's close professional relationship with the members of the back-up band at Café Society who featured on the recording, then it is already possible to link the creation of Holiday's recording to some of Becker's ideas of how art works are actually created: by way of "collective action" and "patterns of co-operative action."

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the "field of cultural production," like Becker's ideas, also challenge the foregrounding of an individual as the creator of artistic works. He examines the complexity of this "field" regarding it as a competitive arena occupied by artists, state and commercial institutions, as well as other intermediaries. According to Bourdieu, "[t]he literary or artistic environment is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces," and these struggles over position and power are intrinsic to the creation of art works and even artistic reputations.<sup>57</sup> Thus for Bourdieu, rather than assessing the skills, abilities or genius of an individual author as contributing the most important aspects to the success of a creative work, he believes that for each one "the essential explanation lies outside of them in the objective relations which constitute the field."<sup>58</sup> Meeropol and Holiday's differing perspectives over the authorship of "Strange Fruit" provide an interesting illustration of how struggles over position and authority can become manifest between artists in the arena of artistic reputations – and how, in Bourdieu's terms at least, a full understanding of contributions to the creative process comes not from looking at a singular act or objective, but the relations between agents and their acts.

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<sup>57</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

## Analysis of “Strange Fruit”

The words for Holiday’s recording of “Strange Fruit” are set out below with the minor changes she made to Meeropol’s lyrics in bold.

- (1) Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
- (2) Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
- (3) Black **bodies** swinging in the Southern breeze,
- (4) Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
- (5) Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
- (6) The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
- (7) Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
- (8) **Then** the sudden smell of burning flesh!
- (9) Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
- (10) For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
- (11) For the sun to rot, for **the** tree to drop,
- (12) Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Holiday achieved the re-composition of “Strange Fruit” through her choice of key, tempo, the subtle reinvention of parts of the melody line, lyrical adaptations and her particular vocal quality, phrasing and intonation. Word painting, which provides a musical depiction of the words in the text, was also an integral part of Holiday’s singing style. Furthermore, working within a small jazz ensemble also influenced the final soundscape of the recording, and combined with other factors enabled her to subvert the stylised stereotypical image of lynching in the South.

Holiday’s choice of key for “Strange Fruit” needs to be considered initially, because the key sets the overall tone of a piece of music. Meeropol’s original sketch of “Strange Fruit” (which has a simple modified AABB structure), is, like the final published solo version in the key of C minor. However, Holiday’s recording is in B flat minor, often thought of as a particularly dark and sombre key. The atmosphere it creates is entirely fitting for the song’s tragic message.

Meeropol's sheet music gives the tempo directions, *andante moderato*, but the recording's pace – if we adhere to that Italian terminology – could be described as *lento* or even *grave*.<sup>59</sup> Holiday's slow, heavy performance similarly emphasises the song's subject matter. A comment from Martin Brin, who had performed the song with Meeropol's group of friends before it was introduced to Holiday, implies that previously the tempo, and hence the mood of the song, had been quite different. He said "I was a little disappointed [with Holiday's version] because it sounded a little like jazz...We sang it with a sort of a zip, with punch."<sup>60</sup>

Holiday begins singing after the long, slow introduction in a calm, almost detached meditative manner. Her melancholy tone is similar to that employed in her ballads during the same period. Throughout, she uses contrasting rhythmic patterns to emphasise the difference in moods between the lyric lines. For example, Holiday sings the first line "Southern trees bare a strange fruit" legato, but uses word painting to increase the tension in the second line, "Blood on the leaves and blood at the root" by musically conveying the drip, drip drip of blood from the body, with the use of a syncopated rhythm which makes the line sound disjointed and provides a contrast with the laid-back utilisation in the previous line.

In the third line it becomes apparent that the strange fruit are actually human beings. The sheet music shows Meeropol used the singular word "body," but Holiday employs the plural "bodies": instead of presenting us with a unique event, she communicates the almost genocidal violence which was inflicted upon African-Americans.

This subtle phrasing and interpretation work continues in the song's middle section. In order to accentuate important words and phrases, Holiday would often lengthen and shorten note values. So to accentuate the idea of a mythic peaceful Southern scene – and subsequently, to ironise it – Holiday sings line five legato, stretching out on the words "Pastoral scene of the gallant South," before contrasting this with a staccato treatment of the next line's words: "The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth."

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<sup>59</sup> MM 56-63.

<sup>60</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 49.

In line seven, “Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh” can be taken to refer to southern white womanhood, as the type of Magnolia being referred to is most likely *Magnolia grandiflora* (also known as the southern magnolia), an evergreen tree which produces large and flamboyant lemon scented white flowers. As a native of the south-eastern United States, its inclusion in the lyrics is one of the factors which culturally anchors the narrative into stereotypical images of the South and lynching. Up to the present day, representations of the tree have been used as symbols by the state and local governments of Mississippi and Louisiana in flags, insignia and coinage. The flower was also used as an emblem by the Confederate army in the American Civil War.

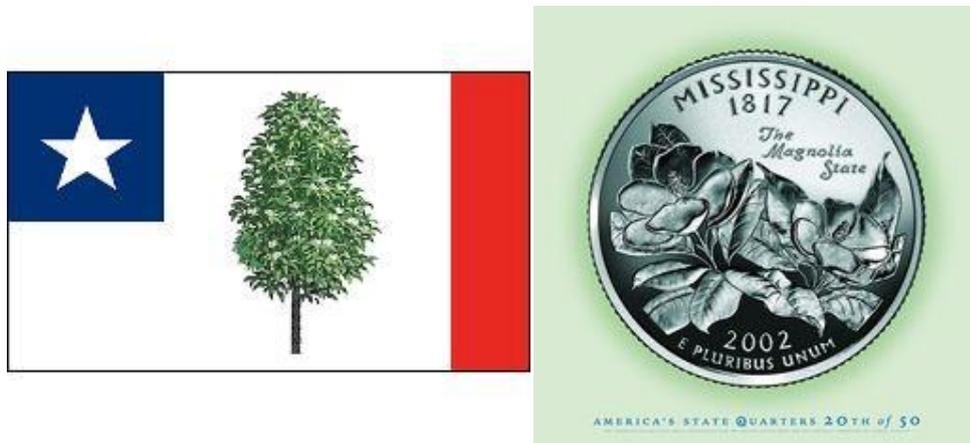


Figure.3. The "Magnolia Flag", used from 1861 to 1865 and unofficially until 1894, and the symbol of the magnolia used on Mississippi coinage.

Holiday lengthens and accentuates the word magnolia, pausing before adding “sweet and fresh” as if to emphasise the purity of southern white womanhood.

However, the chaste image in line seven is immediately followed by the dramatic words “Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!” – note the exclamation mark – which can be interpreted as referring to the tragic consequences for Black males of their alleged coveting of this fragrant flower. Holiday lingers on the word “smell,” and the syncopated rhythm again provides a contrast with the previous line. In Holiday’s treatment of lines

seven and eight, any ambiguity concerning the chaste representation is removed as her performance makes it clear that the action of lynching negates the viability of the previous image by highlighting the horror of the actions carried out in order to preserve it.

As we've seen, Holiday would often reinvent a song's melody and rhythms, and also embellish its melody with original vocal ornamentation. The basic melodic shapes would remain the same, but to those listeners familiar with the original they would appear "paraphrased" by the changing of a few notes here and there.<sup>61</sup> A major component of her style was the landing on and repetition of the same pitch several times in succession. This was a technique Holiday inherited from Bessie Smith and other blues singers, and one which she utilised to enable her to sing within a comfortable range. Schuller writes that this compression technique often showed Holiday "going beyond vocal necessity to the sheer joy of invention in smoothing out the contours of particularly rangy lines."<sup>62</sup>

By comparing the lyrics "Pastoral scene of the gallant South" in the sheet music with the same words in Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit" (Examples 1 and 2), it is possible to observe what she has made of Meeropol's version, and the smoothing-out that Schuller described.

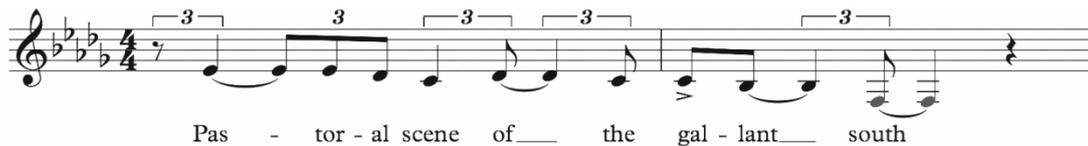


Example 1. Bars 16 and 17 of sheet music of "Strange Fruit," Edward B. Marks Music Company, 1939.

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<sup>61</sup> Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 53.

<sup>62</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 534. Whalen gives Holiday a slightly different range, E flat to D flat and argues that even though she made use of her entire range, she was most comfortable singing between A below middle C to A above middle C. Whalen, "Sociological and Ethnomusicological Study," 250-251.



Example 2. Holiday’s technique of “smoothing out” a melody. “Strange Fruit,” 1939. In *Billie Holiday: The Complete Commodore Records*, Disc One, 1997. 1.48-56.

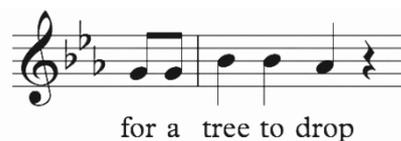
The last four lines of the song describe the fate of the victim’s body. Holiday’s version gradually builds up the tension, not least through a series of ensemble general pauses and out-of-tempo sung enunciations, these interrupting the song’s hitherto smooth flow.

In line eleven, the tree dropping to the ground is made to appear almost suspended in time as Holiday slows down the tempo of the phrase “for the tree to” and slurs the word “drop.” Furthermore, she makes “drop” a semibreve in length whereas in the sheet music it has a note value of only a crochet. Using word painting, then, she illustrates the curve of a tree as it falls, moving up from a G flat to an A flat before finally dropping to the F (Example 3).



Example 3. Holiday’s use of word painting in “Strange Fruit,” 1939. *Billie Holiday: The Complete Commodore Recordings*, Disc One, 1997, 2.41-50.

However, the sheet music version (Example 4) shows Meeropol wrote the more straightforward:



Example 4. Excerpt of bars 29-30 of sheet music of “Strange Fruit,” Edward B. Marks Music Company, 1939.

Holiday follows Meeropol's suggestions of *diminuendo* and *ritardando* for the phrase "Here is a strange and bitter." She lingers on the words "rot," "drop," "bitter" and "crop" in order to drive home the nature of the atrocity being committed. Her staccato treatment of the word "bitter" in the final verse illustrates how there is nothing "pretty" about her performance.<sup>63</sup> Even with romantic material Holiday tried to avoid this trait.<sup>64</sup> Schuller argues that "Her use of these scoops, dips, fall-offs, sags and up-and-down twists was generally in excellent taste...in these early years she used these devices with great subtlety, invariably to punctuate or bring out a particular word or note."<sup>65</sup>

The crows in line nine may refer to birds, but also, metaphorically, to the people standing around observing the lynching, who, as mentioned earlier, would often go home with the victim's body parts. Similarly, the "bitter crop" may also refer to the harvesting of body parts.

In the sheet music, Meeropol's suggestions of *diminuendo* and *ritardando* apply to the rest of the song and so his work ends in a subdued and restrained fashion. But on the final word "crop," Holiday sings the word *fortissimo*; it appears almost like a cry of anguish or wail of agony. Meeropol resolves the song onto a simple tonic chord, but in Holiday's recording this final chord contains a surprising added 6<sup>th</sup>, and, combined with the loudness and forcefulness of the word "crop," this makes for a jarring and unsettling conclusion. Holiday's long-drawn out treatment of that word, and the unresolved 6<sup>th</sup>, suggest that we are still in the midst of tragedy and suffering; there is no end in sight, no light at the end of the tunnel.

Evidently, Meeropol's material is of basic importance to this enterprise. But I want to argue that Holiday's subtle vocal performance and interpretative techniques functioned to make this story seem a personal one,

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<sup>63</sup> Janell Hobson "Everybody's Protest Song: Music as Social Protest in the Performances of Marian Anderson and Billie Holiday" *Signs*, 33, no.2 (Winter 2008): 447.

<sup>64</sup> In a rehearsal which took place on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1955, Holiday said when discussing the song 'I Don't Want to Cry Any More,' "I want that son-of-a-bitch jumpin' because you know everybody else would make it pretty you know." Phil Schaap, "Musical and Discographical Commentary," Billie Holiday, *The Complete Holiday on Verve 1945-1959*, (New York: PolyGram Records Inc.,1992): Liner notes, 117-118 and track 20.

<sup>65</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 535.

located in a specific (and real) socio-political context. Like the Second Wave feminists who recognised that “the personal is political,” Holiday used words to transform a situation which could have been viewed as depersonalised and abstract by humanising and thus politicising it. I have already mentioned the fact that Holiday changed Meeropol’s “body” to “bodies”; but she also changed his phrases “for a tree to drop” to “for *the* tree to drop” and “*and* the sudden smell of burning flesh” to “*then* the sudden smell of burning flesh.” Changing the “phrase “for a tree to drop” to “for the tree to drop,” locates the event to a particular tree and location in narrative time. Holiday makes it appear as if she and therefore all of her listeners are bearing witness to the disastrous events unfolding. Changing “and the sudden smell” to “then the sudden smell” makes it apparent that the brutality of lynching is the inevitable consequence of any alleged breaking of taboos associated with line seven. These are small changes, but it can be argued that they increased the impact the song had on audiences – as did Holiday’s performed “personalisation” and embodiment of the drama. Jack Schiffman, whose family ran the Apollo Theater, recalled that “at the Apollo the song took on profound intimations. Not only did you see the ‘fruit’ evoked in all its graphic horror, but you saw in Billie Holiday the wife or sister or mother or one of the victims beneath the tree, almost prostrate with sorrow and fury.”<sup>66</sup>

The distinction of Holiday’s recording was also enhanced by the particular vocal quality of the singer’s performance. Many of those techniques have already been discussed, but it is worth noting Nicholson’s suggestion that she also relies on “the grain of her voice” and a “hard and worldly wise, careful, dramatic enunciation that would have done credit to a classically trained actor, to exploit the unequivocal drama of the lyrics.”<sup>67</sup> (This is also a factor which supports the idea that Holiday can be regarded as the *auteur* of the song, as it undeniably bears her personal imprint.) An important part of African-American musical aesthetics, and jazz in particular, is the possession of an original sound. The value placed on this as a marker of individuality is discussed by the composer/theorist George

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<sup>66</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 98-99.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 114.

Lewis: within “African-American ways of music making,” he writes, “one’s ‘own sound’ becomes a carrier for history and cultural identity...‘Sound’ becomes identifiable with the expression of personality,...the assumption of responsibility and an encounter with history, memory and identity.”<sup>68</sup>

Holiday’s highly personal “sound” thus acts to further bind the lyric’s narrative and meaning to an immediate, lived experience -s one presented to the audience almost as testimony as much as performance.

Holiday had been performing at Café Society with the musicians on the recording for almost four months on a nightly basis. Previously, and for much of the rest of her career, Holiday worked with tightly knit groups of musicians in small jazz ensembles. As an artist this involved having musical conversations, sharing and developing musical ideas as well as knowing how and when to negotiate and make artistic compromises with the other group members: an approach which could be said to illustrate Becker’s ideas about the creation of artistic works, discussed earlier. These small groups usually had a leader but tended to be more informal and less hierarchal than the large jazz orchestras. Holiday herself had acted as leader on many of her recordings, and does so for “Strange Fruit,” as the record labelling describing the band as Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra makes clear.

All the features Holiday applied in the transformation of musical material that came her way, such as her decisions about keys, the manipulation of original melodies, word painting, changes in tempo, changes to the lyrics, the application of her particular vocal timbre and the decisions/negotiations made about musical choices within a musical ensemble, can – when fused together – be said to have led to the creation of an original version of “Strange Fruit.” In effect, the song had been formed by the tension existing between Meeropol’s original words and music, Holiday’s changes, and what Richard Middleton has described as “authentication,” that is, the concrete realisation and representation of a specific moment.<sup>69</sup> These factors function as important aspects of its musical assemblage, which can also be said to include the relationship between Holiday and her audiences

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<sup>68</sup> Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 33.

<sup>69</sup> Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 53.

and the distribution of creative agency over time and space, which I will discuss in more detail later. Therefore, even though Holiday's recording and performances could never have existed without Meeropol's work, her rendition goes beyond mere interpretation, providing a fully realised performance of what she considered to be Meeropol's "germ of a song" and fundamentally reformulating its original format. In this respect, Schuller is insightful when he points out that "the primary creative impulse of Billie's singing came not from the printed page and the priority of the text, as with most orthodox singers...Other singers would *perform* or *render* a song: Billie would *create* one."<sup>70</sup>

In "Strange Fruit," the prevailing sentiment is not grief or defeat but contempt and confidence.<sup>71</sup> According to Schuller

[i]t is Billie's pure, un-self-pitying, distilled-emotion approach to this material that haunts our memories. The lyrics, which could have become obvious and maudlin, are treated with cold respect for the awesome facts. The hurt is there, but it is not worn on the sleeve. It never slobbers, Billie's poignant finely textured voice threading a wary course between the potential pitfalls of pretentious social drama and awkwardly "serious" pop balladry.<sup>72</sup>

Holiday's performance thus sidesteps potential snares in a work that contained a visual fetishism of the Black body (i.e. the strange fruit hanging in the tree), and which could merely have become over-sweetened with sentimentality or a reflection of righteous indignation. She manages to resist the potential commodification of lynching as a spectacle and the objectification of the Black body.

Nicholson, however, points our attention to another of the most significant outcomes of Holiday's treatment of Meeropol's words and music: the fact that "Strange Fruit" is considered a landmark recording because it is one of the first examples of a popular song which it is impossible to disentangle from a single, defining performance. This was a characteristic

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<sup>70</sup> Schuller *Swing Era*, 536.

<sup>71</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 65.

<sup>72</sup> Schuller, *Swing Era*, 543-544.

which would become commonplace in later pop and rock material.<sup>73</sup>

According to Nicholson, in landmark recordings

[s]ingers and songs are bonded in a performance that exhausts the song's meaning, achieving an autonomy that transcends simplistic chord progressions and mediocre lyrics by embracing musical as well as non-musical factors...These non-musical factors often have social significance to a given group which identifies meaning in them...Billie's performance of *Strange Fruit* achieved a similar autonomy because it set in motion a whole battery of reactions and associations to which a given group attributed significance...These 'signifiers'...had quite specific meaning to both New York's left-wing intelligentsia gathered in Josephson's club and succeeding generations of record buyers sensitive to the issue of racial equality.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, when Holiday's treatment of "Strange Fruit" is set alongside that of contemporary colleagues as well as her other performances, it can be recognised that her approach was not really any different to that of other jazz musicians. Jazz musicians were already using pre-existing melodies and standards to recreate what they believed to be new music. Berliner's claim that jazz improvisers fundamentally devote their lives to music composition has been previously discussed. He considered that this remains true:

whether they store, edit and revise musical ideas by ear, visual imagery, and instrument or carry out similar procedures with the aid of writing or recording...whether the object of an artist's activity is to assemble ideas into a fixed composition, or to continually rework them into transient artworks with but fleeting identities...whether they confine their operations to inventing their own musical parts within groups, or also become involved with arranging parts for other instruments...whether they improvise within the conventional framework of standards or within the extended forms of original large-scale productions...whether they create music in the quiet of their studios or in the context of live audiences and halls. For jazz musicians, each situation simply imposes different kinds of compositional conditions on musical invention.<sup>75</sup>

Meeropol was working during an era which was witnessing the emergence and development of new types of media culture, in certain areas of which – such as film and as we have seen, recorded music – the role of the writer was no longer sacrosanct, or even easily identifiable.<sup>76</sup> The locus of significance

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<sup>73</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 114-115.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 492.

<sup>76</sup> Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Popular Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 175.

was shifting from the score and text to the performance, and from hierarchical to more collectively organised ensembles and ways of working. Much of Holiday's work and approach to jazz composition articulated this trend. Songs which came to Holiday, as the products of the popular music industry of the day or otherwise, went through the Holiday treatment, and were transformed into something original; her approach to "Strange Fruit" is wholly consistent with the rest of her musical output. As Born points out, "jazz can be grasped as a lateral assemblage, one illuminated by comparison with the vertical hierarchy of mediations characteristic of the work concept." This she contrasts to the ontology of the musical work, "which envisions a hierarchical assemblage: the composer hero stands over the interpreter, conductor over instrumentalist, interpreter over listener, just as the work ideal authorizes and supervises the score, which supervises performance, which supervises reception."<sup>77</sup>

In her examination of the changes made to the final solo sheet music version of "Strange Fruit," Baker writes that "I believe that the brief introduction and the more complex harmonies included by Meeropol in his final solo version may have been suggested to him by his friend and collaborator Engel."<sup>78</sup> However, I contend that Holiday's interpretation of "Strange Fruit" could also have influenced the final published version. After all, Meeropol had been involved in some way in the rehearsals with Holiday over the three-week rehearsal period, and thus would also have been working alongside White and Mendelsohn who were familiar with the use of more complex chords and harmonies in jazz ensembles. It is difficult to imagine that Meeropol could have completely imposed his lyrics and music on such a group or that they would have followed them note for note. Could the decision to make use of the D flat ninth chord have come out of these rehearsal sessions? Even though it is now difficult to prove, it is not too far-fetched to consider that Meeropol's time spent working alongside these highly experienced musicians might have influenced his own final published version. I have already mentioned that Meeropol's original sketch lacked an

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<sup>77</sup> Born, "On Musical Mediation," 26. Born uses terms like the work concept, and jazz as akin to Weberian ideal types in order to draw out core features of complex musical cultures.

<sup>78</sup> Baker, "Abel Meeropol," 48.

introduction, but the existence of an introduction in the final published version not only makes it fit the commercial Tin Pan Alley template, but it could also be regarded as a nod towards the long introduction on Holiday's recording. Also, Meeropol would have been faced with the fact that because the sheet music was published *after* Holiday's popular recording, it would have had to bear some similarities to the recording if it was also going to sell as well. Not achieving this might be judged the equivalent of shooting himself in the foot.

Baker's own analysis of the song makes it clear that Meeropol was working on "Strange Fruit" for a few years before approaching Holiday, so it might even be considered to have been a work in progress because of the various adaptations he had already made to meet the needs and requirements of the various types of performing situations and performers (i.e. his progressive friends and the Theatre Arts Committee choir). His attitude appears to have remained flexible with regard to its format as the changes he made to its structure, and the additions he appears to have willingly accepted from Earl Robinson, reveal. In fact, a version does not appear to have become "set in stone" until Holiday made her popular recording, when it became a matter of urgency on Meeropol's part to get his version published. Perhaps in making comparisons between Holiday and Meeropol's versions, it might be more apposite to compare Holiday's recording with Meeropol's original sketch (before Robinson and Engel had contributed their ideas) in the consideration of the authorship claims over Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit."

### **The Economics of Authorship**

The differing approaches to and expectations of authorship adopted by Holiday and Meeropol resulted in certain financial and legal consequences for them both. Milt Gabler, Holiday's record producer, gave her \$500 for "Strange Fruit" and the other sides recorded on the same day – which were "Yesterdays," "Fine and Mellow" and "I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues" – plus

\$1000 later. However, he would not (or preferred not to) say how much she eventually earned from the recordings. He explained that his brother and father would give her money from the shop till when she was in trouble and needed it, but that they never really kept a record of the total amount.<sup>79</sup>

After threatening Herbert Marks that he was going to hire a lawyer to further his claim, Meeropol got the standard royalties of two cents per record, one for the words, and another for the music. However the initial sheet music sales were disappointing. Herbert Marks, Meeropol's publisher wrote to him in May 1940 explaining that "[y]our song is being sung around more than ever but only, unfortunately, at gatherings which are progressive." He also remarked that Laura Duncan had been applauded after singing it at the National Negro Congress, but that ovations did not equal revenue. Thus a year later, in May 1941, Marks was forced to report to Meeropol that he was only entitled to two dollars in royalties for the entire year. "People say flattering things about [the song]," Marks complained, "they just don't go out and buy it."<sup>80</sup> Later, Meeropol wrote the letter to *PM* magazine which was printed on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1945, and which prompted the response from Holiday discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>81</sup>

The publication of Holiday's autobiography in 1956 resulted in another flurry of legal activity by Meeropol. He obtained signed affidavits from people he knew to be connected with the song and eventually won a pledge from the publisher, Doubleday, to change Holiday's description of how the recording came to be created. Her explanation was therefore revised in the second edition even though the original account remains in later editions.<sup>82</sup> The Abel Meeropol Collection contains an undated signed

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<sup>79</sup> Gabler, "A Lady Named Billie and I," 86 and 88; Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Baker, "Abel Meeropol," 76, n.57.

<sup>82</sup> Such as the U.K. and U.S. Penguin editions, 1984, and the U.S. edition published by Harlem Moon, 2006.

statement by Barney Josephson supporting Meeropol's right to be considered the author of the words and music of "Strange Fruit."<sup>83</sup>

However, looked at in the long term the picture was rosier. Information Margolick received from Bob Golden, Marketing Executive at Carlin America, the company which now owns the publishing rights, revealed that over a sixty year period from 1940 to the year 2000, the Meeropol estate had collected more than \$300,000 from the song.<sup>84</sup>

Ironically, despite Meeropol's struggles to assert his authorship, in 1968, the publishers Herbert Marks were forced to make changes to the words in order to bring them up to date. The revision of the first verse reads:

*Tree of Liberty bears a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood on the root,  
Black body swinging in the freedom breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the white man's trees.*

Even Holiday never interfered with his words to this extent, and today these lyrics appear cringe-making. One can sense the exasperation in Meeropol's written response to Marks: "[t]he whole process of willing and easy distortion is very much a part of our whole commercialization process in so many areas."<sup>85</sup>

It is useful to note that despite the tensions created by these authorship issues, Meeropol was always happy with Holiday's performance of "Strange Fruit." In a letter written to Linda Kuehl dated July 28<sup>th</sup> 1971, he

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<sup>83</sup> The unsigned statement says "On----- or about Feb.10.1939 [date written in], Lewis Allan came to me with the manuscript of a song entitled 'Strange Fruit' as possible material for presentation at the Cafe. This was an original manuscript bearing his name as author of the words and composer of the music. He demonstrated the song for Billie Holiday in my presence and it was quite obvious that this was the first time she had ever seen or heard the song. 'Strange Fruit' was very much different from the usual songs she had been doing, and she seemed puzzled and reluctant to do it. Her claim to having had a share in writing the music with Sonny White is completely false." The typed statement was probably written by Meeropol or his lawyer in the mid-1950s and then signed by Josephson. Baker, "Abel Meeropol," 75-76, note 56.

<sup>84</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 70.

<sup>85</sup> Baker, "Abel Meeropol," 76, n.61.

claimed that when he went along to Café Society to hear her introduce the song,

[s]he gave a startling, most dramatic and effective interpretation, which could jolt an audience out of its complacency anywhere. This is exactly what I wanted the song to do and why I wrote it. Billie Holiday's styling of the song was incomparable and fulfilled the bitterness and shocking quality I had hoped the song would have. The audience gave her a tremendous ovation.<sup>86</sup>

Meeropol therefore recognised that in performance Holiday was able to contribute and communicate powerful meanings impossible to achieve in sheet music form alone. It is also worth mentioning that even though Meeropol had been angry about Holiday's account of the creation of "Strange Fruit," he does not appear – at least in the long-term – to have taken it out on her personally, claiming that "I did not hold any enmity toward Billie Holiday for her lapses into fancy, nor would I want the fact that she made untrue statements bruited about now that she is dead."<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless it is ironic that despite his obvious left-wing credentials, Meeropol's critique of Holiday reveals that he was unfortunately never able to sufficiently distance himself from the market based rules of the industry he was working within. He was interested in maintaining his financial interest, even though he believed her version to be the best.

### **Holiday as a Political Activist**

Born argues that, in our musical analyses, it is necessary for us to "move beyond the sphere of micro-social interactions and trace the historical trajectories of musical assemblages, reconnecting them to analyses of the micro-dynamics of cultural history and technological change," and it is in this spirit that I will proceed with this analysis.<sup>88</sup> I will be examining an important non-musical signifier which impacts this discussion of "Strange

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<sup>86</sup> Blackburn, *With Billie*, 111.

<sup>87</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 129.

<sup>88</sup> Born, "On Musical Mediation," 34.

Fruit,” which is the image of the Black woman singing in American culture and its inherent symbolism. Unpicking this type of representation helps to illustrate how Holiday was able to knowingly subvert the song’s stereotypical images in order to communicate its political message.

Her simply *being* both African-American *and* female were the most crucial symbols Holiday brought to her performance in the racially divided society of 1930s America. Audience members both Black and white, as well as listeners of the recording, would have attached a certain type of significance to the words and music because they were being sung by a Black woman in a country with a past history of plantation slavery and the associated subordination of the African-American population. Our discussion of Crenshaw’s articulation of intersectionality, in chapter two, focussed on the invisibility it conferred, particularly within the legal process on Black women. However, with the recording of “Strange Fruit” the opposite occurred. Holiday’s performance of the song enabled the historical sufferings of, and wrongs perpetrated against the community of African-Americans in the U.S. to be condensed within the song and also exposed in the clear light of day, and for that intersectional experience to be rendered visible and understood as such by audiences – arguably with more effectiveness than would be possible with the presentation of a political speech on the same subject.

In what she describes as a meditation on Black women’s vocality, Griffin has discussed the inherent contradictions in the spectacle of the Black woman vocalist, a spectacle which is so deeply ingrained within American music culture that she is called upon to perform on important state occasions or at times of national crisis. Griffin provides us with numerous examples of the Black woman singing as this kind of spectacle; they include Marian Anderson singing at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 and Whitney Houston singing “The Star Spangled Banner” at the Super Bowl during the Gulf War.<sup>89</sup> More recently, Aretha Franklin’s performance at Barack Obama’s Presidential inauguration in 2009 can also be said to fit the template. According to Griffin,

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<sup>89</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality,” in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, eds. Robert G. O’Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 102.

these images and our memories of them are as much about the spectacle as the sound. The recognizably black woman – singing rather than speaking – is a familiar sight for American audiences. While each instance, each woman, each voice is unique – these women do not “sound” alike – the physicality is familiar. The woman stands before a crowd in front of a microphone, mouth open, positioned to sing.<sup>90</sup>

Thus the Black woman gets the gig because her voice is regarded as being a “quintessential American voice...one of its founding sounds, and the singing black woman is one of its founding spectacles.”<sup>91</sup>

Yet because it develops alongside and not fully within the nation state, the spectacle can also create a space for critique and protest. Griffin does not present us with any theories on why this is the case, but she does pose some unanswered questions, the most crucial being: “[h]ow does a vocal tradition that first emerged in the creation and service of an oppressed people end up in service to a nation that has been hostile to the aspirations of black people?”<sup>92</sup> The main aim of the following closing section of this chapter is to interrogate this problem more fully. I am going to do this by considering, firstly, the implications of the contradictory tensions existing between objectification and agency in the Black female voice; secondly, how Holiday’s diffidence toward (white) audiences when performing the song might be interpreted; and thirdly, the reasons why, “Strange Fruit” notwithstanding, she is often not recognised as being a “political” activist.

This spectacle of the Black woman singing at an occasion of great importance was recreated night after night by Holiday when singing “Strange Fruit” at Café Society. Barney Josephson, the manager of Café Society, was always clear how he wished the scene to be staged to make an impact:

I stopped all service in the place. All the lights went off. The waiters were not allowed to move...The cashier can’t ring the register...Nobody must even strike a match. This is it. All attention. We had a low ceiling, with one little pin spot just illuminating Billie’s face and maybe five or six inches to her bosom. Billie knew how to get under it exactly right. No other lights. Complete darkness. The spot came up on Billie. She

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 104.

never moved, her arms down at her side. She didn't even touch the microphone.  
Billie sang.<sup>93</sup>

Once she had finished singing, Holiday would walk off stage and not return for a bow or encore.

For feminists, because of its articulation from a marginal location, the singing voice of the African-American woman has been perceived as a complex site of struggle between objectification and agency. Objectification, because its sound was/is often fetishised and commercialised owing to the historical subordination of Black women; and agency because, as discussed earlier in this thesis, at least from the blues epoch onwards, women were able to transcend their oppression in performance and use their voices to create spaces of social protest.<sup>94</sup>

In recognition of the contradictory tensions existing between this objectification and agency, Janell Hobson has described the African-American female's voice as being both "hypervisible" and "hyperaudible" because of its continued appropriation by the dominant culture on, for example, film soundtracks and television programmes dealing with issues of sexuality, deep emotion and suffering in the story lines.<sup>95</sup> Far from being a wholly positive situation, Hobson argues that this hypervisibility and hyperaudibility merely serves to reinforce the actual "voicelessness" of Black women in mainstream cultural and political contexts because as performers they are often presented as singing in the service of someone else, rather than for themselves.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, like Davis, Hobson maintains that despite these ambivalences, Black women are still able to use these performances as sites of resistance against the combined effects of racism and sexism by reclaiming

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<sup>93</sup> Barney Josephson with Terry Trilling-Josephson, *Café Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 47-48.

<sup>94</sup> See for example, Carby, "It Just Be's Dat Way Sometime," 470-483; Davis, *Blues Legacies*, Griffin, "When Malindy Sings," 102-125.

<sup>95</sup> Hobson, "Everybody's Protest Song," 448.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

for themselves the musical material.<sup>97</sup> Whereas Davis supports her argument with the lyrics of Rainey, Smith and Holiday, Hobson uses performances by the classical singer Marian Anderson and Holiday's "Strange Fruit" to illustrate this in the historical context of African-American feminist activism.<sup>98</sup>

In order to address the issue of "voicelessness," and how it may be possible to move beyond it, Hobson firstly examines Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's theory of the "politics of silence," which argues that one outcome of the historical oppression of Black women in the U.S. is that they have been discouraged from discussing their sexuality in the public domain, and that their bodies have been viewed as colonised. Secondly she draws on Darlene Clark Hines' idea of the "culture of dissemblance," which asserts that Black women in American society have as a rule "developed and adhered to a cult of secrecy, a culture of dissemblance, to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives." This is a self-imposed invisibility which makes it possible for ordinary Black women to create an illusion of openness which enables them to continue their resistance to oppression.<sup>99</sup> Both of these theories are concerned with notions of sexuality and "respectability," but in her paper Hobson extends their use to include the aspirations of Black women in the political realm.<sup>100</sup>

An indication that a current of protest flows through the African-American musical tradition is the fact that, historically, spirituals often functioned to reflect the suffering of the enslaved and their desire and attempts at freedom. For example, the most famous Underground Railroad conductor, Harriet Tubman (c.1822-1913), would sing spirituals and hymns

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<sup>97</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*

<sup>98</sup> Hobson, "Everybody's Protest Songs," 443-444. Marian Anderson's performance at the Lincoln Memorial (which occurred because the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow her to perform at Constitution Hall), took place on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1939, only eleven days before Holiday's studio recording of "Strange Fruit."

<sup>99</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17, no. 2 (1992): 266; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs*, 14, Common-Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives. (Summer 1989): 912-920.

<sup>100</sup> Hobson, "Everybody's Protest Song," 444.

in order to communicate secret messages on her rescue missions, which is why Hobson describes Tubman's activities as being the genesis of an important chapter in Black feminist musical resistance.<sup>101</sup>

However, Hobson is particularly interested in examining whether Black women have continued to build on this radical tradition of resistance. She wants to know if they can make the protest their own, or "do their bodies merely function as vessels, coded in the culturally specific ways in which Black women's singing already connotes suffering and in which Black women were regarded as an appropriate instrument to voice political and social discontent?"<sup>102</sup>

She responds in the affirmative, and, using Anderson's and Holiday's performances argues that African-American women have built on earlier traditions of resistance by making use of subtlety, understatement and irony in their performances. These are all stylistic traits of communication inherent within the spirituals and blues traditions which also made use of secret codes, in-jokes and double entendres, in order that diverse types of audiences would be able to understand what was being communicated differently. I have previously discussed how these devices may be interpreted in the context of the theory of Signifying. More importantly, that which Hobson – alluding to W. E. B. Du Bois – describes as "double-consciousness singing" also made it safe for women to publicly perform whilst shielding their private lives, giving them a measure of physical, psychological and psychical protection from a public which often misrepresented the actual circumstances of their existence.<sup>103</sup>

Thus Hobson contends that, for "Strange Fruit," Holiday borrowed techniques from earlier African-American traditions in order to create an effective protest against lynching. By making use of irony (for example her

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 445-446. W.E. B. Du Bois described the "double-consciousness" of African-Americans as a psychological "twoness." He wrote that the Black individual was, "American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." W.E.B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. Meyer Weinberg (New York: Harpers and Row, 1970), 20.

enunciation of the words “pastoral scene of the gallant South”), despite her ambivalent attitude toward the genre, she evokes the spirit of the blues, as she performs in a manner reminiscent of the power and authority of an earlier generation of blues women. This has been recognised by other writers on jazz. Benny Green for example commented that “[w]hen Billie Holiday sings the phrase ‘pastoral scene of the gallant South’, civilization has said its last word about the *realpolitik* of racial discrimination in all its forms and degrees. The resigned bitterness and contempt with which Billie throws out the phrase, leaves nothing to be said.”<sup>104</sup> Holiday’s long-drawn out treatment of the word *crop*, and the fact that the song ends on the dominant has already been discussed. It is for reasons such as these that Hobson argues that Holiday does overcome the problem of “voicelessness” in performance and succeeds in the creation of a “call for action” by performing with the authority of “a blues singer speaking for numerous subalterns.”<sup>105</sup>

According to Griffin the representations of the Black woman singing are as much about the spectacle as the sound, as her use of the word “spectacle” has resonances with another racialised event, the lynching spectacles which permeate the American cultural imagination, both North and South. And it is the linkages between Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” and the spectacle of lynching which the writer Fumiko Sakashita examines. Sakashita uses the recording and a photograph of Holiday singing “Strange Fruit” at Café Society to argue that she eroticised the song in performance, because of the combination of her personal presence and her contemporary white audiences imagined ideas about race, sex and violence in the South, although she was ultimately able to subvert these negative images. Yet I do not consider that Sakashita provides sufficient evidence to support her claim.

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<sup>104</sup> Green, *Reluctant Art*, 152.

<sup>105</sup> Hobson, “Everybody’s Protest Song,” 447.



Figure 4. Photograph of Billie Holiday at Café Society 1939. Frank Diggs Collection. Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

Examining the photograph above, I consider that she only focuses on Holiday's appearance, rather than the effect of her performance on the audience members.<sup>106</sup> As the photograph shows, the faces of the club's patrons look frankly glum and serious, and they therefore cannot be said to be enjoying an erotic experience in any sense of the word. But Sakashita does make two important points: firstly, as mentioned earlier, parts of lynching victims were often brought back as "souvenirs," and so in effect African-Americans became commodities surrounded by spectators in the pictures circulated in newspapers or on postcards. This explains why Sakashita argues that Holiday's performance could also be interpreted as a consumer spectacle. She cites a headline in the *New Yorker* which advertised the song with the words "HAVE YOU HEARD? 'Strange fruit growing on Southern trees' sung by Billie Holiday at Café Society."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Sakashita, "Politics of Sexuality," 114.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

Her second relevant point is that this picture of Holiday, standing tall, singing in a long white dress surrounded by mainly white patrons, paradoxically evokes the kind of lynching spectacle contained in many of lynching photographs, and so her performance can be interpreted as being analogous to that spectacle: she suggests that the audience can be perceived as actually consuming vicariously, within a kind of secondary lynching experience. Therefore:

[i]n such a space, Holiday was not only the narrator of lynching, but also embodied the Black victim, male and female...The audience surrounding Holiday at Café Society unintentionally supplemented the absence of white mobs in the lyrics, turning the club space into the spectacle of secondary lynching, albeit a benign one staged in New York. Nightclubs might not have offered a carnival-like atmosphere, but the song did help the predominantly white audience to participate vicariously in southern lynching, or its rejection as foreign to northern sensibilities.<sup>108</sup>

Sakashita argues that the song's original lyrics shore up the racist dominant discourse because the words "black body" (or "black bodies" as sung by Holiday) are ambiguous with respect to gender and so cannot be said to clearly provide a representation of the female experience. Nevertheless Holiday's presence in the commodified space, and the fact that the audience had to listen to her bearing testimony about lynching, enabled her to bring to the fore complicated and difficult dynamics of race, gender and sexuality. According to Sakashita,

not only did she represent Black male victims and/or their mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, she also possibly embodied Black female victims of lynching *and* rape...While nightclubs offered a space where Black female sexuality was objectified and consumed, Holiday subverted the white gaze and challenged the negation of Black female sexuality through her artistic qualities."<sup>109</sup>

Holiday's transformation of the orthodox relationship between Black entertainers and white audiences in 1930s America needs also to be brought into the mix, as this kind of relationship was recognised as being unusual by contemporaries. According to the columnist Samuel Grafton, "I have been

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 116.

entertaining you,' she seems to say, 'now you just listen to me.' The polite conventions between race and race are gone."<sup>110</sup> And this was happening some years before it became common for Black bebop musicians to exhibit diffident attitudes toward their (white) audiences; that change in attitudes, much remarked upon by historians of jazz, signals a change in the jazz musician's status from entertainer to artist, one which is always linked to a changing social status for Black people (the Civil Rights movement would begin in earnest within a decade).<sup>111</sup> Given the nature of jazz historical discourses as critiqued throughout this thesis, it is not coincidental that the harbingers of this artistic and social change are always identified as male. But here we see Billie Holiday not only anticipating that kind of public political gesture, but also inserting herself into what I have shown to be an already long line of "political" Black women artists.

Experiences of racism, which Holiday chose to document in *LSTB*, only intensified the message in the song's lyrics and ensured that she would be able to transmit it with conviction from her own standpoint. She does not appear to have ever witnessed a lynching, but she related directly to the situation described in the poem by linking it with the circumstances surrounding the death of her father saying that: "[w]hen [Allen] showed me that poem, I dug it right off. It seemed to spell out all the things that had killed pop." In *LSTB*, the reader is told that her father, Clarence Holiday, died of pneumonia in the Jim Crow ward of the Veterans' Hospital in Dallas after several other segregated Southern hospitals had refused to treat him.<sup>112</sup>

For Davis, the importance Holiday herself accorded "Strange Fruit" is revealed by her (ultimately frustrated) decision to name her autobiography *Bitter Crop* – the last two words of the song – as well as by the fact that she

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<sup>110</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 75 .

<sup>111</sup> Holiday dressed in satin gowns with gardenias in her hair and never incorporated minstrelsy in her performances. She was a forerunner of the "hip" seriousness of jazz performers that defined the bebop era. The more old-school musicians of the 1930s and 1940s, most notably Louis Armstrong, were known for their minstrel-like theatrics on stage during their performances. With the emergence of bebop jazz, born during the political transitions of the Second World War period in the U.S., the performance styles associated with the pre-war era began to appear outdated as a more socially conscious musician evolved.

<sup>112</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 84.

began to reconstruct her entire repertoire around it.<sup>113</sup> Supporting Holiday's stated standpoint on the creation of the recording in her autobiography, Davis has emphasised the political aspect of her actions and refuted previous studies – mostly authored by white male critics and biographers – that have downplayed Holiday's role in her rendition, even though she makes it clear that Meeropol never did this himself<sup>114</sup> Only Nicholson meets with Davis's approval as, when he describes the song's development, he does not include the stories which foreground white men as being wholly responsible for Holiday's decision to sing the song.<sup>115</sup>

According to Davis and Sakashita it is apparent that for many critics in the arena of show business "political consciousness was not what Holiday represented – nor what they were prepared to see in her."<sup>116</sup> Davis in particular argues that commentators like Josephson disparaged Holiday's comprehension of racial and social issues, and that their stories succeed only to "capture Holiday in a web of gendered, classed, and raced inferiority in order to present her as capable of producing great work only under the tutelage of her racial superiors."<sup>117</sup> They seemed unaware of the fact that, as Clarke has pointed out, it is impossible to be an African-American without making political decisions: "even the decision to keep your head down is a political decision."<sup>118</sup>

The content and tone of an article entitled "Strange Record" printed in the music section of the April 1939 edition of *Time* magazine is a contemporary example of how Holiday was generally perceived by jazz critics and commentators. The anonymous writer appears to be trying to militate against the song's message by making fun of Holiday's appearance and trivialising her involvement. The article begins: "Billie Holiday is a roly-poly

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<sup>113</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 187; Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, 160.

<sup>114</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 184.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>116</sup> Sakashita, "Politics of Sexuality," 111.

<sup>117</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 187.

<sup>118</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 166.

young colored woman with a hump in her voice...She does not care enough about her figure to watch her diet, but she loves to sing.” About her personal attitude towards the song, we are informed that “Billie liked its dirge-like blues melody, was not so much interested in the song’s social content. But Vocalion was.”<sup>119</sup> Vocalion was part of the Columbia record label, and so the implication was that Vocalion was aware of the song’s political message, but Holiday was not.

Ultimately the *Time* journalist aimed to undercut Holiday’s political contribution. She is presented as “an ignorant, happy-go-lucky type of heavy set Black woman” a representation reminiscent of the stereotypical Mammy image that had perhaps been most notably exploited in the Hollywood film *Gone with the Wind*, released in the same year as Holiday’s recording of “Strange Fruit.”<sup>120</sup> The irony however is that, some sixty years later, as if to make amends, *Time* magazine designated “Strange Fruit” as “The Best Song of the Century,” saying that “[i]n this sad shadowy song about lynching in the South, history’s greatest jazz singer comes to terms with history itself.”<sup>121</sup>

A letter from Dufty to Doubleday and their lawyers reveals that he clearly believed that there was something malicious afoot in the attempts to downgrade Holiday’s role in the shaping of “Strange Fruit.” Dufty wrote that:

[f]or years both American fellow travellers and the FBI have been agreed on the myth that Allan wrote a song about lynching and Miss Holiday was Svengalied into singing it by certain operators...I have even heard it said that she sang this song for about a year before she really understood what she was doing...And this is what enrages me. It gets to the point of the book [*Lady Sings the Blues*], and disputes all of it and its reason for being written – to bury exactly this kind of picture of her as a simple little barefoot girl.<sup>122</sup>

The discussion of standpoint theory in chapter two make it possible to consider Holiday’s version of events surrounding her decision to take the

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<sup>119</sup> “Music: Strange Record” *Time Magazine*, June 12, 1939, 66.

<sup>120</sup> Sakashita, “Politics of Sexuality,” 110.

<sup>121</sup> “Best Song – Strange Fruit by Billie Holiday,” *Time Magazine*, December 31, 1999, 74, Foldout Section.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from William Dufty to Le Baron Barker, Doubleday and Co., October 26, 1956, 1-3 in the Dennis Fairchild Archive. In John Szwed, *Billie Holiday*, 218.

song on and set her account alongside those of other commentators. And as we have already discussed in chapter one, its limitations aside, over the years, the veracity of her testimony in *LSTB* has come to be increasingly supported by jazz scholars.<sup>123</sup>

Nowadays the attitude of earlier commentators appears misguided, particularly as we are aware that although Holiday was only twenty-four when she recorded “Strange Fruit” she had experienced enough prejudice and hardship to call herself a “race woman.”<sup>124</sup> She had, for example, experienced the humiliations of Jim Crow on her travels through the South with the Count Basie and Artie Shaw orchestras, as well as in Northern clubs which only allowed entry to Caucasians. “It got to the point”, Holiday said “where I hardly ever ate, slept or went to the bathroom without having a major NAACP-type production.”<sup>125</sup> Reflecting on her experiences as a Black female vocalist in the entertainment industry she said: “[y]ou can be up to your boobies in white satin, with gardenias in your hair and no sugar cane for miles, but you can still be working on a plantation.”<sup>126</sup> The folksinger Josh White, who had got to know Holiday well after an initial falling out over his decision to sing “Strange Fruit, said that “[s]he had more thought for humanity and was more race-conscious than people thought.”<sup>127</sup> Holiday often proudly defined herself as “a race woman.” That she performed as a “race woman” eager to disseminate the anti-lynching message contained within the song can be realised by her description of her personal efforts to ensure that “Strange Fruit” was recorded by Commodore, after the Columbia label she was signed to refused to do so.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has pointed out that, for African-Americans, race signified a cultural identity which connected them as a people. Therefore to be called a “race leader” “race man,” or “race woman” by

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<sup>123</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 30.

<sup>125</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 69, 104; Holiday, *LSTB*, 74.

<sup>126</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 97.

<sup>127</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 104.

the Black community was a sign of respect. These were titles “conferred on men and women who devoted their lives to the advancement of their people. “When the National Association of Colored Women referred to its activities as ‘race work,’ it expressed both allegiance and commitment to the concerns of Black people.”<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, it is interesting that Holiday viewed herself in this light, as Carby’s own research on this subject illustrates that Black women have rarely been acknowledged as race women. In her examination of the complex ways in which Black masculinity has been and still is being socially produced within American society, she argues that this has occurred because African-Americans have inherited rarely questioned notions of masculinity as it is connected to ideas of race and nation.<sup>129</sup> Her views are therefore similar to those of Gaunt and Olaniyan which discussed in chapter one, who argue that Black cultural identities are generally assumed to be male. In this light, it is possible to consider that by identifying herself as a race woman, Holiday was also challenging the masculinisation of the term.

Although Meeropol is often regarded without any complications as a political activist and intellectual, Holiday, who recast and disseminated his material – ensuring its relevance to future generations of Americans – is often not. Denning points out that any suggestion that Holiday is a political artist is usually greeted with scorn, but considers that Holiday should not be disqualified in this way because many people involved in the Popular Front social movement of 1930s America were not intellectuals as such; their political activities and convictions naturally grew out what was going on in their neighbourhoods and work places.<sup>130</sup> It is thus possible to understand that Holiday’s political awareness would have been linked to the day-to-day realities she was experiencing as an African-American woman in 1930s America, as well as the views and attitudes of the musicians she was surrounded by in the jazz community – which was becoming increasingly openly socially conscious – rather than to the value attached to the reading of theoretical political material.

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<sup>128</sup> Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History,” 267.

<sup>129</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men*. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 328.

The Popular Front was essentially a broad-based multi-racial alliance of activists that included Communists, Socialists, radical-leftists, community organisers and liberals. The individuals involved were concerned with a wide range of issues such as challenging the rise of Fascism, trade union organising, socialism, racism and anti-lynching campaigns. Some jazz critics and musicians had links to the Popular Front and supported its aims and cultural events.

Black jazz musicians and artists often performed at political rallies hosted by African-American participants in the Popular Front. These individuals and organisations had differing political affinities and included Benjamin Davis, Adam Clayton Powell, the NAACP, the March on Washington Movement and Harlem's Negro Labor Victory Committee. Artists such as Paul Robeson, Teddy Wilson, Langston Hughes, Dizzy Gillespie and Ralph Ellison, were to varying degrees linked to the leftist politics of the Popular Front. Holiday was also part of this community of Black artists who performed at political rallies. In 1941 she performed at a May Day Rally. In 1943, during the campaign to elect Benjamin Davis (1903-1964) to the New York City Council, Teddy Wilson chaired an artists' committee to assist him and encouraged artists, including Holiday to perform at a rally in support of him.<sup>131</sup> Again in support of Benjamin Davis, Holiday performed alongside Mary Lou Williams, Josh White and Count Basie at the Golden Gate Auditorium in New York, in May 1944.<sup>132</sup> She also performed at a concert in New York for a Russian Relief Programme in 1946, the proceeds of which were used to support the re-equipping of the First Central Medical Institute in Moscow.<sup>133</sup> There is some evidence that Holiday even took part in some political activity when she was touring outside of the U.S. Jimmy Davis (1908-1941), the pianist, songwriter and singer who wrote "Lover Man" for Holiday (and who served a year in prison because of his

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 334. Benjamin J. Davis Jr. (1903-1964) was an African-American lawyer and Communist who in 1943 was elected as the representative for Harlem to the New York City Council.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

opposition to racial segregation within the American army), recalled that “[s]he came to Paris during the time of the war in Algeria when the Algerians were fighting for their freedom. She went to a clandestine meeting, to sing to encourage the fighters. This is something very strong.”<sup>134</sup>

Denning also reminds us that that Holiday was regarded as one of the voices of the Popular Front movement, and not only because of her performances of “Strange Fruit” and her association with Café Society. She had also performed with two out of three of the Popular Front’s favourite bands (that is, Count Basie and Artie Shaw), and was closely linked with Teddy Wilson, who had broken swing’s colour line with the third favourite band, Benny Goodman’s. It was therefore not surprising that Holiday was asked to sing at political rallies.<sup>135</sup>

The irony is that, even if she is not regarded by many as a political artist, she was treated as such by the State. Holiday claimed that “Strange Fruit” was one of the reasons why she was hounded by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and the Federal Bureau of Investigations. In a 1947 interview for *Down Beat* she said, “I’ve made a lot of enemies. Singing that song hasn’t helped any. I was doing it at the Earle Theatre ‘til they made me stop.”<sup>136</sup> After Holiday defied an order not to sing it at the Earle Theatre in Philadelphia, she was arrested the following day for drug possession on charges which eventually lead to her being incarcerated for a year and a day at the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderston in 1947. The FBI had set in motion its surveillance of her when she began singing the pacifist song, “The Yanks Aren’t Coming,” a parody of Irving Berlin’s “Over There” during her residency at Kelly’s Stables from April to June in 1941.<sup>137</sup> As the

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<sup>134</sup> David Widgery, “Billie Holiday – The Woman Who Moves the World” in *The Wire*, no.7 (Summer 1984): 4.

<sup>135</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 343.

<sup>136</sup> Levin, “Don’t Blame Show Biz,” 6. In a recent interview, the writer Julia Blackburn who regards Holiday as the first voice of the civil rights movement, said that “Part of the tragedy of what happened to Billie Holiday was that she refused to stop singing that song and the different elements of authority, of the law and of government, in trying to stop her from singing it, began to hound her.” *Great Lives: Billie Holiday*, British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio 4. Series 12, Episode 5. Broadcast July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016.

<sup>137</sup> Nicholson suggests that “The Yanks Aren’t Coming” was the subtitle of a song by Meeropol entitled “Over Here”.

*Amsterdam News* reported “F.B.I. agents got wind of it however and had the management restrain Miss Holiday from singing this type of song...Just why, it’s hard to say, except possibly that they felt that it was very un-American for a Negro to sing a pacifist song.”<sup>138</sup> Holiday was outraged when the FBI leaned on the club owner, Ralph Watkins in order to make her stop singing what they considered to be unpatriotic material, but she was unaware of the true seriousness of the situation she was in, as they had already opened a file numbered 4855389, labelled “Billie Holiday: Singer.”<sup>139</sup>

Holiday’s well-publicised difficulties with drug addiction and treatment by the authorities placed her centre stage as a political symbol of America’s harsh drug laws. It is often forgotten that, after Holiday had been arrested on her death bed in the Metropolitan Hospital in Harlem in 1959 for possessing drugs, she had mug shots taken, was fingerprinted without “permission, knowledge or consent,” had armed guards posted outside her room, and her radio, flowers and telephone taken away from her. In addition, the hospital was picketed by demonstrators with placards from Reverend Callender’s Committee which, with the Harlem churches, were involved in the setting up of clinics to give medical help to addicts.<sup>140</sup> Thus it is apparent that throughout her career, her contemporaries always recognised her political and intellectual significance, even if this knowledge has become historically obscured by the froth of show business.

Some commentators have interpreted what appears to have been Holiday’s initial reluctance to sing “Strange Fruit” as a lack of understanding of what the words meant. Clarke communicates Josephson’s comment that “I felt that Billie didn’t know what the hell the song meant.”<sup>141</sup> Chilton writes that she was “into” the song after a few readings, but was still unconvinced initially that the material was suitable for her and told Meeropol that she would have to think it over. Nevertheless it appears that within minutes of

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<sup>138</sup> Bill Chase, “All Ears,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 31, 1940, 11.

<sup>139</sup> Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 120-121

<sup>140</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 195; Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 439-440.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

Meeropol leaving the club after their first meeting, she had made up her mind, because when Frankie Newton came off the stage she greeted him with the words “Some guy’s brought me [a] hell of a damn song that I’m going to do.”<sup>142</sup>

The likelihood is that any reluctance on Holiday’s part had everything to do with the fact that she understood the meaning of the words only too well, and that she possibly had real concerns about the reception a political song would receive, even with the supportive audience demographics of Café Society. It is likely that Holiday recognised it would prove a difficult task for her to use her musicianship skills in order to transmit such a taboo subject to multi-racial audiences. It could be argued that her comment “I was scared people would hate it” reflected the fact that she knew the song was controversial and could divide audiences, and yet she would somehow have to communicate the horror of the situation it described as best as she could.

Holiday was also probably conscious right from the beginning that if the song was going to work, then it was going to be dependant not just on the efficacy of the words and music, but also on the creation of a communal empathy between the performer and audience members. This issue must have caused the most difficulty for Holiday, who as an African-American would have had to communicate the song’s message in potentially non-supportive environments: as she recalled, “I worked like the devil on it because I was never sure...I could get across to a plush night-club audience the things that it meant to me.”<sup>143</sup> Her decision to go ahead with the song was undoubtedly her bravest act. When singing about unrequited love, Holiday was communicating a more or less common experience shared by all classes and races. But a song about a lynching was another matter. She could not assume the existence of the kind of universal empathy or communal understanding between artist and audience I have discussed previously in relation to the blues and other African-American genres of music.

Even after Holiday had been singing the song for almost twenty years, “Strange Fruit” caused difficulties for her with some audiences, particularly

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<sup>142</sup> Chilton, *Billie’s Blues*, 69

<sup>143</sup> Holiday, *LSTB*, 84.

during the period of the anti-Communist witch-hunts of the 1950s when some clubs refused to allow her to sing what had become her signature song. During her performance of the song in a Miami nightclub in 1956, seven couples walked out, and although the majority of her fans remained, the management asked her not to sing it again.<sup>144</sup> In the end Holiday was forced to insist on contracts which specified her right to sing it, but even this did not always resolve the problem.<sup>145</sup>

Holiday may also have been cognisant of the difficulty involved in trying to protect herself psychologically if she was going to be able to sing “Strange Fruit” with credibility, night after night. During her residency at Café Society she sang it three times a night, at the end of each set.<sup>146</sup> Meeropol and Josephson were perhaps unaware that for any human being, even one of Holiday’s artistic capabilities, this was a “big ask.” There is clear evidence that at times she found the song too draining for her, particularly towards the end of her life. The drummer and singer Lee Young (1914-2008), the brother of the saxophonist Lester Young, remarked that “[s]he didn’t like to sing it because it hurt her so much. She would cry every time she would do it.”<sup>147</sup>

In this analysis of “Strange Fruit” it is possible to argue, as does Hobson, that Holiday navigated the tensions between her work, community, and nation and her own individual demands for artistic and vocal autonomy.<sup>148</sup> Hobson contends that even though the icon of the singing Black woman originated in a culture where African-American female bodies were colonised in the public sphere, when singing, “they complicate the politics of silence.” This they achieve by speaking in “a subaltern language that inspires marginal voices to emerge from the historical void.” By breaking their silence in this way, their singing transcends as an act of resistance and alters the

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<sup>144</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 126-127.

<sup>145</sup> Daniels, “Strange Fruit,” 3.

<sup>146</sup> Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon*, 164.

<sup>147</sup> Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 125-126.

<sup>148</sup> Hobson, “Everybody’s Protest Song,” 447.

political landscape.<sup>149</sup> I argue that my analysis of “Strange Fruit” provides more transparency on what this “subaltern language” actually consists of.

It is thus possible to perceive, as demonstrated in the works of Davis, Sakashita and Hobson, how Holiday can be understood as being not just an heir to blues artists such as Rainey and Smith, but also to enslaved women who fought for freedom on many levels and their female predecessors who battled to expose the workings of white hegemony and patriarchy. It would not be true to say that Holiday had a history of direct or extended participation in political activities and movements, but Davis is correct in stating that Holiday “was among a host of artists who moved into the stream of political radicalization by following paths carved out by their art, rather than by explicit political commitments.”<sup>150</sup> It is therefore viable to claim that she used her music as a personal contribution to political organising and activism.

## **Conclusion**

Holiday’s recasting of “Strange Fruit” succeeded in catapulting it into the cultural mainstream, making it an important part of American cultural traditions of protest and resistance, and not just a song appreciated by a few committed progressives. As Amira Baraka powerfully communicated in the film *Strange Fruit*, the song will always be of relevance until the last racist is dead.<sup>151</sup>

This discussion of “Strange Fruit” brings us back to Collins’s use of Black women’s standpoint theory, and her deconstruction of “the intellectual” as discussed in the previous chapter. It supports her theory that the expression of Black feminist thought needs to be looked for in alternative institutional locations, and among women not usually perceived as

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>150</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 192

<sup>151</sup> *Strange Fruit*, 2002, California Newsreel Release in association with The Independent Television Service (TVS). Producer: Joel Katz.

“intellectuals”; these women can be described as being “organic” intellectuals in the Gramscian sense of the term, as for Collins, “traditional wisdom is a system of thought which reflects the material positions of its practitioners.”<sup>152</sup>

With “Strange Fruit” Holiday was following in the footsteps of those African-American women who in previous generations had incorporated criticisms and protests about the challenging society they lived within into their performances. By recomposing Meeropol’s work, she reclaimed both its words and music, and thus represented a continuum of this tradition and the important place of women within it. In doing this, she also undermined the more traditional concept of authorship discussed previously – a concept which itself reflected hegemonic organisations of power and property. It is also possible to understand how the song can be regarded as a political *assemblage* if equal consideration is given to the creator(s), performance context/production and listening audience(s) – all of which merit consideration. These cultural, historical, musical and social factors interacted and evolved to enable the creation of the song’s complex ontology and political potentiality. They also provide a context to help us understand how Holiday might be recognised as the *auteur* (rather than the author) of “Strange Fruit.”

Once we understand Holiday’s status in this way – and are able to reframe her as an “organic intellectual” – it is possible to recognise her as a link between her musical ancestors and the many other African-American female artists who have followed in her wake. From Nina Simone to Sonia Sanchez, these are women who have made significant artistic and political contributions to the Civil Rights movement in the twentieth century and beyond.

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<sup>152</sup> Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within,” S16.

## Summary and Conclusion

By making use of gender as a critical category, it has proved possible to discover more about Billie Holiday's songwriting methodologies, and illustrate more clearly her agency as an artist. Evidence of Holiday's originality as a composer and songwriter and *auteur* provided in this thesis demonstrates how this originality could be obscured or belittled owing to gender inequalities within the jazz environment.

It is in recognition of her original approach to songwriting, methods of re-composition and the recasting of songs like "Strange Fruit," that it is possible for Holiday to be regarded as an "organic intellectual" in the Gramscian sense of the term – particularly since, as I have already noted, Collins and Gilroy argue that musicians, poets, writers and other artists constitute a group from which intellectuals have emerged who have built upon African and African-American influenced oral traditions.

This work has raised issues of relevance to the visibility or rather invisibility of women within the orthodox discourse of jazz history. I am in agreement with Sherrie Tucker, who has made it clear that when examining jazz history and culture we *always* need to ask ourselves "where are the women?", and secondly, "why and how did they manage to both exist in, and disappear from, jazz history?": doing so will enable us to discover new information and move away from predicable riffs.

Holiday is one of the most visible women in the pantheon of jazz history. Certainly, more than a million words have already been written about her, yet as this examination of her life and music makes clear, even in the case of well-known female jazz "stars," it is possible for aspects of their work to be obscured or even erased, and thus for their historical contribution to the jazz genre to be diminished. However, by making use of standpoint theory, and focussing on Holiday's songwriting and what she had to say about herself in her autobiography and interviews, it is possible to override the popularised orthodox views about her. Yet we still need to consider why this type of dominant discourse about Holiday and the erasure of the contributions of other women in jazz still continues. The search for the

answer to this question is, I believe, the most critical task for jazz studies as it continues to develop as a discipline.

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## Discography<sup>1</sup>

### Abbreviations

vo	vocal	b	bass
tp	trumpet	g	guitar
c	cornet	el-g	electric guitar
tb	trombone	bj	banjo
fl	flute	d	drums
cl	clarinet	vib	vibraphone
ss	soprano sax	xylo	xylophone
as	alto sax	arr	arranged by
ts	tenor sax	v	violin
bs	baritone sax	ce	cello
p	piano	cond	conducted by
org	organ	mc	master of ceremonies
orch	orchestra	md	musical director

### Any Old Time

**July 24, 1938.** BH, vo; with ARTIE SHAW AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Chuck Peterson, John Best, Claude Bowen (tp), George Arus, Ted Vesely, Harry Rodgers (tb), Artie Shaw (cl), Les Robinson, Hank Freeman (as), Tony Pastor, Ronny Perry (ts), Lester Burness (p), Al Avola (g), Sid Weiss (b), Cliff Leeman (d).

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Phil Schaap "Discography," in Nicholson, *Billie Holiday*, 254-258.

### **Billie's Blues**

**July 10, 1936.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Bunny Berigan (tp), Artie Shaw (cl), Joe Buskin (p), Dick McDonough (g), Pete Peterson (b), Cozy Cole (d).

**April 8, 1944.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY WITH THE EDDIE HEYWOOD TRIO. Eddie Heywood (p, arr), John Simmons (b), Sidney Catlett (d).

**June 3, 1946.** JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC CONCERT. BH, vo; with Joe Guy (tp), Georgie Auld (as), Illinois Jacquet, Lester Young and/or maybe Coleman Hawkins (ts), Ken Kersey or Joe Springer (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Al McKibbin or Lloyd Trotman (b), J. C. Heard or Eddie Nicholson (d).

### **Did I Remember**

**July 10, 1936.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Bunny Berigan (tp), Artie Shaw (cl), Joe Buskin (p), Dick McDonough (g), Pete Peterson (b), Cozy Cole (d).

### **Don't Explain**

**November 8, 1944.** Billie Holiday vo; with Toots Camarata and his Orchestra.

Russ Case (tp), Hymie Schertzer, Jack Cressy (as), Larry Binyon, Dave Harris (ts), Dave Bowman (p), Carl Kress (g) Haig Stephen (b), George Wettling (d), six strings, Toots Camarata (arr.cond)

**August 14, 1945.** Billie Holiday vo; as Billie Holiday with Bob Haggart and His Orchestra. Joe Guy (tp), Bill Stegmeyer (as), Hank Ross, Armand Camgros (ts), Stan Webb (bs), Sammy Benskin (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Bob Haggart (b, cond), Specs Powell (d), Morris Leftkowitz, Fran Siefiels, George Serloff, Leo Kruczek, Charles Jaffe (v), Arnaud Kaproff (viola), Toots Camarata (arr).

**November 10, 1956.** Billie Holiday, vo; with Coleman Hawkins (ts), Carl Drinkard (p), Kenny Burrell (g), Carson Smith (b), Chico Hamilton (d).

**July 17, 1958.** BH, vo; with Charlie Shavers (tp), George Auld (ts), Harry Shepherd (vib), Mal Waldron (p), Mary Osborne (g) Vinnie Burke (b), Osie Johnson (d).

### **Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans**

**September/October 1946.** Pre recording began September 11 1946. BH, vo; Charlie Beal (p).

BH, vo; with LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS HOT SIX. Louis Armstrong (tp), Kid Ory (tb), Barney Bigard (cl), Charlie Beal (p), Bud Scott (g), Red Callender (b), Zutty Singleton (d).

### **Everything Happens for the Best**

**March 21, 1939.** Billie Holiday, vo; as Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra. Oran 'Hot Lips' Page (tp), Tab Smith (as, ss), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Kenneth Kersey (p), Jimmy McLin (g), John Williams (b), Eddie Dougherty (d).

### **Farewell to Storyville (plus choir).**

**September/October 1946.** Pre recording began September 11 1946. BH, vo; with LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS HOT SIX. Louis Armstrong (tp), Kid Ory (tb), Barney Bigard (cl), Charlie Beal (p), Bud Scott (g), Red Callender (b), Zutty Singleton (d).

### **Fine and Mellow**

**April 20, 1939.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Frankie Newton (tp), Tab Smith (as), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Sonny White (p), Jimmy McLin (g), John Williams (b), Eddie Dougherty (d).

**December 8, 1957.** BH, vo; with Roy Eldridge, Doc Cheatham (tp), Vic Dickenson (tb), Lester Young, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins (ts), Gerry Mulligan (bs), Mal Waldron (p), Danny Barker (g), Milt Hinton (b), Osie Johnson (d). TV soundtrack: *Seven Lively Arts: The Sound of Jazz*.

### **God Bless the Child**

**May 9, 1941.** Billie Holiday, vo; as Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra. Roy Eldridge (tp), Jimmy Powell, Lester Boone, Ernie Powell (as), Eddie Heywood (p), Paul Chapman (g), Grachan Moncur (b), Herbert Cowans (d).

**March 8, 1950.** Billie Holiday vo: with Dick 'Dent' Eckles (fl), Charles La Vere (p), Robert 'Bob' Bain (g). Lou Buttermann (b), Nick Fatoor (d), David Friscina, Joseph Quadri (v), Maurice Perlmutter (viola), Kurt Reher (cello),

The Gordon Jenkins Singers (chorus), Gordon Jenkins (arr), Fred Neff (orch manager).

**August 1950.** Billie Holiday, vo; with Count Basie and His Sextet. Clark Terry (tp), Boniface 'Buddy' DeFranco (cl), Wardell Gray (ts), Count Basie (p), Freddie Green (g), Jimmy Lewis (b), Gus Johnson (d).

Count Basie Universal film short – soundtrack

Note: Marshal Royal (cl) appears on film.

### **I Can't Believe that You're in Love with Me**

**January 6, 1938.** BH, vo; with TEDDY WILSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Buck Clayton (tp), Benny Morton (tb), Lester Young (ts), Teddy Wilson (po), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (d).

### **I Can't Get Started**

**November 3, 1937.** BH, vo; with COUNT BASIE AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Ed Lewis, Bobby Moore, Buck Clayton (tp), Benny Morton, Dan Minor (tb), Earle Warren (as), Lester Young, Herschel Evans, (ts), Jack Washington (bs), Count Basie (p), Eddie Durham (g) Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (d), Buck Clayton (arr).

### **I Cried for You**

**June 30, 1936.** BH, vo; with TEDDY WILSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Jonah Jones (tp), Johnny Hodges (as), Harry Carney (bs, cl), Teddy Wilson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (d).

### **I'm Pulling Through**

**June 7, 1940.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Roy Eldridge (tp), Bill Bowen, Joe Eldridge (as) Kermit Scott, Lester Young (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), J C. Heard (d)

### **Left Alone**

**November 1957.** Mal Waldron, (p), Jackie McLean, (as), Julian Euell, (b), Al Dreares, (d).

**February 1961.** Abbey Lincoln (vo), Mal Waldron (p), Coleman Hawkins (ts), Art Davis (b).

### **Long Gone Blues**

**March 21, 1939.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Oran "Hot Lips" Page (tp), Tab Smith (as, ss), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Kenneth Kersey (p), Jimmy McLin (g), John Williams (b), Eddie Dougherty (d).

### **New Orleans Blues**

**1938-1939.** Blue Lou Barker, vo; Henry "Red" Allen (tp) Wellman Braud (b), Danny Barker (g), Sam Price (p).

### **Now (Baby) or Never**

**September 30, 1949.** Billie Holiday vo; with Sy Oliver and His Orchestra. Bernie Privin (tp), Sid Cooper, Johnny Mince (as), Art Drelinger, Pat Nizza (ts), Billy Kyle (p), Everett Barksdale (g), Joe Benjamin (b), Jimmy Crawford (d), Sy Oliver (arr, cond).

**August 1950.** Billie Holiday, vo; with Count Basie and His Sextet. Clarke Terry (tp), Boniface 'Buddy' DeFranco (cl), Wardell Gray (ts), Count Basie (p), Freddie Green (g), Jimmy Lewis (b), Gus Johnson (d). Count Basie Universal film short – soundtrack. Note: Marshal Royal (cl) appears on film.

### **Our Love is Different**

**July 5, 1939.** Billie Holiday, vo; As Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra. Charlie Shavers (tp), Tab Smith (as, ss), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Sonny White (p), Bernard Addison (g), John Williams (b), Eddie Dougherty (d).

### **Please Don't Do It In Here**

**2001.** Laurie Krauz vo; with Daryl Kojak (p), (arr) and (md), Sean Conly (b), Gene Lewin (d)

### **Preacher Boy**

**2002.** Isobel Campbell cello; Bill Wells, (p).

### **Riffin' the Scotch**

**December 18, 1933.** BH, vo; with BENNY GOODMAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA. BH, vo; with BENNY GOODMAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Charlie Teagarden, Shirley Clay (tp), Jack Teagarden (tb), Benny Goodman (cl), Art Karle (ts), Joe Sullivan (p), Dick McDonough (g), Artie Bernstein (b), Gene Krupa (d), Dean Kincaide (arr).

### **Saddest Tale (Blues)**

**December 1934.** *Symphony in Black* Film Soundtrack. March 1935; Visuals. BH, vo; with DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Arthur Whetsol, Freddie Jenkins, Cootie Williams (tp), Joe 'Tricky Sam' Nanton, Lawrence Brown, Juan Tizol (tb), Otto Hardwick (cl, as), Barney Bigard (cl, ts), Johnny Hodges (as), Harry Carney (bs), Duke Ellington (p), Fred Guy (bj), Wellman Braud (b), Sonny Greer (d).

### **Safety Mama**

**November 20, 1931.** Bessie Smith, vo; Fred Longshaw, (p).

### **Somebody's on My Mind**

**October 1, 1949.** BH, vo; with GORDON JENKINS AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Bobby Hackett (tp), Milt Yaner (cl, as), John Fulton (fl, cl, ts), Bernie Leighton (p), Tony Mottola (g), Jack Lesberg (b), Norris 'Bunny' Shawker (d), plus five strings, Gordon Jenkins (arr. cond).

### **Some Other Spring**

**July 5, 1939.** BH vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Charlie Shavers (tp), Tab Smith (as, ss), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Sony White (p), Bernard Addison (g), John Williams (b) and Eddie Dougherty (d).

### **Stormy Blues**

**September 3, 1954.** BH, vo; with Harry "Sweets" Edison (tp), Willie Smith (as), Bobby Tucker (p), Barney Dessel (g), Red Callender (b), Chico Hamilton (d).

## **Strange Fruit**

**April 20, 1939.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Frankie Newton (tp), Tab Smith (as), Kenneth Hollon, Stanley Payne (ts), Sonny White (p), Jimmy McLin (g), John Williams (b), Eddie Dougherty (d).

‘Strange Fruit’ (Version 1)

‘Strange Fruit’ (Version 2)

**February 12, 1945.** BH, vo; with JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC. Joe Guy or possibly Howard McGhee (tp), possibly (tb), Willie Smith (as) Illinois Jacquet, Wardell Gray (ts), possibly Charlie Ventura, (ts), possibly Milt Raskin (p), possibly Dave Barbour (g), Charles Mingus (b), Davie Coleman (d).

**October 29-31, 1951.** BH, vo; with Buster Harding (p), John Felds (b), Marquis Foster (d). (Recorded at Storyville nightclub in Boston).

**June 7, 1956.** BH, vo; with Charlie Shavers (tp), Tony Scott (cl, musical director, [arr], Paul Quinichette (ts), Wynton Kelly (p), Kenny Burrell (g), Arron Bell (b), Lennie McBrowne (d).

**Between 22-25, February 1959.** BH, co; with PETER KNIGHT directing the CHELSEA AT NINE HOUSE BAND with Mal Waldron (p).

## **‘Taint Nobody’s Bizness If I Do**

**April 26, 1923.** Bessie Smith, vo; Clarence Williams (p).

**August 17, 1949.** BH, vo; with BUSTER HARDING AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Jimmy Nottingham, Buck Clayton, Emmett Berry (tp), Dickie Wells, George Mattews (tb) Rudy Powell, George Dorsey (as), Lester Young, Joe Thomas (ts), Sol Moore (bs), Horace Henderson (p), Mundell Lowe (g), George Duvivier (b), Shadow Wilson (d), Buster Harding (cond).

## **Tell Me More And More (And Then Some)**

**June 7, 1940.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY AND HER ORCHESTRA. Roy Eldridge (tp), Bill Bowen, Joe Eldridge (as), Kermit Scott, Lester Young (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), J. C. Heard (d).

## **The Blues are Brewin’**

**September/October 1946. Pre recording began September 11 1946.** BH vo; with LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Louis Armstrong, Robert Butler, Louis Gray, Fats Ford, Ed Mullins (tp), Russell ‘Big Chief’ Moore, Waddet Williams, Nat Allen, James Whitney (tb), Don

Hill, Amos Gordon (as) Joe Garland, John Sparrow (ts), Ernest Thompson (bs), Earl Mason (p), Elmer Warner (g), Arvell Shaw (b), Edmond McConney (d).

### **The Lady Sings the Blues**

**June 6, 1956.** Billie Holiday, (vo); with Charlie Shavers (tp), Tony Scott (cl, musical director, [arr], Paul Quinichette (ts), Wynton Kelly (p), Kenny Burrell (g), Arron Bell (b), Lennie McBrowne (d).

**August 1, 1956.** Herbie Nichols (p), Al McKibbon (b), Max Roach (d). Blue Note Records.

**November 10, 1956.** Billie Holiday, (vo); with Roy Eldridge (tp), Coleman Hawkins (ts), Tony Scott (p), Kenny Burrell (g), Carson Smith (b), Chico Hamilton (d).

**July 6, 1957.** Billie Holiday, (vo); with Mal Waldron (p), Joe Benjamin (b), Jo Jones (d), Willis Connover (mc).

### **These Foolish Things**

**June 30, 1936.** BH, vo; with TEDDY WILSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Jonah Jones (tp), Johnny Hodges (as), Harry Carney (bs, cl), Teddy Wilson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (d).

### **They Can't Take That Away From Me/Swing Brother Swing**

**30 June, 1937.** BH, vo; with COUNT BASIE AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Ed Lewis, Bobby Moore, Buck Clayton (tp), Dan Minor, George Hunt (tb), Earle Warren (as), Lester Young, Herschel Evans (ts), Jack Washington (bs), Count Basie (p), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (d).

NOTE: Both arranged by Buck Clayton.

### **This Year's Kisses**

**January 25, 1937.** BH, vo; with TEDDY WILSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Buck Clayton (tp), Benny Goodman as John Jackson (cl), Lester Young (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (d).

### **What a Little Moonlight Can Do**

**July 2, 1935.** BH, vo; with TEDDY WILSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Roy Eldridge (tp), Benny Goodman (cl), Ben Webster (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), John Trueheart (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (d)

### **What is This Thing Called Love?**

**August 14, 1945.** BH, vo; as BILLIE HOLIDAY WITH BOB HAGGART AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Joe Guy (tp), Bill Stegmeyer (as), Hank Ross, Armand Camgros (ts) Stan Webb (bs), Sammy Benskin (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Bob Haggart (b, cond. arr), Specs Powell (d), Morris Leftkowitz, Frank Siefiels, George Serloff, Leo Kruczek, Charles Jaffe (v), Arnaud Kaproff (viola).

### **Who Needs You (Baby)?**

**January 10, 1961.** Aretha Franklin, vo; Aretha Franklin (p), Al Sears, (ts), Chauncey (Lloyd) Westbrook, (g), Milton John (Milt) Hinton, (b), Belton (Sticks) Evans, (d).

### **Yes Indeed He Do**

**August 24, 1928.** Bessie Smith, vo; Bob Fuller, (cl) & (as), Ernes Elliot, (cl) & (as) & (ts), Porter Grainger, (p).

### **Young Woman's Blues**

**October 26, 1926.** Bessie Smith, vo; as BESSIE SMITH AND HER BLUE BOYS. Joe Smith, (c), Buster Bailey, (cl), Fletcher Henderson, (p).

### **Your Mother's Son-In-L**

**November 27, 1933.** BH, vo; with BENNY GOODMAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA. Charlie Teagarden, Shirley Clay (tp), Jack Teagarden (tb), Benny Goodman (cl), Art Karle (ts), Joe Sullivan (p), Dick McDonough (g), Artie Bernstein (b), Gene Krupa (d).

## Appendix 1: Billie Holiday Timeline

- April 7, 1915** Billie Holiday is born Eleanora Fagan in the Philadelphia General Hospital to Sarah [Sadie] Julia Harris. (Her mother later takes on the name Sadie Gough when she is married for a short time and then Sadie Fagan, her father's surname). Sadie Fagan stays in Philadelphia and hands over Eleanora to Martha Miller, (the mother of the husband of her half-sister Eva Miller) in order to continue earning a living.
- 1918** Sadie Fagan returns to Baltimore and stays with Martha Miller.
- 1920** Sadie Fagan moves in with Robert and Eva Miller in Colvin Street with Eleanora. Works in a shirt factory during this period.
- October 1920** Eleanora starts attending nursery school, (Public School No. 102).
- Oct. 20, 1920** Sadie Fagan marries Philip Gough and moves with him and Eleanora to East Street.
- November 1920** Eleanora starts attending the Saint Francis Academy for Colored Girls, a private school run by the Oblate Sisters of Providence.
- 1923** Sadie Fagan separates from Philip Gough. Eleanora also starts attending the Robert Browne Elliott School, (Public School No.104), AKA the Carey Street School. She moves back to live with Martha Miller for a while before her and her mother go to live with Miss Viola Green for about a year and half.
- 1924** Sadie Fagan moves into a house of her own with Eleanora on Dallas and Caroline Street near the docks in the Point district.
- January 1925** Eleanora is sent to an approved school, the House of the Good Shepherd for Colored Girls for playing truant and being "without proper care and guardianship."
- October 3, 1925** Eleanora is released on parole and lives on the East Side with her mother.
- October 26, 1925** She moves with her mother to Durham Street, the home of Miss Lou Hill.
- Dec. 24 1926** She is raped by her neighbour, Wilbert Rich and sent back to the House of the Good Shepherd as a State Witness.

- February 2, 1927** She is released from the House of the Good Shepherd after the intervention of a lawyer who uses the grounds of Habeas Corpus and goes to stay in Miss Lou Hill's house.
- 1927** She begins running errands and washing basins in the brothel owned by Alice Dean
- 1928** Sadie Fagan moves to Harlem, leaving Eleanora with Miss Lou Hill
- 1929** Eleanora migrates to Harlem to join her mother
- May 2, 1929** Both Holiday and Sadie Fagan are arrested in a raid on a brothel in Harlem. Eleanora is tried, found guilty of vagrancy and sentenced to one hundred days to be spent in the hospital and then the workhouse on Welfare Island.
- October 1929** Eleanora is released from Welfare Island and joins her mother in Brooklyn. She sings at the Grey Dawn, a small cabaret bar in Queens.
- 1930** Moves with her mother to live in a tiny room in Harlem between 5<sup>th</sup> and Lenox Avenue. Starts doing waitress work at a club called Mexico's. Around this time she changes her name from Eleanora Fagan to Billie Halliday.
- 1932** Meets the record producer, John Hammond
- Nov. 27, 1933** Does her first recording, '*Your Mother's Son-in-law*' with the Benny Goodman Orchestra for the English Columbia recording label
- Nov. 23, 1934** Makes her major Harlem debut at the Apollo Theatre.
- March 12, 1935** Appears in the short film, *Symphony in Black* with the Duke Ellington Orchestra singing 'Blues Saddest Tale'.
- July 1935** Begins recording with the Teddy Wilson Orchestra
- March 1937** Joins the Count Basie Orchestra.
- February 1938** Leaves (or is sacked from) the Count Basie Orchestra
- March 1938** Joins the Artie Shaw Orchestra.
- December 1938** Leaves the Artie Shaw Orchestra and opens at Café Society.
- April 20, 1939** Records '*Strange Fruit*'.

- May 1941** Sings '*Strange Fruit*' at the May Day celebration in Union Square New York City
- August 25, 1941** Marries Jimmie Monroe
- August 7, 1944** Signs with the Decca recording label.
- April 1945** Claims to marry the trumpeter Joe Guy, although friends say they never married.
- September 1946** Begins filming *New Orleans*.
- October 6, 1946** Sadie Fagan dies.
- March 22, 1946** Begins three-week "cure" from her drug habit at Park West Hospital in Manhattan
- May 19, 1947** Holiday and Joe Guy are both arrested for drug possession in New York and without representation she admits to the charges.
- May 28, 1947** Enters the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderston, West Virginia and is incarcerated there for a year and a day.
- March 16, 1948** Released from prison.
- March 27, 1948** Appears at Carnegie Hall to standing-room-only crowds.
- May 1948** Begins dating the nightclub owner, John Levy
- January 1949** Both Holiday and John Levy are arrested in San Francisco for possession of narcotics. She maintains that she has been framed.
- June 4, 1949** Holiday is acquitted.
- July 1949** In an interview with *Ebony* magazine she tells the readers that the New York Police Department has refused to issue her with a Cabaret Performer's Licence, making it impossible for her to perform in New York clubs.
- May 1950** She begins the process of leaving John Levy.
- Spring 1951** Begins dating Louis McKay
- April 1951** Records a session for Aladdin Records using the name "Lady Day"
- 1952** Begins to record with Norman Granz's Verve label.
- January 1954** Travels to Europe, where she gives concerts in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, France and England.

- Feb. 23, 1956** Arrested with her partner Louis McKay in Philadelphia for possession and use of narcotic drugs. They are both released on bail pending a possible grand jury trial.
- July 1956** Her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* is published.
- March 28, 1957** Holiday and Louis McKay marry in Mexico to prevent each being called to testify against each other and perhaps to consolidate their relationship after her divorce with James Monroe becomes absolute.
- June 1957** Louis McKay leaves Holiday.
- December 8 1957** Premiere of the broadcast, *The Sound of Jazz* on CBS.
- February 1958** Records the album, *Lady in Satin*. Performs in Europe to mixed reviews. She and the jazz pianist Mal Waldron perform at the Mars Club on the West Bank for a percentage of the gate in order to pay their fares home.
- March 12, 1958** Holiday and McKay are given twelve months probation for their narcotics arrest in February 1956.
- May 31, 1959** Admitted to the private Knickerbocker Hospital and then because private hospitals do not take in patients showing any signs of drug addiction is transferred on to the Metropolitan Hospital in Harlem, a city hospital.
- June 12, 1959** She is arrested on her hospital bed and charged with possession of narcotics.
- June 22, 1959** The hospital is picketed by supporters who want the government to allow medical help and support to be given to people suffering from drug addiction.
- July 17, 1959** Dies in the Metropolitan Hospital in New York City.

## Appendix 2: Lyrics of Songs Discussed in Thesis

### Billie's Blues (Original Version)

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

My man wouldn't give me no breakfast  
Wouldn't give me no dinner  
Squawked about my supper and then put me  
outdoors  
Had the nerve to lay a matchbox on my clothes  
I didn't have so many, but I had a long, long way to  
go

Some men like me 'cause I'm happy,  
Some 'cause I'm snappy  
Some call me honey  
Others think I've got money  
Some tell me Billie  
Baby you're built for speed  
Now if you put that all together  
Makes me everything a good man needs.

### Billie's Blues (1940's Version)

I love my man; I'm a liar if I say I don't  
I love my man; I'm a liar if I say I don't  
But I'll quit my man, I'm a liar if I say I won't.  
  
I've been your slave, ever since I've been your babe  
I've been your slave, ever since I've been your babe  
But before I'll be your dog  
I'll see you in your grave.

My man wouldn't give me no breakfast  
Wouldn't give me no dinner  
Squawked about my supper  
And then put me outdoors  
Had the nerve to lay a matchbox on my clothes  
I didn't have so many but I had a long, long way to  
go.

I ain't good-looking and my hair ain't curled,  
I ain't good-looking and my hair ain't curled  
But my mother, she gave me something  
That's gonna take me through this world.

Some men like me 'cause I'm happy,  
Some 'cause I'm snappy  
Some call me honey  
Others think I've got money  
Some tell me Billie, "Baby you're built for speed"  
Now if you put that all together  
Makes me everything a good man needs.

### Don't Explain: November 8<sup>th</sup> 1944

Hush now, don't explain!  
I know you'll raise Cain  
I'm glad you're back  
Don't explain!

Quiet, don't explain!  
You mix with some dame  
Skip that lipstick  
Don't explain!

You know that I love you and what love endures.

Nothing rates above you when I'm so completely  
yours.

Cry to hear folks chatter,

And I know you cheat.  
Right and wrong don't matter  
When you're with me, sweet.

Hush now, don't explain!  
You're my joy and pain.  
My life's yours, love  
Don't explain.

You know that I love you and what love endures.  
Nothing rates above you when I'm so completely  
yours.

Cry to hear folks chatter,  
And I know you cheat.  
But right and wrong don't matter  
When you're with me, sweet.

Hush now, don't explain!  
You're my joy and pain.  
My life's yours, love  
Don't explain.

### Don't Explain : August 14<sup>th</sup> 1945

Hush now, don't explain!  
Just say you'll remain,  
I'm glad you're back  
Don't explain!

Quiet, don't explain!  
What is there to gain?  
Skip that lipstick  
Don't explain!

You know that I love you and what love endures.  
All my thoughts are of you for I'm so completely  
yours.

Cry to hear folks chatter,  
And I know you cheat.  
Right or wrong don't matter  
When you're with me, sweet.

Hush now, don't explain!  
You're my joy and pain.  
My life's yours, love  
Don't explain.

You know that I love you and what love endures.  
Nothing rates above you for I'm so completely yours.

Cry to hear folks chatter,  
And I know you cheat.  
Right or wrong don't matter  
When you're with me, sweet.

Hush now, don't explain!  
You're my joy and pain.  
My life's yours, love  
Don't explain.

### Everything Happens for the Best

Always blue all in a mist  
It's plain as can be  
You're so mean to me

But everything happens for the best.

You always play around  
You're running my heart  
So deep in the ground  
That's O.K. It happened for the best  
I loved you so madly  
Knew you would be true  
Now this thing has happened dear  
It's over all over because we're through.

Sorry dear, it may end this way  
Since the world begin  
The old folks say  
Everything happens for the best.

I loved you so madly  
Knew you would be true  
Now this thing has happened dear  
It's over all over because we're through  
So sorry dear it end this way  
Since the world begin  
The old folks say  
Everything happens for the best.

#### **Fine and Mellow**

My man don't love me  
Treats me oh so mean,  
My man he don't love me  
Treats me awful mean,  
He's the lowest man  
That I've ever seen.

He wears high draped pants  
Stripes are really yellow,  
He wears high draped pants  
Stripes are really yellow,  
But when he starts to love me  
He is so fine and mellow.

Love will make you drink and gamble  
Make you stay out all night long,  
Love will make you drink and gamble  
Make you say out all night long,  
Love will make you do things  
That you know is wrong.

But if you treat me right baby  
I'll stay home very day.  
Just treat me right baby  
I'll stay home night and day,  
But you are so mean to me baby  
I know you're gonna drive me away.

Love is just like a faucet  
It turns off and on,  
Love us just like a faucet  
It turns off and on,  
Sometimes when you think it's on baby  
It has turned off and gone.

#### **God Bless the Child**

Them that's got shall get,  
Them that's not shall lose,  
So the Bible said, and it still is news.  
Mama may have,  
Papa may have,  
But God bless the child that's got his own!  
That's got his own.

Yes, the strong gets more  
While the weak ones fade.

Empty pockets don't ever make the grade.  
Mama may have,  
Papa may have,  
But God bless the child that's got his own!  
That's got his own.

Money, you got lots o'friends  
Crowdin' round the door.  
When you're gone and spendin' ends,  
They don't come no more.

Rich relations give, crust of bread and such,  
You can help yourself, but don't take too much!  
Mama may have,  
Papa may have,  
But God bless the child that's got his own!  
That's got his own.

Mama may have,  
Papa may have,  
But God bless the child that's got his own!  
That's got his own.

He just don't worry 'bout nothing  
Cause he's got his own.

#### **Gotta Be This or That. Words and Music.** **Sunny Skylar**

If you ain't wrong, your right;  
If you ain't day, it's night;  
If you ain't sure, you might -  
Gotta be this or that.

If it ain't dry, it's wet;  
If you ain't got, you get;  
If it ain't gross, it's net -  
Gotta be this or that.

Bridge:

If it ain't sis, you can't miss,  
It's got to be your brother;  
Can't you see it's gotta be  
One way or the other?

If it ain't full, it's blank;  
If you don't spend, you bank;  
If it ain't Dee, it's Frank -  
Gotta be this or that.

#### **I'm Pulling Through (And It's Because of You!)**

I'm pulling through and it's because of you!  
When I was stranded came your helping hand.  
Lonely, hurt I had not known which way to turn,  
'Til you said, "That's bad, not tears, just laugh and learn."

I'm pulling through and it's because of you!  
You made me see how lovely life could be,  
Lifted up my heart and made me count the cost  
To find I'd gained not lost!

When I thought that hope was really gone  
You showed me I was wrong,  
And you taught me how to carry on,  
Thanks for the lift in time and thanks for this song!

I'm pulling through and it's because of you!  
I'd do the same for you if your turn came;  
Hope it never will, for I've been through the mill.

I won't forget this debt, I'm pulling through.

When I thought that hope was really gone  
You showed me I was wrong,  
And you taught me how to carry on,  
Thanks for the lift in time and thanks for this song!

I'm pulling through and it's because of you!  
I'd do the same for you if your turn came;  
Hope it never will, for I've been through the mill.  
I won't forget this debt, I'm pulling through.

#### **Lady Sings the Blues June 6, 1956 Recording**

Lady sings the blues,  
She's got them bad  
She feels so sad  
And wants the world to know  
Just what her blues is all about.

Lady sings the blues  
She tells her side  
Nothing to hide.  
Now the world will know  
Just what the blues is all about.

The blues ain't nothin' but a pain in your heart  
When you get a bad start  
When you and your man have to part.  
I ain't gonna just sit around and cry  
I know I won't die  
Cos I love him.

Lady sings the blues,  
I'm telling you  
She's got them bad,  
But now the world will know,  
She's never gonna sing them no more.

Cos the blues ain't nothin' but a pain in your heart  
When you get a bad start  
When you and your man have to part.  
Ain't gonna just sit around and cry,  
I know I won't die  
Cos I love him.

Lady sings the blues,  
I'm telling you,  
She's got them bad.  
But now the world will know  
She's never gonna sing them no more

No more.

#### **Lady Sings the Blues: Carnegie Hall Concert 10<sup>th</sup> November 1956**

Lady sings the blues  
She's got 'em bad  
She feels so sad.  
Wants the world to know  
Just what her blues is all about.

Lady sings the blues  
She tells her side  
Nothing to hide.  
Now the world will know  
Just what her blues is all about.

The blues ain't nothin' but a pain in your heart  
When you get a bad start  
You and your man have to part.  
I ain't gonna just sit around and cry

And I know I won't die  
Because I love him.

Lady sings the blues  
She's got 'em bad  
She feels so sad.  
But now the world will know  
She's never gonna sing them no more

No more.

#### **Left Alone - Billie Holiday and Mal Waldron**

Where's the love that's made to fill my heart?  
Where's the one from whom I'll nev-er part?  
First they hurt me then desert me,  
I'm left a-lone, all a-lone.

There's no house that I can call my home.  
There's no place from which I'll never roam.  
Town or city, it's a pi-ty,  
I'm left a-lone, all a-lone.

Seek and find they al-ways say,  
But up to now it's not that way.  
May-be fate has let him pass me by,  
Or per-haps we'll meet be-fore I die.  
Hearts will open, but un-til then  
I'm left a-lone all a-lone.

#### **Long Gone Blues**

Talk to me baby  
Tell me what's the matter now?  
Tell me baby,  
What's the matter now?  
Are you trying to quit me baby  
But you don't know how?

I've been your slave  
Ever since I've been your babe,  
I've been your slave  
Ever since I've been your babe,  
But before I'll be your dog  
I'll see you in your grave.

I'm a good gal  
But my love is all wrong.  
I'm a good gal  
But my love is all wrong.  
I'm a real good gal,  
But my love has gone

#### **'Miss Mary Mack': A Handclapping Game-Song**

Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack  
All dressed in black black black  
With silver buttns buttns buttns  
All down her back back back.

She ask'd her mother mother mother  
For fifteen cents cents cents  
To see the elephnts elephnts elephnts  
All jump the fence fence fence

He jumped so high high high  
That he touchd the sky sky sky  
And he never came back back back  
Til the fourth of July ly ly

I stopped down there  
Way down in New Orleans  
And I found a man to love me  
Like good old family? greens.

**Mistreatin' Daddy (Porter Grainer and B. Ricketts).**

Daddy, mama's got the blues, the kind of blues that's  
hard to lose  
'Cause you mistreated me and drove me from your  
door  
Daddy, you ain't heard the news, there's another  
papa in your shoes  
You ain't even got a chance with me no more, so be  
on your p's and q's  
  
Mistreatin' daddy, mistreatin' mama all the time  
Just because she wouldn't let you  
Mistreatin' daddy, mama's drew the danger line  
If you cross it I'll get you

If you see me setting on another daddy's knee  
Don't bother me, I'm as mean as can be

I'm like the butcher right down the street  
I can cut you all to pieces like I would a piece of meat

Mistreatin' daddy, you used to knock your mama  
down, when you knew I fell for you  
Had me so nervous I would start jumping 'round,  
yes, every time I saw you

But I have got you off my mind  
And found another daddy who's just my kind  
Mistreatin' daddy, I've got another papa now  
I've got a tip of people talkin' about  
I will grab my daddy and turn him wrongside out  
Mistreatin' daddy, I've got a good papa now.

**New Orleans Blues by Blue Lou Barker**

I never felt so lonesome before  
My best man has quit me  
Now he's gone for sure.

He broke my heart  
But I could slap his face  
Just for letting another woman  
Ease into my place

Now I've got those blues on my mind  
Sometimes I feel like living  
And other times I feel like dying

Woke up this morning  
The day was dawning  
And my daddy he wasn't about  
A man does something  
Always makes me shout  
And he better hurry and get back  
Before it all spilled? out

Now some like me cos I'm happy  
Some because I'm snappy  
A very few think that I've got money  
Lord one did and told me  
Mama you were built for speed  
And if you put that all together  
I've got everything a good woman needs.

I've travelled all over  
In Memphis Tennessee  
Trying to find a man who could love and please me

**Now (Baby) or Never.**

Hey there baby make up your mind  
'Cause I've been waiting such a long, long time.

Now baby or never 'cause I've been so good to you.  
Now baby or never 'cause I've been so lonesome, too.  
Now baby or never, if I mean anything to you.  
Now baby or never 'cause you've wasted so much  
time,  
Now baby or never 'cause you can't make up your  
mind,  
Now baby or never and it ain't no fault of mine.

It's got to be yes or no!  
It's either you stay or go!  
You can't leave me on the shelf!  
You gotta commit yourself!  
It's either you will baby or won't fall in love with me!

Gotta call you once more on the telephone,  
I'll give you till twelve than I'll be gone.

Now baby or never 'cause I've been so good to you.  
Now baby or never 'cause I've been so lonesome, too.  
Now baby or never, if I mean anything to you.  
Now baby or never 'cause you wasted so much time,  
Now baby or never 'cause you can't make up your  
mind,  
Now baby or never and it ain't no fault of mine.

It's got to be yes or no!  
It's either you stay or go!  
You can't leave me on the shelf!  
You gotta commit yourself!  
It's either you will baby or won't fall in love with me.

I waited last night for you to call,  
You give me no consideration at all.

It's now baby or never 'cause you wasted so much  
time,  
Now baby or never, and you must make up your  
mind  
Now baby or never, and it ain't no fault of mine.

It's gotta to be yes or no!  
It's either you stay or go!  
You can't leave me on the shelf!  
You gotta commit yourself!  
It's either you will baby or won't!  
You do baby or don't!  
Either you will baby or won't fall in love with me!

**Old Voodoo Song (Originally sang in Creole).**

They think they frighten me  
Those people must be crazy  
They don't see their misfortune  
Or else they must be drunk  
I-the Voodoo Queen  
With my lovely handkerchief  
Am not afraid of tomcat shrieks  
I drink serpent venom!  
I walk on pins  
I walk on needles  
I walk on guided splinters

I want to see what they can do!  
They think they have pride  
With their big malice  
But when they see a coffin  
They're as frightened as prairie birds.  
I'm going to put gris-gris  
All over their front steps  
And make them shake  
Until they stutter!

#### **Our Love is Different**

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

Our love is different dear  
To me it's almost heavenly  
Let us guard it ever preciously  
Even jealously  
While we may.

A love like ours dear heart  
The angels send  
And so I know dear heart  
That it won't ever end.

For as the years roll by  
You'll learn my love for you is true  
And I'm sure I'll learn the same from you  
For our love is different dear.

A love like ours dear heart  
The angels send  
And so I know dear heart  
That it won't ever end.

For as the years roll by  
You'll learn my love for you is true  
And I'm sure I'll learn the same from you  
For our love is different dear.

#### **Please Don't Do It In Here**

Break down the door,  
Chop up the floor,  
Kick out the ceilin'  
And anything more, but, Baby,  
Please don't do it in here.

Kick off the roof,  
Break out the panes,  
Smash in the walls  
And bust out your brains, but, Baby,  
Please don't do it in here.

Took me years to get my pad straight  
I'm gonna keep it that way.  
Don't intend to have it torn up,  
Listen what I say.

So,  
Take all the money,  
Steal all the clothes,  
Shoot off your pistol  
'Cause anything goes,  
But, Baby,  
Please don't do it in here.

#### **Preacher Boy – Jeanne Burns and Billie Holiday**

He was lank-y and tall as a bean-pole

And the wind fann'd my heart to a flame.  
As he looked to the sky,  
And there's no won-der why,  
For Preacher Boy was his name.

With his old yal-ler dog there be-side him  
And his eyes throw-in' sparks in the sun,  
I grew faint from the heat,  
From my heart to my feet,  
When I knew Preach-er Boy was the one.

Then he did-n't say much  
He's the sil-ent kind,  
But his arms were strong  
Just the same as his mind.  
And my knees grew weak  
As I clung to him,  
My Preach-er Boy,  
My Preach-er Boy.

But he heard the call,  
now he's left me,  
For his faith was strong-er than I  
And though we are a-part  
Yet he's still in my heart,  
My Preach-er Boy,  
My Preach-er Boy,  
My won-der-ful Preacher Boy!

#### **Safety Mama (Bessie Smith)**

Let me tell you how and what one no-good man done  
to me  
He called me pretty, young and wild, after that he let  
me be

He'd taken advantage of my youth, and that you  
understand  
So wait awhile, I'll show you child, just how to treat a  
no-good man

Make him stay at home, wash and iron  
Tell all the neighbours he done lost his mind

Give your house rent shake on Saturday night  
Monday morning you'll hold collectors good and  
tight

You see a man you really like  
Let him bite that monkey brother in his back

When his cruel heart turn, his love breaks down  
Hold him where you got him, make him stay in town

'Cause I'm a safety woman lookin' for a safety man

I made him stay at home, help me wash and iron  
The neighbours knows he done lost his mind

I gave a house rent shake one Saturday night  
Monday morning I held collectors good and tight

I've seen a man I really like  
I let him bite that monkey brother smack in his back

When his cruel heart turn, his love breaks down  
I hold it where I had it and he stayed in town

I'm a safety woman, and I had to have a safety man

Say, I ain't good looking, I'm built for speed  
I got everything a pigmeat need

'Cause I'm a safety woman lookin' for a safety man.

**Say I'm Yours, Again – A.B. Morgan and Billy Holiday**

La-zy moon is shi-ning  
The stars are blinking too  
lov-ers lane will be the same  
while the moon comes peep-ing thru  
A boy and girl were strol-ling  
strol-ling down the lane  
the girl was sad, she shed a tear; the boy replied,  
I'm sorry dear but speak to me please do.

Speak to me sweet-heart must we drift apart  
Can't you see my heart is break-ing  
Let us not pre-tend  
must this be the end  
seems your love for me is wan-ing  
I can well ex-plain  
I was all to blame  
blame it on my heart  
It made me play the part  
Speak to me sweet-heart  
can't we be the same  
Kiss me and say I'm yours a-gain.

Speak to me sweet-heart must we drift apart  
Can't you see my heart is break-ing  
Let us not pre-tend  
must this be the end  
seems your love for me is wan-ing  
I can well ex-plain  
I was all to blame  
blame it on my heart  
It made me play the part  
Speak to me sweet-heart  
can't we be the same  
Kiss me and say I'm yours a-gain.

**Some Other Spring**

Some other spring  
I'll try to love  
Now I still cling  
To faded blossoms  
Fresh when worn  
Left crushed and torn  
Like the love affair I mourn

Some other spring  
When twilight falls  
Will the nights bring  
Another to me  
Not your kind  
But let me find  
It's not true that love is blind

Sunshine's around me  
But deep in my heart  
It's cold as ice  
Love, once you've found me  
But can that story unfold twice

Some other spring  
Will my heart wake  
Stirring to sing  
Love's magic music  
Then forget the old duet  
And love with some other spring

Sunshine's around me  
But deep in my heart  
It's cold as ice  
Love, once you've found me  
But can that story be told twice

Some other spring  
Will my heart wake  
Stirring to sing  
Love's magic music  
Then forget the old duet  
And love in some other spring

**Stormy Blues**

I've been down so long  
That down don't worry me.  
I've been down so long  
That down don't worry me.  
I just sit and wonder  
Where can my good man be?

When it rains in here  
It's storming on the sea.  
When it rains in here  
It's storming on the sea.  
Every time I come here  
Everything happens to me.

I lose my man  
I lose my head  
I lose my money  
Feel like I'm almost dead  
I need you honey  
Need you bad as can be.  
I've been down so long  
That down don't worry me.

**Strange Fruit - Abel Meeropol's Lyrics**

- (1)Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
- (2)Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
- (3)Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
- (4)Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
- (5)Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
- (6)The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
- (7)Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
- (8)And the sudden smell of burning flesh!
- (9)Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
- (10)For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
- (11)For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
- (12)Here is a strange and bitter crop.

**Strange Fruit - Holiday's Minor Changes to Meeropol's Lyrics Highlighted**

- (1)Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
- (2)Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
- (3)Black **bodies** swinging in the Southern breeze,
- (4)Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
- (5)Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
- (6)The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
- (7)Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
- (8)**Then** the sudden smell of burning flesh!
- (9)Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
- (10)For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
- (11)For the sun to rot, for **the** tree to drop,
- (12)Here is a strange and bitter crop.

**'Tain't Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do (Porter  
Granger and Everett Robbins) - Original**

If I should take a notion to jump into the ocean,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.  
If I go to church on Sunday, then cabaret all day on  
Monday,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.

If my friend ain't got no money, and I say "Take all  
mine, honey."  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.  
If I give her my last nickel, and that leaves me in a  
pickle,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.

There ain't nothin' I can do nor nothin' I can say,  
That folks don't criticize me.  
But I'm gonna do just as I want to anyway,  
And don't care if they all despise me.

If I work and come home draggin' then stay up all  
night raggin',  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.  
If I eat three turkey dinners and announce that's just  
beginners,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.

If I date a real style setter, but go home with  
someone better,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.  
If I party stay out drinking', and buy me a ten grand  
Lincoln,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.

If I feed my wife baloney, and don't pay my alimony,  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do.  
If I ball and dress up sporty, 'n live to die before I'm  
forty,  
"Tain't your bizness, "Tain't my bizness, "Tain't her  
bizness, "Tain't their bizness, "Tain't nobody's bizness  
if I do.

Well, I'd rather my man would hit me than to jump  
right up and quit me  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

I swear I won't call no copper if I'm beat up by my  
papa  
"Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do.

**T'aint Nobody's Bizness: Billie Holiday  
Version**

There ain't nothin' I can do or nothin' I can say  
That folks don't criticize me but I'm going to do  
Just as I want to anyway  
And don't care just what people say  
If I should take a notion, to jump into the ocean  
Ain't nobody's business if I do  
If I go to church on Sunday, then cabaret all day  
Monday  
Ain't nobody's business if I do  
If my man ain't got no money and I say, "Take all of  
mine, honey"  
Ain't nobody's business if I do  
If I give him my last nickel and it leaves me in a  
pickle  
Ain't nobody's business if I do

Well, I'd rather my man would hit me  
Than for him to jump up and quit me  
Ain't nobody's business if I do  
I swear I won't call no copper, if I'm beat up by my  
papa  
Ain't nobody's business if I do, nobody's business  
Ain't nobody's business, nobody's business if I do

**Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)**

Tell me more and more, and then some  
You know what I long to hear  
I want more and more, and then some  
Of that "I love you only, dear"

Tell me more, and then some  
The way that you feel, and then  
When you've told that old sweet story  
And you're through, start right in again  
I've made that old mistake  
Know the awful ache  
Of a heart that double-crossed  
The waitin's been so long.  
It's hard to be believing'  
If I've missed my guess, happiness is lots.  
Tell me more and more, than then some  
You know how I love that stuff  
Whisper on, from now till doom's day  
But I never will hear enough.

I've made that old mistake  
Know the awful ache  
Of a heart that's double-crossed  
The waitin's been so long  
It's hard to be believing'  
If I've missed my guess, happiness is lost  
Tell me more and more, then some  
You know how I love that stuff  
Whisper on, from now till doom's day  
But I will never hear enough.

**Union Man**

I think I sing that little song  
Hope to say it nothing wrong.  
Hope my song she bring you cheer  
Just like couple of shots of beer.

**CHORUS**

Union man! Union man!  
He must have full dinner can!  
AFL, CIO  
Callin' strike, out she go!

We all contract, she expire:  
Mr Lewis mad like fire;  
Miners strikin' too much time,  
Uncle Sam take over mines

We signin' contract, we get raise  
After strikin' twenty days.  
Butcher comes and ringin' bell  
He raises prices – what the hell!

I'm drinkin' too much beer last night,  
To go to work I don't feel right.  
In my can some bread and meat,  
I'm too dam' sick I cannot eat.

I fire shot at 10 o'clock,  
Tumble brushes full of rock,  
Timber breakin' o'er my head  
Jeepers cripes I thin I'm dead!  
(Laughter of miners).

**Who Needs You?**

If you ev-er want me  
You know where to call me;  
If you ev-er need me  
You know where to write me;  
But you never call me,  
No, you nev-er write me.  
Who needs you?  
Who needs you?

Take a pen or pen-cil,  
A han-dy lit-tle item.  
Or the tel-e-phone dear,  
Why you want to fight 'em?  
How much can it cost dear?  
Why don't you get lost dear?  
Who needs you?  
Who needs you?

Came on like a big deal.  
Though that you could bag me.  
Lis-ten Mis-ter Big Wheel,  
All you do is drag me.

When I real-ly want you,  
You just can't be found, dear.  
When I real-ly need you,  
You're no-where a-round, dear.  
So all this pro-duc-tion  
Leads to one de-duc-tion:  
Who needs you?  
Who needs you?  
Who needs you?  
Who needs you?

**Yes, Indeed He Do (Porter Grainger)**

I don't know what makes it rain, can't tell what  
makes it snow  
Well, I don't claim to know it all, but there's some  
things I do know

There's one thing in particular that I never have to  
guess  
I ask myself this question, and I have to tell me yes  
Oh, do my sweet, sweet daddy love me? Yes, indeed  
he do  
Is he true as stars above me? What kind of fool is  
you?

He don't stay from home all night more than six  
times a week  
No, I know that I'm his Sheba, and I know that he's  
my sheik

And when I ask him where he's been, he grabs a  
rocking chair  
Then he knocks me down and says, "It's just a little  
love lick, dear."

But if some woman looks at him, I'll tear her half in  
two  
Oh, do my sweet, sweet daddy love me? Yes indeed  
he do

Of course my sweet daddy loves me, yes, indeed he  
do  
If he beats me or mistreats me, what is that to you?

I don't have to do no work except to wash his clothes

And darn his socks and press his pants and scrub the  
kitchen floor

I wouldn't take a million for my sweet, sweet daddy  
Jim  
And I wouldn't give a quarter for another man like  
him

Gee, ain't it great to have a man that's crazy over  
you?  
Oh, do my sweet, sweet daddy love me? Yes, indeed  
he do.

**Young Woman's Blues (Bessie Smith)**

Woke up this mornin' when chickens were crowin'  
for day  
Felt on the right side of my pillow, my man had gone  
away

By his pillow, he left a note  
Readin' "I'm sorry, Jane, you got my goat."

No time to marry, no time to settle down  
I'm a young woman and ain't done runnin' around  
I'm a young woman and ain't done runnin' around

Some people call me a hobo, some call me a bum  
Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I've  
done

I'm as good as any woman in your town  
I ain't no high yella, I'm a deep killer brown

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

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

### Appendix 3: List of Songs Composed and Co-composed by Holiday

ORD = Original Recording Date. OPD = Original Publication Date

	Title	Words	Music	Words & Music	ApORD	OPD	Publishers
1	Billie's Blues (I Love My Man)	B.H.	B.H.		1936	1956	E. B. Marks Music JATP Publishing Co
2	Close Dem Eyes My Darling	Albert Bryce Morgan	Billy Holiday		Never Recorded	1936	International Music Inc.
3	Don't Explain	Arthur Herzog	B.H.		1944	1946	Northern Music Inc.
4	Everything Happens for the Best			Billie Holiday Tab Smith	1939		Publisher Unknown
5	Fine and Mellow	B.H.	B.H.		1939	1940	E. B. Marks Music.
6	God Bless the Child			Billie Holiday Arthur Herzog	1941	1941	E. B. Marks Music
7	Lady Sings the Blues	B.H.	Herbie Nichols		1956	1956	Northern Music Inc.
8	Left Alone	B.H.	Mal Waldron			1959*	E. B. Marks Music.
9	Long Gone Blues	B.H.	B.H.		1939*	1947	E. B. Marks Music
10	Lost at the Crossroads of Love	B.H.	B.H.		Never Recorded		Unpublished*
11	Now (Baby) or Never			Billie Holiday Curtis R. Lewis*	1949		Unichappell Music Inc

12	Our Love is Different			Billie Holiday Sonny White R. Conway Basil G. Alba	1939		Publisher Unknown
13	Please Don't Do It In Here			Billie Holiday Buster Harding	Never Recorded	1954	E. B. Marks Music Regent Music Corp.
14	Preacher Boy			Billie Holiday Jeanne Burns	Never Recorded	1962*	E. B. Marks Music Co.
15	Say I'm Yours Again	Albert Bryce Morgan	Billy Holiday		Never Recorded	Copy- right 1936	ciE unpublished* Copyright E. B. Marks Music 1936
16	Somebody's On My Mind	Arthur Herzog	B.H.		1949	1947	E. B. Marks Music International Music Inc.
17	Stormy Blues	B.H.	B.H.		1954	1954	Travis Music Co. EMI Unart Catalog Inc.
18	Tell Me More and More (And Then Some)	B.H.	B.H.		1940	1940	E. B. Marks Music
19	What Can It Be That's Wrong with Me?	Albert Bryce Morgan	William Holiday			Copy- right 1936	Unpublished Copyright 1936
20	Who Needs You?	B.H.	Jeanne Burns			1960	E. B. Marks Music
21	You'd Do It Anyway			Billie Holiday Buster Harding	Never Recorded	1952	Regent Music Corp.

- Close Dem Eyes My Darling – Registered with USA Copyright Office but never recorded.
- Left Alone was published posthumously in 1959.
- Long Gone Blues was not released until 1947.
- Lost at the Crossroads of Love, unpublished according to information contained in Nicholson.
- Now (Baby) or Never, Donald Clarke describes as being her own tune written in collaboration with Curtis R. Lewis, but it is registered only under Curtis Reginald Lewis's name with BMI.
- Preacher Boy was published posthumously in 1962.

## Appendix 4: Sheet Music for "Say I'm Yours, Again"

© Cl E unpub 123479  
 APR 17 1936  
*Say I'm Yours, Again*  
 Words by - A. B. Morgan Music by - Billy Holiday

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the song "Say I'm Yours, Again". It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system is an instrumental introduction. The second system is the start of the verse, with lyrics: "La - zy moon is shi - ning The stars are blink - ing too lov - ers here will be the same while the". The third system continues the verse with lyrics: "moon comes pass - ing thru a boy and girl were strol - ling strol - ling down the lane the". The fourth system concludes the verse with lyrics: "girl was sad, she shed a tear, the boy re - plied, I'm aw - ry dear but speak to me please do,". The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings.

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(2)

Chorus

Speak to me sweet-heart must we drift a-part Can't you see my heart is

break-ing let us not pre-tend must this be the end

wan-ing I can well ex-plain I was all to blame blame it on my heart

made me play the part Speak to me sweet-heart Can't we be the same Kiss

(3)

me and say say yours a-gain gain

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## **Appendix 5: Albert Bryce Morgan Copyright Information.<sup>1</sup>**

What Can It Be That's Wrong with Me; song, m. William Holiday. © 1 c. Feb. 20, 1936; E unp. 118579 Albert Bryce Morgan, Tamaqua, Pa. – 5976

Say I'm Yours Again; song, m. Billy Holiday. © 1 c. April 17, 1936; E unp. 123179; Albert Bryce Morgan, Tamaqua, Pa – 11898

Close Dem Eyes, My Darlin'; song, m. Billy Holiday. © 1 c. May 16, 1936; E unp. 124575; Albert Bryce Morgan. Tamaqua, Pa. - 13173

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<sup>1</sup> Information from Library of Congress, *Copyright Office, Catalog of Copyright Entries: Musical Compositions, Part 3*.