

KENNEL JACKSON

Introduction

Traveling While Black

In 1849, William Wells Brown set off for a journey to France and England. He was being sent to the Paris peace congress as a member of an American delegation. The thirty-five-year-old Brown was surely a most distinctive delegate. Fifteen years earlier, he had escaped from Missouri slavery, first into Ohio and later into New York. He exemplified what he called “self-culture,”¹ having taught himself to read and write extraordinarily well. He had made himself extremely well informed on political matters, an excellent conversationalist, and a stylish man. The year before the peace conference, his slave narrative had been a best-seller in America, and he had achieved first-rank status as a speaker on the American abolitionist circuit.² It was inevitable that he would become much sought after in Paris and in England.

Once overseas, he stayed in England for five years, partly to avoid being captured and returned to slavery, a prospect he faced if he went back to America. In 1855, Brown recounted his overseas experiences in *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad*. Brown’s book is rarely read these days, but it should be, for it is an early record of a free black man participating in a considerable black cultural traffic. In fact, he understood that he was performing as a traveler, his book being “the first production of a Fugitive Slave as a history of travels” (iii). Existing at the time was a small, but consequential and growing, movement—a traffic—of black speakers and performers within the northern, free American states and across the Atlantic to Europe.

Brown had already represented enslaved blacks and black runaways in America, mostly in New York and New England antislavery gatherings. Now he was stepping onto a larger stage, an international one, in Europe,

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where he was to become a performer in the fast-growing American-European black cultural traffic of the mid-nineteenth century. His experiences are a good entry point to the theme of this collection of essays. On the title page Brown wished his book to find a place in the future: “Go, little book, from this my solitude . . . The world will find thee after many days.” It has found that place, in this new effort.

By 1850, northern America and parts of Europe had a well-developed black cultural traffic devoted to the eradication of slavery.³ It consisted of a transatlantic lecture circuit, but also more:⁴ rallies, meetings, marches, speeches, manifestos, newspapers, even songs and memorabilia. It engaged impressive numbers of people, especially women and women’s clubs, and by the time of Brown’s arrival in Europe, it was rapidly becoming a mass or popular culture arrayed against slavery. In large measure, this culture’s authenticity depended on one luminous moment, when former slaves testified about their trauma in slavery, detailed their brave escapes, and in turn excited an optimistic hope for a future world free of slavery. This was, in cultural anthropologist Johannes Fabian’s expression, one of the “moments of freedom” for former slaves.⁵ But it was simultaneously highly problematic.

Every black person standing before the largely white antislavery audience—often called “friends of the Negro,” Brown reported (216)—became a performer who had to negotiate perceptions of slave blackness. Balancing a black presenter’s sense of self with an audience’s need for a particular black type was tricky. Abolitionist campaigners sometimes desired a plantation vernacular from speakers fully capable of formal English. Still, within this problematic moment, a cultural exchange between blacks and others was going on. This cultural traffic contained many noble political possibilities and many cultural anxieties—what one might call a rich Ellisonian mixture, one that still surrounds contemporary black cultural performance.

For his part, Brown rose to the occasion. He performed deftly on the international stage of the 1850s.⁶ He helped advance the view that blacks had great intellectual capacities. Antislavery gatherings at which he gave speeches—“more than one thousand public meetings” by his own count (32)—were his primary performance venue. Other stages appeared when he met and was feted by the great, including Victor Hugo, Alexis de Tocqueville, Tennyson, and Harriet Martineau. Other venues of his performances were his visits with farmers, among the working class, and meetings with London’s free blacks.⁷ On these tiny stages, he strove to

demonstrate his sincerity as a populist.⁸ At other times, he showed himself a tireless, high-minded tourist, visiting cathedrals, famous authors' houses, and museums. Brown's reaction to London's famous Crystal Palace exhibit in 1851 revealed what future world his speeches were intended to generate. Its throngs were an "amalgamation of rank," containing "a goodly sprinkling" of "colored men and women—well dressed and moving about with their fairer brethren" (195–96).

Proslavery Americans traveling overseas were one problem for Brown, with their confrontational, sneering remarks. He also faced a possible rivalry, for Frederick Douglass's stentorian magic, spun around England five years before Brown's visit, might have challenged Brown's status as an orator. However, probably the biggest threat to Brown's impeccable stagecraft was the arrival, in 1852, of the sensational *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, suggesting an image of blacks as dependent, long-suffering, and in need of paternalism.⁹ It was the fictional Uncle Tom—a character doted on by the English reader—who really threatened to overtake the persona Brown had so painstakingly constructed. No dependent black, Brown took as his core value "independence of feeling" (80). A few London newspapers came to his defense against Stowe's treachery book, urging readers to put it down and pay attention to Brown, a "real fugitive slave" speaking in his own voice (318).

Was Brown conscious of participating in a cultural traffic? Brown wrote, in an understated way, of negotiating the rapids of mid-nineteenth-century blackness. However, his volume's twenty-eighth chapter, "Joseph Jenkins: African Genius," the only chapter devoted to one person, is very revealing. Here, Brown recounts his encounters with a free black Londoner from the Sudan, a man of "many characters" (272), who was as much a trafficker, as skilled in the commerce in blackness and black culture, as Brown was. At a lower level of society, Joseph Jenkins was also moving from stage to stage. Brown encountered him first as a working-class man handing out handbills. Next, he saw him daily cleaning an inter-section. Much later, Brown found Jenkins playing Othello in a small theater "to deafening approbation" (270). A year later, he discovered him in a pulpit preaching. When Brown finally spoke with Jenkins, he found out that Jenkins led a musical group, too. It could be argued that Brown wrote so much about Jenkins because he recognized himself in the man—a person moving from one venue to another, each time assuming a slightly different posture. Brown called him "the greatest genius I had met in Europe" (275).

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Brown's Legacy of Cultural Traffic

Remote as it might appear at first glance, Brown's odyssey in the 1850s highlights three core issues within the larger concept of black cultural traffic. First, it tells us this traffic—in performances, images, impressions—is old. The modern era, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with its technology dispersing black performances so widely and so quickly, does not have a monopoly. From the 1840s on, this traffic was dynamic. In that decade the John Luca family troupe was touring in the nonslave sections of America. By the 1870s, the Bohee brothers troupe was teaching banjo and dancing to European royalty.¹⁰ One can find evidence of black cultural traffic as early as the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, "Negro jigs" and dances were being absorbed by whites on American plantations.¹¹ When we speak of black cultural traffic, therefore, it pays to consider it a historically layered phenomenon reaching back in time.

Because of this layering, few public spaces occupied by a black performance or a black performer are entirely free. Few tabula rasa spaces exist, empty of previous black content. Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000) is a devastating inquiry into the imprisoning impact of past racism on contemporary black performance.¹² But it is not only layers from the past that surround performances. As Brown found out in England, contemporary notions about blacks and blackness also crowd the performance space. Not all of these notions are entirely harmful. In fact, this thick layering of past and present notions of blackness is partly responsible for the public's intense interest in black presentations. Simply put, the density of ideas about blacks pulls people in, even though they often bring along a jumble of troublesome notions of blackness. For centuries, therefore, performances within black cultural traffic have been highly charged and greatly magnetic.

Brown's experiences provide a second insight into black cultural traffic. His account reveals that performance is a key element in such traffic. Public performance is what Brown and Jenkins engaged in—they were maestros of public spaces, of the spaces allotted to blacks, spaces that they powerfully reinvented. The performance moment is key because it is the instance in which some representation of blacks, black cultural material, or blackness is offered. That representation need not be well articulated. In fact, these performances seem to work best at projecting their representations when they are broadly suggestive about blacks and black culture, when they allow the audience to insert its own ideas into the performance.

A good analogy, as art critic E. A. Gombrich tells us, is the difference in visual impact between a simple line drawing of a human figure and a detailed one.¹³ The former tells us it is a human and allows us to add our own interpretations, whereas the detailed drawing restricts us to imagining a particular person. Brown always drew a big picture of the “America enslaving nearly four millions” of his “brethren” (29).¹⁴ A century and a half later, we find in the film *Kings of Comedy* the comedians drawing a similarly broad picture of blacks—this time a black essence—as a prop for their jokes.¹⁵ “Oh, you know us,” says Steve Harvey. D. L. Hughley is blunter: “we do shit different,” and “we are different.” Cedric the Entertainer says, “White people live by a different creed, and black people live by a whole different creed.” Never is the quality they allude to exactly defined. By making this essence broad, the Kings allow the audience to see themselves in this black folk-geist. Each time they cite this black essence, the audiences get excited. It is like talking about a very public secret.

Third and very important, Brown’s account tells us that black cultural performances and representations of blacks can travel far and wide. Performances and representations derived from black cultural material have shown enormous mobility. They can end up in unlikely places, in contradictory alliances, can take on new and unintended forms, and can synthesize radically disparate materials. Think of how jazz sprouted in New Orleans and Chicago in the first two decades of the twentieth century and went through countless American transformations until the 1960s, all the while spreading in Europe, South Africa, the Soviet Union, and Japan.¹⁶ Traveling black culture is like eighteenth- and nineteenth-century runaways from slavery who, against the odds, managed to travel vast distances, avoiding being ensnared. “Artful” was the word a slaveholder’s advertisement might use to describe his runaway. From his perspective, the runaway was deceitful. From the runaway’s view, being “artful” was being “ingenious.” Runaways often slipped the noose of their pursuers by turning into thespians. When possible, they took on accents, pretended to be free, and stole clothing, becoming new characters. Likewise, a force keeping black cultural traffic moving along—allowing it to spread widely—is its ability to reshape itself, to adjust to different circumstances—to be “artful” like the runaway.¹⁷ Reconstituting and reenergizing has been fundamental to the black cultural travel. In South Africa, in congested, mostly poor black townships, for example, American jazz of the 1920s and 1930s took on its own tonal character, gave women singers a greater role as club singers, and incorporated Zulu musical formulas. The

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new jazz was called *marabi* music. All the while, these new jazz producers believed in its kinship with American jazz, imitated the showiness of black bands, and were likewise initially rejected by the black middle class.¹⁸

Extending Black Cultural Traffic: Concepts and Examples

The essays in *Black Cultural Traffic* come into being in the midst of today's dizzying black cultural movement. We are in the midst of another version of globalization, a differently inflected dispersion of cultural forms. The ubiquity of black cultural elements in national cultures and in global culture calls for chroniclers, analysts, and commentators. Yet our view of this mobility is not celebratory: beholding the sweep of black culture is not the posture of these writers. There is no triumphalism here, acclaiming the dominance of black cultural traffic.

The main goal of this volume's contributors is the analysis of the fluidity of black mass or popular culture, its capacity to move within black communities but crucially outside of black communities, too. Usually, black cultural performance is analyzed within a particular situation or context. For instance, black gospel music is commonly explained by way of its historical origin, from its Pentecostal church roots and its evolution through its principal composers, Charles Albert Tinsley, Lucie E. Campbell, and Thomas Dorsey.¹⁹ By contrast, essays in this volume take a different approach to black music, specifically gospel. They start with the assumption of a mobile black music: it can travel, settle, and flourish in niches beyond its point of origin. It can be broken apart, with elements inserted and reimaged in another form, much in the way that West African weavers in the nineteenth century purchased foreign fabrics only to break them up and reuse the imported strands to achieve a new color palette and texture for established local designs.²⁰ The essays in this volume analyze a wide variety of black cultural traffics, in music, film, television, language, and definitions of individual and collective self. Regardless of where we look at black cultural presentations, we track them in travel, observing what happens to material as it crosses boundaries, moving on to new destinations.

The general concept of cultural mobility has been gaining ground in today's cultural commentary. Several factors account for this: the rise of the view that culture is a system of communications; the growing interest in culture as commodity or consisting of commodities; and a broader,

more flexible view of the phenomenon of “influence.” In 1990 the literary critic Stephen Greenblatt wrote of “cultural mobility,” arguing that “this mobility is not the expression of random mobility but of exchange.”²¹ He went on to add that “a culture is a particular network of negotiations for . . . exchange.”²² His stress on mobility and exchange is appropriate for this collection of essays. Greenblatt might have been prompted in his embrace of cultural mobility by Roger Chartier, whose influential 1987 writing on the culture of printed texts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France stressed the circulation of cultural artifacts across social boundaries, and the fact that both elite and common people constantly imitated and borrowed each other’s cultural forms.²³

Greenblatt’s definition and Chartier’s model are helpful, but the most seminal work promoting black cultural traffic as a concept is Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993),²⁴ which traces both black intellectuals’ nationalist ideas as they traveled to and fro across the Atlantic and the travels of popular culture, specifically black music. Gilroy’s chapter “Jewels from Bondage: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity” is one to heed in building the case for these essays; in it Gilroy offers a highly kinetic model for the routes in the movement of black music. He makes the significant point that today’s black music travels in much the same way it did in the first breakout of black music into the world’s popular culture in the late nineteenth century. This is a point that we have already stressed in our reading of Brown’s travelogue. Gilroy refers to present and past black music movements as “circulatory systems.”²⁵

To amplify his points, he chooses the little-known example of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their singing tour of England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland in the early 1870s—the first time “African-American folk forms” passed into “the emergent popular cultural industries of the overdeveloped countries.” Once again, however, the public space the Fisk Jubilee Singers occupied was not a tabula rasa. Fifty years of blackface performance in England nearly undermined their appeal. What would real blacks offer as songsters that was different from the singing of minstrels? That was the raging question. English blacks themselves worried about the singers’ presentation of serious, morally upright spirituals before white audiences who had grown used to the gimmicks of minstrelsy. In the end, as we know, the singers succeeded on their new stages, creating new constituencies for black music among both working people and elites.²⁶ Gilroy’s full analysis of the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ moment achieves great insight because he is not daunted by the complexity of black cultural traffic.

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So far, I have used the phrase *cultural traffic* in an operational sense, as a way to describe actual movements of black cultural material from place to place, rather than in a conceptual sense. This has been a helpful approach because it is important to establish first that such movements can and do occur. Bringing together our previous discussion with the remarks by Greenblatt and Gilroy, we can now codify this volume's notion of cultural traffic.²⁷

Even using the few examples offered thus far, it is obvious that cultural traffic can take many forms, but it always presupposes the movement of cultural matter. Even more importantly, cultural traffic involves some system of exchange or commerce. Between black performances and the viewers looking in on those performances, there occurs trade in ideas, styles, impressions, body language, and gestures. Let's look at one quite recent example. When Missy Elliott and Madonna were choreographed together in a Gap advertisement (summer 2003), connoisseurs of these performers avidly consumed every tilt of their tams, position of scarves, swift foot moves, and their womanly toughness. Many connoisseurs of black culture noted the quiet elevation of Missy Elliott to Madonna's stature, and Madonna's reliance on Missy Elliott's hip-hop heft to revitalize her public image. In that very summer of 2003, in which medical science was busily separating many Siamese twins,²⁸ Gap was headed in the opposite direction, trying to make a twinship of Missy Elliott and Madonna. *Joined at the hip culturally* was the Gap message. (At one point, they even turn their monogrammed derrieres toward one another, virtually touching.) Of course, the concept of cultural traffic is more complex than this deconstruction of an ad can illustrate. But the ad does suggest the trade aspect of cultural traffic, the ideas emanating from even a short primetime television performance involving one of today's major black animators of public spaces.

The everyday wordage and metaphors surrounding *traffic* give us a clue as to the complexity of the general issue of cultural traffic. One associates *intersections*, *nodes*, *crossroads*, *side roads*, and *freeways* with traffic, as well as *congestion*, *being stuck in traffic*, *gridlock*, *traffic jam*, *merging traffic*, and *on-ramp*. Few of these words might actually be useful in designing a vocabulary for analyzing cultural traffic, but intersections, nodes, and crossroads already have a history in cultural analysis. In fact, *intersection* has been emptied of much of its valuable analytical content from overuse. In a place like California, with its intense car culture, traffic vocabulary can achieve arcane dimensions: *mixmasters*, *traffic particles*, and *traffic citings*. Listing

these words helps us to picture the many possible paths or routes that cultural material can move along.

Crossroads is the word we have borrowed for this volume's subtitle because we are anxious to stress a fascinating reality of recent black cultural traffic. That reality is this: we are approaching a time when the relationship between black cultures and performance by blacks is becoming highly problematic. Eminem comes to mind here, because he has become a very successful rapper or hip-hopper, but as his detractors will quickly say, he is a white man who should be considered an intruder in the field. At the same time, he cannot be easily dismissed as a cultural bandit favored by antiblack popular media happy to have a white rhymester—another Great White Hope—for hip-hop. Labeled by the *Village Voice* in 2002 a “Trailer Park White Boy: Crossover Dream,”²⁹ he has become a recognized wordsmith within hip-hop circles, to a degree other whites who performed an assumed black art form never achieved.

The assumed organic relationship between black cultures and black performers or performances has always been open to question. But today, this relationship shows new ruptures. Our current condition is not one to disparage but to treat as an interesting state of affairs that can enrich future black cultural analysis. In fact, the *Crossroads* subtitle can suggest a place where new, even magical, things can happen. It is a space full of possibility, but newness always begets new issues. Art critic Thelma Golden may have been trying to address the erosion of an organic relationship through her idea that the black artistic world is increasingly “postblack,” meaning that artists do not engage in previous representations of blacks but are going into new spaces. According to Golden, they “embrace the dichotomies of high and low, inside and outside, tradition and innovation with a great ease.”³⁰ Although steeped in black cultural material, their work does not come clearly imprinted as “black.” It is more oblique in its reference to black culture, subtly shifting from previous artistic approaches to black subjects and at the same time, foregrounding new cultural material that carries black import. This represents not so much a jettisoning as a reworking of black cultural materials. Suggestiveness, ricocheting meanings, and a lot of plain old signifying are taking over. At the same time, directly black figurative painting continues to lay claim to public attention, but it too is undergoing dramatic changes. For example, the great art of the statuesque from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Barkley Hendrick's,³¹ can be seen in Kehinde Wiley's recent presentations of young black males dressed in lavish velvets with gold brocade, posed against

backgrounds suited for the ruling houses of Renaissance Florence.³² These new modalities in art tell us that the performance of black cultural material is not to be expected to be predictable.

One cannot leave behind the wordage and metaphors of cultural traffic without mentioning one of its most fundamental definitions, that of the buying and selling of goods for profit and the bargaining that goes into traffic in goods. The economic or financial transactional life of cultural traffic has to be of great concern in an analysis, and especially in connection with black cultural traffic, where, to put it plainly, so much capital has been generated through marketing black culture. Tom Fletcher's highly informative and anecdote-rich *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business* (1954) is first of all an insider's history of black entertainers from the 1840s forward.³³ But Fletcher's prominent subtext is the struggle by blacks to gain primacy in the performances where black culture was being represented. They wanted to make the money from the presentation of black material. One can see the imprint of money in all the examples offered so far in this introduction; an economic infrastructure surrounds these cultural moments as well. Brown insisted that he not be seen as on "a begging mission, for some society or for themselves" as were many "colored men who have visited Great Britain from the United States" (30). Positioning himself in this way, he acknowledges that finances were often key to the transatlantic black traffic before the Civil War. In the Jubilee Singers' tour, the purpose was the collection of funds for Fisk University. In South African jazz, there was the expense of creating and sustaining bands and the vibrant marketing of illicit liquor in the *shebeens* where the bands performed. In *Bamboozled*, money is both a centerpiece of the film and important in determining Lee's options in making the film itself. The Gap ad is unashamedly an act of commodity commerce. While entralling viewers with street moves, it screams: buy our clothes!

One of the more fascinating aspects of writing on black culture is how little of it notes that trafficking is important to the culture's vitality. Moreover, it is interesting how difficult the traffic has been to define. Even a writer as agile as Gilroy produces a chapter on music that creaks under the weight of the vocabulary he deploys to represent the movement of black cultural material. The high quality of his analysis stems from his relentless search for an imaginative vocabulary that mirrors the convolutions of black cultural traffic. At one point, he writes of "loops" and "fractals."³⁴ W. T. Lhamon's outstanding *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip-Hop* (1998)³⁵ tracks the elusive blackening trope—from black

plantation culture and nineteenth-century New York City black culture to the blackface of urban theater and bar performances. His analysis succeeds because he abandons the idea of linearity in the movement he details.

It is essential to loosen our views of the pathways of black popular matter, even within black societies, to open a full, new field of black cultural material's passages. This is no mere scholarly urge. It is essential because the material demands it. When we speak of the traffic in black cultural material, we often refer to fragments of cultural complexes that break loose and assume a life of their own. In addition, there is often no performance that transmits this material, no person on a stage—though a performance is being suggested, just as a stick figure drawing can suggest a whole human being.

Take, for instance, the strange careers of the recent idea of “bling bling” at one end of the spectrum and of African dress and fashion at the other. “Bling bling” was still just bubbling up in usage in the mid-1990s. When New Orleans rapper B.G. in 1999 created the anthemic hit single “Bling Bling,” it began its wild journey.³⁶ For some time, it remained within black youth circles, but by 2001, the idea appeared increasingly in the regular print media, even in mainstream venues such as the *New York Times*.³⁷ It was used more frequently in television pop culture show commentary such as *Inside Hollywood* and *Entertainment Tonight*. In the fall of 2002, London's *Financial Times* column “How to Spend It” noticed the renewed preference for jewelry and, in particular, the new craving among established elites for platinum, no doubt due to the hyping of “ice” bling bling by hip-hoppers. Topping this off was the inclusion, in 2003, of *bling bling* in standard dictionaries.³⁸ Who could have predicted this zigzagging pathway for the concept, from the benjamin-rich youngster's platinum ring bought from B & A Jewelry on New York City's Canal Street to the platinum- and diamond-dazzling fingers of the tony classes of London. When B.G. said, “my pinky ring is platinum plus,”³⁹ who knew that he would be creating the desires of Europe and America's rich? Who could have guessed that, in the summer of 2003, a *New York Observer* reporter would call Princess Diana's royal jewels “Diana's bling-bling?”⁴⁰

In the case of African dress and fashion, the passage is similar and just as complicated. African fabrics and clothes began coming into America and Europe in a major way through immigrants in the 1970s. Within black urban America and in places like black London and black Paris, these clothes achieved a popularity, mostly through smallish shops with colorful signs, because they fitted in with various 1970s black power and Afrocent-

tric movements and niche cultures. Eventually, though, they began to become a part of middle-class dress, particularly through the dispersion of on-the-spot tailoring that was typical of African marketplaces. As the 1960s and 1970s evolved, African dress became an integral part of black fashion tours featuring mostly women and in fact was a way that black models, mostly women, asserted their independence from “white notions of beauty.” In recent years, African dress has turned another page, becoming a major theme in haute couture collections, most recently in Dior’s John Galliano’s runway shows.⁴¹ Again, there is no one pass play that put African fashion into contact with these radically disparate elements, 1970s black power and Afrocentric communities; black middle-class fashion extravaganzas; black models leveraging their physical assets against a monopolistic white beauty standard;⁴² and finally, the haute couture houses of Paris. Black cultural material in these instances acts like Velcro, sticking to all manner of surfaces where it finds sufficient texture.

Advancing a metaphor like “cultural Velcro” might suggest that black cultural material is indiscriminate in its pathways and comes to settle in random places. Undoubtedly, black communities worldwide have been net cultural exporters for almost two centuries, radically so in the twentieth century. With such voluminous outflows of cultural material, there are bound to be seemingly random alliances, and many amusing ones. But the evidence shows that even unusual traffic has a certain functionality. One of the biggest areas of recent black cultural export has been in the field of linguistic invention. Rick Ayers, the editor of the *Berkeley High School Slang Dictionary* (2000)⁴³ wrote recently, “Most of the new words entering American English . . . come from the African American community and African American experience.”⁴⁴ His word “entering” suggests moving from a side road onto a larger artery, a case of merging traffic.

Here are two interesting examples of this merging. After World War II, “funk” became prominent in black and hipster slang. It meant “troublesome,” “stinky,” “obnoxious.” In the 1950s, “funky” was quite popular in jazz circles and in song titles, and meant “basic” and “bluesy.” It then began to take on the shading of “soulful” and “down-home,” as a quality expressed in black music.⁴⁵ In the 1970s it took on meanings from George Clinton’s Parliament popular music, with its multiple overlapping rhythms. Now it has moved on to describe personal and national mood, suggesting a dense, foggy experience, a depression in which it is hard to find one’s way, and more specifically, as a description of American eco-

conomic downturns. A second Clinton, Bill Clinton, took part in cultural traffic when, in 1995, he used *funk* as part of his political vocabulary. He had remarked that an important feature of his job was “trying to get people out of their funk.”⁴⁶ Now such expressions as “The economy is in a funk” and “The stock market is going through a funky patch” have become part of the lingo of financial news anchors on television. Continuing on another road is funk as “down-home.”⁴⁷

Now, take the word *dissing*, that is, “showing disrespect.” It has been used to describe rhetorical battles between George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein prior to the Iraq War. Most of the black cultural material that travels and settles in different or new territory is there for a purpose. Developing a more systematic discussion of black cultural traffic depends on identifying, of course, the paths this traffic uses but also deciphering why this particular cultural material fits so well in particular niches. *Funk* and *dissing* were adopted because they provided concepts—not mere words, but ideas—that commentators needed to make their reports more understandable, more immediate. They completed people’s mental sentences. Audiences could grasp what actually was happening in human terms. Use of *dissing* said that world leaders are only people, maybe people in a large neighborhood, but still neighborhood powers. As in neighborhood conflicts, they resort to rhetorical jousts, defaming their adversaries. Street wars and world wars both use “dissing,” verbal dishonoring.

A major moment in the travels of *diss* came more recently. During NBC’s *Meet the Press* on September 7, 2003, Tim Russert, while questioning Secretary of State Colin Powell on the plan to get United Nations help in Iraq, used *diss*, this time in a higher realm of discussion than trash-talking between warring leaders. This time, the word was used in a prime time conversation between television’s leading political reporter and the most famous foreign policy executive in the world. Russert said that the French and the Germans were not ready to join America in postwar Iraq. “You called us ‘Old Europe,’” said Russert, making reference to the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s remark prior to the war. “You dissed us,” continued Russert. Showing his comprehension of the term, Powell immediately tried to counter Russert’s assertion. Now, though *diss* proved its utility in this instance, Russert’s using it highlighted the complications of the traveling of black cultural material.⁴⁸ Was he attempting to appear *au courant*, or was he suggesting that his was a language Powell would understand? Was he “dissing” Powell by lowering his status through the

use of vernacular? Or has the term become so common in elite conversational circles that no one bothers to check if it is carrying a proper passport for radical crossings of racial and class borders? Is *diss* on its way to joining elite language traffic? Black culture and language have taken stranger journeys.

Bumps in the Road: Resistances to Black Cultural Traffic

Black cultural material often moves with purpose and nests in suitable places as it travels outside of black cultural zones. This does not mean that it moves without resistance. It is possible to get caught up in a master narrative of black culture traffic as an uncongested freeway, where the way ahead is guaranteed, the only problem being the position of a particular item in the on-ramp queue. In real life, however, getting on freeways does not always mean easy movement.

In the 1950s, white Americans, particularly the older generations, resisted the incursion of the new black rhythm and blues into their new suburbs,⁴⁹ seeing it as subversive to their children's moral upbringing. However, they were unable to get their children to reject the siren calls of Johnny Ace's "Pledging my Love" (1955), or Little Willie John's "Talk to Me" (1958), or LaVern Baker's "Jim Dandy" (1957) or Frankie Lymon's "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" (1956). Parental resistance was probably one cause of the proliferation of 1950s crossover sites, a place where black cultural content or a black performer was remasked or reconfigured as culturally white. Pat Boone's renderings of Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" (1956) and Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill" (1956) are perfect examples of this blanching process. Gone were Little Richard's hoops and hollers, his radical stand-up piano virtuosity, his pompadour hairstyle, his eye-rolling and dazzlingly inviting smiles, and his hints of eyeliner—all markers of black wildness, and androgyny to boot, together overtaxing the earnest visual purity of television of the 1950s and making a space for a tamer, domesticating mediator to appear. Pat Boone also got rid of Fats Domino's rotund black body, his shiny conk, his gold tooth, and honeyed lyrics suggesting "thrills on Blueberry Hill."⁵⁰

In the 1950s, Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, with its primarily white dance crowd and its aversion to showing black youngsters on camera, became another safe site for trafficking in black cultural material. Black

entertainers were necessary for *Bandstand's* media success, but beyond that, they were almost expendable. By now, *American Bandstand's* Cotton Club–like exclusion of blacks is almost forgotten.⁵¹ Many more instances of white resistance to traveling black cultural material could be cited, because it has been a prevalent theme in the history of black cultural traffic. But this has not been the only resistance of importance.

Certain black cultural performances have not been embraced by black communities. Historical revisionism has allowed us, for example, to see the rise of jazz as an assured ascendancy. But in its early years, influential voices in the black middle classes spoke against it,⁵² and in the early twenties jazz had not yet won broad support from the black intelligentsia, opinion makers of many types, who would later cluster around it, endorsing and explaining jazz's performance values. Another example of black communities' resistance to importing black cultural material: in Africa, the postindependence intelligentsia of the 1960s and 1970s was often a critical force opposed to the adoption of African American cultural exports. The much-touted Afro hairstyle of the 1960s met consistent resistance in West Africa by local writers, who saw it as inconsistent with African body presentation traditions—a truth rarely mentioned in today's histories of the Afro.⁵³ In 1970s East Africa, the late writer Okot p'Bitek, a critical and creative powerhouse, dissented from African youth's cultural "apemanship" in absorbing black cultural material from the West. He wanted a reversal of cultural traffic, asking, "When will the youths of Africa influence the youths of the world?"⁵⁴

One of the most poignant examples of resistance by blacks to black cultural material comes from a poem by Chicago-based Margaret Danner, who recalls black-middle class resistance to African art. "The Convert" explains that she first disliked greatly an African nude sculpture brought by the African art-lover and famous actress Etta Moten to Danner's Chicago Art Study Group tea. The year was 1937, a time by which one might expect that the value of African art was established among the literary and artistic black urban middle classes. Danner explains that when Moten, "Parisian-poised and as smart as a chrome toned page / from Harper's Bazaar, gave / my shocked / guests this hideous African nude, I could have cried." Every feature of this black body, encoded in an aesthetic of exaggeration, horrified Danner. The "tea" devoted to "art study" had been upset. But, as "the turn of calendar pages" occurred, Danner's "eyes would skim / the figure . . . / until, finally, I saw on its / ebony face . . . a

radiance.” She was on her way to a conversion to a new aesthetic.⁵⁵ Daner’s poem is a confessional: it gives us an invaluable insight into the hesitations marking the African American approach to African artistic performance, a reality often overlooked in the Pan-Africanist cultural agenda of recent years.

The larger point that these examples of resistance make is that black cultural material has a conflicted history as it has passed within black communities. It is such an important point that another example is necessary to help drive it home. Contemporary appraisers of black cultural history are often astonished that writer Langston Hughes’s poems about the little people of Harlem, as in *Weary Blues* (1926),⁵⁶ were greatly criticized by black critics when they first appeared because their subject matter was too democratic. He dared to traffic in the dramas of everyday Harlem, the rough, intimate world of black work and leisure. A year later, middle-class critics in black newspapers and magazines treated his *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927)⁵⁷ even more harshly for its depiction of lower-class blacks, especially in the blues poems. His portraits in “Gypsy Man,” “Po’ Boy Blues,” and “Ruby Brown”⁵⁸ brought the reader close to the wayward folk of black life. His skillful juxtaposition of a “Gin on Saturday, Church on Sunday” black life was new and upsetting. Few books of American verse have been more harshly reviewed. He was called a “sewer dweller” and “the Poet Low-rate of Harlem.”⁵⁹ Hughes encountered cultural resistance because he allowed new material into the traffic flows. He might have seen himself like the jazz band in his poem “Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret,” which acted to disperse black music to the wider world. Just like Hughes, the musicians were traffickers: “Play that thing, Jazz Band! / Play it for the Lords and Ladies / For the dukes and counts / for the whores and gigolos / For the American millionaires / And the school teachers out for a spree.”⁶⁰

Disruptions of smooth traffic flows, as in the case of Hughes, are a critical, instructive part of the total story of the travel of black cultural material. It is vital for us to understand these disruptions, especially when class figures as an important element, as the case of Hughes suggests. Automobile traffic today is filled with incredible snafus. Television and radio “traffic pulse reports” remind us endlessly of disruptions. Somehow motorists get through, often only after overcoming tremendous impediments. Commentaries on black cultural traffic should not ignore the fact that blacks themselves often have initially resisted the very cultural innovations that black intelligentsia later have proclaimed as noble, as theirs and theirs alone.

Another Traffic Complexity: Cosmopolitanism in the Local

There is another complexity—actually a paradox—important to understanding black cultural flows. Again, it has not been sufficiently addressed. Again, once addressed, it enhances our inquiry. Carl E. Schorske, the distinguished cultural historian of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe, has reminded us that in assessing cultural traffic it is important to take account of the way cosmopolitanism feeds localism. In his study of Basel, he asserted that the Swiss city “learned to live by a paradoxical combination of cosmopolitanism and narrow localism.”⁶¹ With some modification, his idea can be applied profitably to the formation of black cultural material. Much has been made in this introduction of blacks and black communities as net exporters of cultural material to others. But there is an important corollary to this premise: blacks have been remarkable importers of cultural elements from other groups and cultural traditions. Though black cultural products appear highly local and group-specific in origin, they have relied on a vigorous cosmopolitanism in their formation.

Cosmopolitan traffic has fed the formation of black cultural material. In the Americas, this consumption of others’ cultural material has been proceeding at least since the onset of slavery, from the late sixteenth century. In Africa, this has been happening since at least the early seventeenth century with the beginnings of trade with outsiders,⁶² and during colonialism in Africa from the 1870s to the 1960s.⁶³ For as long as black enclaves have existed in Britain, France, Portugal, and Holland, cultural inflows have been occurring.⁶⁴ Even within Africa itself prior to great contact with outsiders, cultural transactions were constant. The idea of pure “tribal cultures” has no reality in African cultural history. Therefore, the cultural material that we call “black” is often significant core cultural elements supplemented by many streams of incoming cultural traffic, coming from outside of black cultural notions. Blacks and black communities reconstitute these materials over time, and bring to them new arrangements. Force and violence and segregation have often been behind these cultural inflows, but those vicious forces have rarely had the final say in the outcomes of traffic. Maybe the real genius of black cultural production has been the ability to reorganize a welter of cultural materials into innovative, arresting new arrangements.⁶⁵

Instances of this incoming cultural traffic come in large, medium, and small episodes. A large episode: jazz emerged from New Orleans in the

early twentieth century, where African, Cuban, American, Afro-American, Parisian, Martinican, and Iberian musical influences were rampant. New Orleans was a sonic carnival of the likes rarely seen before in human history. When Louis Armstrong made his first highly original recordings of 1925–28, he drew unconsciously on this vast musical corpus, while adding trumpet experiments, scat singing, casual delivery, unique solo accenting, and of course, his exuberance.⁶⁶ A medium-range episode: Rastafarian ideology has brought together varied elements from a pan-black world—Garveyist pro-African idealism, Ethiopian history and imperial hagiography, marooned or runaway Jamaican community histories—reworking this material to achieve its current spiritual and political prominence. To this has been added exceptional linguistic invention, biblical templates, and a new spiritual philosophy for the uplifting of the black body.⁶⁷

A small-scale episode: in places as disparate as West Africa, Uganda, and central Africa, postcolonial female garb for special occasions often blended many local dress styles and Victorian English dresses, creating Afro-Victorian as a dress genre, bustles and all. In central Africa such skirts were called *misisi*.⁶⁸ Often these Afro-Victorian dress styles became the source of great pride as “distinctive national dress” in the years following independence when traditional cultural revival was a nationalist goal.

All these intricate comings-together tell us how limited is the idea of “hybridity,” recently so popular in academic circles. (Hybridity is a metaphor borrowed from philology and biology, though the more accessible biological origin of the concept has overshadowed its philological aspect).⁶⁹ How much easier would be the task of explaining the formation and traveling of black culture if we could rely on only two cultural elements fusing, as biological “hybridization” would suggest. Hybridity is too mechanical and predictable and is, thus, but a way station where we can rest and catch our breath, before proceeding to the frontier of more complex black cultural traffics, where the real action is.

Bringing all these complications to bear on our discussion of black cultural traffic seems to destabilize the concept of “black culture.” Anyone who has ever seen a Robert Farris Thompson lecture on black art and black performance in the New World—with his drumming, asides in many different languages, his terpsichorean maneuvers—realizes that as Thompson traces the building of New World black cultural material and performance, he also undermines the idea of a solid, seamless, highly integrated black culture. Before our very eyes, Thompson brings into being complex cultural edifices, informed mightily by cultural traffics with many vectors,

and simultaneously dissolves the archetype of “black culture” as an entity. “Black culture” or “black cultures” is at best shorthand for a profound process of cultural formation, inflows, and outflows. Such cultural formation has resulted in a highly distinctive expressivity for black communities as a part of their being in the world. For our purposes, therefore, it is important to stress that black culture is a highly variegated entity at any historical moment or in any one historical situation. Black cultures have arisen from the action of vast historical forces. Cultural material has emerged from black communities established across many times and across many geographies. They range from the slave communities of the New World to the rural niches of precolonial Africa; from the urban black neighborhoods to the urban native quarters and reserves of colonial Africa; and from the post-1960s black urban centers in places like Soweto, Oakland, Nairobi, Kingston, Accra, London, Amsterdam, and the Belleville section of Paris.⁷⁰ Hence, when we speak of black cultural traffic, we are always implying the traveling not of whole cultures, but elements—even microelements—from these variegated formations. In his thousands of antislavery lectures in England and Scotland, William Wells Brown was bringing together a composite from a large cultural material, performing that portrayal, and in the process, promoting further black cultural traffic.

Yet Another Complexity: The Desire for Black Cultural Material

The penultimate issue for this introduction is what motivates a desire for black cultural material that has brought into being this enormously intricate and fascinating traffic. In a rarely noticed 1966 essay tracing black cultural traffic of a literary nature, “Harlem and Its Negritude: The Twenties,”⁷¹ Langston Hughes emphasizes “the voltage”⁷² behind “the Renaissance connections”: “the voltage in one way or another came through to all of us.” “Us” in this case refers to the black literati and cultural intelligentsia of the 1920s and writers running all the way to Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, but also and just as crucially, to the African writers in Paris and “in far-away South Africa.” Hughes points out that South Africa’s “Peter Abrahams wrote in his autobiography *Tell Freedom*, how as a teenager at the Bantu Men’s Social Center in Johannesburg [*sic*], he discovered the Harlem writers of the Twenties.”⁷³ Hughes was pointing out two traffics, one moving within the American black community of

writers and cultural performers, and a second, jumping across the Atlantic to Europe's young African and Caribbean writers in Paris, who had come from France's sprawling empire. Hughes is onto something when he speaks of voltage, for cultural traffic requires energy and demand. What, then, is it about black cultural material, performances, and representations that puts them in such demand?

It is impossible to answer definitively. But one obvious mistake in seeking an answer would be to ignore differences in the level of demand for black cultural material over the last two centuries. Another obvious error would be to see the circulation of material among blacks and among outsiders as entirely the same. A caveat has to be added immediately to this last statement: it is surprising to some that marginality plays a role in black cultural traffic among both blacks and outsiders. Black cultural material coming from niche cultures, such as that of early jazz musicians or early rhythm and blues, was desired and reviled by many, regardless of racial territory, because it was seen as coming from the lower depths of black experience—occasionally, even from a primitivity. In fact, black musicians often playfully engaged this notion, “junglefying” their club, early film, and recording appearances.

History can be helpful here. The demand for black cultural material—generating Hughes's voltage—has not been constant, and certain periods have witnessed more traffic than others. The first of these runs from the 1840s to the 1880s.⁷⁴ This was probably the first era in which black cultural performances gained audiences outside of plantations and villages.⁷⁵ This occurred primarily in America and England, where the performances were usually of the abolitionist mass culture type, such as those in which William Wells Brown engaged. Beyond abolitionist mass culture, a few black musical entertainers became popular in northern cities and in Europe.⁷⁶ However, all-white performances projecting a faux black culture of the minstrel variety greatly outpaced black entertainment. For many audiences, minstrelsy *was* black life. After slavery ended in 1865, black entertainment challenged the hegemony of white minstrelsy, by often “corking-up,” too, and following minstrel themes.

Intense cultural traffic began again in the 1890s–1920s, though the backdrop for the traffic is violence and repression in both the New World and Old World black communities. Tom Fletcher, the entertainer cum black performance historian, argues that this is a period of great expansion, with some African American singing groups even touring South Africa. In this period, black stage performers edged closer to creating their own voice,

emancipating themselves slowly from plantation show formulas. African flows into the cultural traffic were restricted by the tight grip of colonialism across the continent, yet a few performers make their way to the colonial metropolises, but mostly as participants in exhibits in colonial expositions and fairs. One of the most significant flows of African cultural material into the world was assisted by colonialism, by colonials collecting vast caches of African art objects for marketing, often in curio shops and museums in Europe. This traffic did not involve directly African performers at all, but art pieces that inspired, around 1905, the beginnings of a variety of European and American cubisms, which later included many black American painters and sculptors. Writer and avant-garde cultural promoter Gertrude Stein called this infusion of African art “a veritable cataclysm.”⁷⁷ It was cataclysmic because African art altered the paradigm for the representation of the human body in many arts in the West.

The next expansion arrived shortly after the end of World War I. After a few years of gestation, this burgeoned into the Harlem Renaissance, which, we need to be reminded, was only one of multiple black renaissances in places like Havana, Paris, London, Germany, Accra, Lagos, and South Africa.⁷⁸ One of the principal reasons black cultural material broke out into greater streams was the advent of recorded music. In 1923, Bessie Smith made her first recording, “Gulf Coast Blues” and “Downhearted Blues,” which sold 750,000 copies.⁷⁹ In 1926, Zanzibar’s popular songstress Siti binti Saad issued her first recording, and it went on to sell 75,000 copies along the East African coast and the Indian ocean rim.⁸⁰ It was during this period that one finds African cultural performers traveling. For example, Asadata DaFora, the Sierra Leonean who taught dance in Berlin and Dresden, formed a touring company that performed in Europe, Canada, and the United States before settling in New York City.⁸¹ Black cultural productivity was so vast during the 1920s that one sometimes overlooks the place of black renaissances within wider cultural upsurges in places like Vienna, Prague, Moscow, London, Paris, and Berlin. Black cultural traffic was advanced by, and influenced, the voltage behind a worldwide attempt to reshape culture after the disastrous European war.⁸² A war-weary world yearned for cultural revivification.

Within the last two centuries, the period from the 1940s to the end of the millennium is easily the most crowded with traffic. It should be divided into two subperiods, one running from the 1940s, that is, during World War II, to the mid-1960s. Pumping the traffic during this time is the tremendous unleashing of the forces of political change throughout the

black world. It is a time when blacks, nearly everywhere and of all ideological stripes, were caught up in the sense of a new historical destiny for their part of the world. Regardless of how this period's ethos was subverted by both events and retrospective revaluations, it was a time marked by historical optimism, and that optimism brought to culture-making work a sense of challenge and expansiveness. Okwui Enwezor's large 2001 museum exhibit of art, photographs, and music "The Short Century" makes this point clearly.⁸³ Making an alternative cultural modernity to match the political upsurge was a major goal of black writers, artists, and performers across the world. Taking one small corner of this attempt at a cultural world shift, one need only look at the West African state known as the Gold Coast and later Ghana. From the 1940s through Ghana's independence in 1957 and into the early 1960s, Ghana was one of the centers of cultural and political traffic in the black world. Ideas and cultural material coming from Ghana entered the world, not just the black world, in particular the European liberal lefts and the Asian decolonizers, with astonishing alacrity, and a diverse parade of foreign visitors, of which many were blacks from the diaspora, went to Ghana to see a new black destiny emerging in microcosm.⁸⁴

While citing Ghana as a state that became a focal point of cultural comings and goings, it is also important in viewing the period from the 1940s to the 1960s to recognize that black cultural traffic defied national, regional, and linguistic groupings and was not unidirectional, that is, not from visitors to Africans. We can see this specifically in some of the jazz produced during this era, by such musicians as Randy Weston, Mongo Santamaria, in Ghanaian E. T. Mensah's *Ghana Freedom* album, and in the township music of South Africa. The driving conception behind this jazz was a cross-traffic of techniques, instrumentations, and sounds, and its aim was to create a music greater than the sum of its parts, more than the contributors' backgrounds and past music orientations.⁸⁵ It was to be a music aspiring to capture this unprecedented moment of black quests for freedom.

For this period of the 1940s through the 1960s, we can also see in the photographs of Mali's youth and young adults in and around the capital city of Bamako made by the West African Malick Sidibé other ways in which black cultural traffic defied previous boundaries. His party photographs show young Africans dancing to Chubby Checker and James Brown in the early 1960s and preening in the dress and hairstyles of the

era.⁸⁶ Yet commentators such as Manthia Diawara, who first brought these photographs into clear view, have insisted that this was not a simple appropriation by Malian youth.⁸⁷ Youth in their bell-bottoms, with their manicured Afros, and with their album covers prominently displayed at dances were using the music and the dress styles as a way of renegotiating the heavy French colonial influence that remained after independence, of trying to set a new cultural trajectory for themselves and their country. In fact, they were also probably gently spurning the new African government's revival of African music, song, and dance. The youth were assembling a new cultural presentation of self, partly African American and partly new Malian. In dress in the party photographs, they retain both high African dress styles and streamlined or minimalist French suits and dress styles. Their new cultural personas created a space for their new country, one that began with youth but could radiate outwards to the whole country, a space that was beyond the previous polarities of Malian and French, former colony and colonial overlord, African and European, *noir* and *blanche*.⁸⁸ Could this be achieved through dress, music, dancing, and partying? Not really, but these performances could suggest the possibility, itself a launching toward the future. Both of these cases from the middle decades of the twentieth century tell us how vital they were in generating new modes of black performances that crossed old boundaries. By the mid-1960s, the traffic takes another turn as black power ideologies swirl through Africa, Europe, and the New World. This black power period is the one Gilroy has been adept in illuminating.

The last surge in black cultural traffic is the one we currently inhabit, which began in the mid-1970s and for a quarter century has run exceedingly strong. In fact, it could be conjectured that one of the main reasons “popular culture” has become a category for inquiry has been the enormous success of hip-hop culture and its component performance domains, rapping, graffiti writing, break dancing, emceeing, and deejaying. A huge intelligentsia—scholars, television and newspaper journalists, museum curators, a wide range of artists, hip-hop magazine cultural critics, and filmmakers—has been seduced by hip-hop's growth and vitality. Hip-hop has played a role in establishing the field of black mass cultural studies. It has taught us much about what the “popular” in “black popular culture” can possibly mean. Hip-hop has traveled to new places on a scale unimaginable for earlier black cultural material. Still, from the time in the 1970s that Kool DJ Herc (Clive Campbell) set up his mammoth speakers in

South Bronx parks, mixing classic soul grooves, Latino music, blaxploitation soundtracks, Caribbean dance hits, forming the sound foundation of hip-hop, this popular music has surged forward.⁸⁹

These bold hip-hop wanderings are the main context in which black cultural commentators work today. But it would be wrong to limit the travels of black cultural material and performance from the 1970s on to the mobility of hip-hop. Hip-hop-centric studies can do a great deal of harm to black popular culture studies because they focus us largely on African American cultural products and because they may cause us to overlook other forms of black cultural dispersion. For example, a powerful issue for Africa has been the use of black mass cultural material as a populist weaponry in contests with the state. Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's experience of trying to mount theatrical productions containing political commentary in 1977 caused him to realize that popular theater material enters an arena where "enactments of power" take place.⁹⁰ For him, the Kenyan colonial and postcolonial state saw "the entire territory as its performance area . . . the nation-state performs its own being relentlessly."⁹¹ Therefore, when he launched his Kamiriithu People's Theater in Kenya, an open air theater built by locals, and put on *I Will Marry When I Want*, thousands of people sought out the theater, and after ten performances, the Kenya government shut it down. What the government also destroyed was the concerted work of village women, as theater builders and actors, for they were a principal ally of Ngugi's.⁹² Popular culture in Africa, even the popular culture of Africa that can be seen abroad, often has a politically and socially critical edge, particularly around the issues of gender.

Even a film like *Faat Kine* (2000),⁹³ one of Senegalese filmmaker Sembene Ousmane's least overtly political films and one that incorporates many popular culture elements, carries an incisive political and gender critique. This film, widely seen outside of Africa owing to its melodramatic plot and its high production values, is unable to become simply entertainment. It visits the issues of women's independence, intergenerational conflicts, male accountability, and subtly, through the medium of painting as domestic decoration, it addresses (by not denying) an African middle class's continuing pursuit of African nationalism.

In Africa, when black cultural forms critique power and social status, this critique often contributes "voltage" to its mobility. Karin Barber's work on Nigerian popular theater and its critique of "petro-naira," the vast sums of money that flooded the country during its late 1970s oil boom days, tells a similar story.⁹⁴ In this case, cultural material circulated not so

much as leverage against the state as commentary on a new moneyed class. The theater addressing this theme drew large audiences—“not elite but farmers, workers, petty traders, minor public servants, drivers, school-children”⁹⁵—because it skillfully dissected the impact this new money had on the traditional conception of the path to wealth. As these examples suggest, the importance of looking outside the hip-hop frame of reference is that we are reminded that the critiquing power of popular culture can be a source of its momentum and mobility. For many, hip-hop does much the same critical job, of critiquing power, and does it well. But since the late 1990s, it is not as much a purpose of hip-hop as in its rowdy, more anti-establishment earlier days. Searching outside of today’s American black cultural context helps shatter the preference for looking at black cultural performance as mostly entertainment, while retaining the idea that a compelling style of cultural performance is essential in carrying, in supporting, cultural critique. Ngugi’s play was able to draw people into its critique of the postcolonial Kenya state because of its rich overlay of language, storytelling, and well-characterized personalities. It was the styling of cultural elements that supported his message.

In a very recent example, Charlie Gillett’s music compilation “World 2003”⁹⁶ contains a number of African performers who advance a pro-African, critical, populist message through a captivating blend of syncopation, sampling, and original spirited vocals. One such song is by the Senegalese musician Daara J., whose haunting “ParisDakar” speaks to youth who travel to Paris. Daara J. urges them not to forget Dakar because of Paris, and urges them to ponder the reality that Africa, even in France, is still in their soul. This song is the ultimate example of black cultural traffic with several layers of mobility: the song itself is traveling outward to world music listeners; it represents a performer who has appeared abroad, has picked up hip-hop elements; and it is a critique of the possible cultural subversions embedded in Senegalese youth going to Paris.

The Volume’s Essays: Exploring Specific Traffics

The seventeen essays in this collection were inspiration for this introduction. In addition, four artists’ conversations add excitement to the mix, derived from the real-life experiences of cultural performers and cultural producers. The essays and the conversations can be thought of as analytical riffs, pieces that are the core of the book, but also play off of each other

and the introduction. Like riffs in jazz, they give more amplitude to the subject of black cultural traffic.

The essays cover a wide range of specific instances, itself proof of the fertility of the book's basic theme. Donald Byrd's "Twenty Questions" is an exciting and provocative querying of the themes surrounding the category called black culture, its performative aspects, and its mobility. He causes us to worry over the problematics of defining black culture, black performance, and cultural movement. After his swift, take-no-prisoners questioning of black culture, almost as if it were in the dock in a courtroom, the essays move along many lines. Collecting papers over a wide range of specific instances was our deliberate strategy. Our purpose is to show a variety of cultural mobility and traffics, but also to present a range of analytical approaches, to show how different scholars and commentators approach the subject. Another purpose of this breadth is that the essays provide a test of the possibilities of analyzing cultural traffics in general, whether labeled black or not. The last trait these essays have in common is that they extend the meaning—sometimes questioning the usefulness—of some of the conventional categories of cultural studies: authenticity, appropriation, hybridity, cultural tradition, commodity, borrowing, as well as others.

Aptly, the four parts of the book are defined by deploying the language of traffic. Part 1 is "Crossroads and Intersections in Black Performance and Black Popular Culture." Its papers cover the phenomenon of black cultural material's encounter with new contexts. This material has come to a cultural intersection where it is joined by other cultural agendas. What we find in these crossroad encounters is that *blackness* and *black* are not useful labels for the resultant cultural products. They appear to be "black" cultural products, but their distance from an archetypal "black" cultural experience is sufficiently great to show us the flaw in using race as a broad cultural label. Catherine M. Cole's "When Is African Theater 'Black'?" is a perfect illustration of this problem. Cole explores Ghana's popular concert party performances, a kind of theater where blackface is practiced without the overtones of minstrelsy. Even when pressed in interviews, the practitioners of the concert party were reluctant to put themselves within a hard black-white polarity. E. Patrick Johnson's "Performing Blackness Down Under: Gospel Music in Australia" is an ethnographic account of an all-white, atheist, a cappella gospel group in Sydney and their adoption of gospel music. Like Cole, Johnson brings fascinating interviews with the performers into the interpretation of their work. Using a variety of theo-

retical assists, Johnson brings into view how they see their affiliation to black gospel. Danzy Senna uses autobiography in “Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride (or, Why One Mixed Girl Still Answers to Black)” to get at the intersection of a biracial family history with the outside world’s shifting definitions of “being black.” Growing up within this shifting landscape of race markers gives Senna a vantage point from which to question the credibility of Afrocentric worldviews and *black* as a label. Kennell Jackson’s “The Shadows of Texts: Will Black Music and Singers Sell Everything on Television?” is a look at the incorporation of black music into television commercials, and the resultant racialization of television marketing. The importance of this essay lies in its excavation of a largely subliminal black cultural material.

Part 2, “Stop Signs and Signposts: Stabilities and Instabilities in Black Performance and Black Popular Culture,” recapitulates some of the questioning and unease of the first papers, but takes a different tack. The four commentators present four cases of the instabilities in definitions of blackness and the complications that appear often in the path of traveling black culture material. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., presents in “Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit” a subtle discussion of the fascination with blackness from the 1830s on that became fundamental in the North Atlantic cultural commerce. He comes forward in time to the hip-hop performer Big Pun, a prominent Latin emcee of the late 1990s. Lhamon’s idea is that blackness has been a treasure trove for peoples and individuals seeking alternative identities, from early Irish male immigrants to America straight through to the Chris Rocks of today. His essay unsettles both the definition of black and black performance as well as whiteness. Kobena Mercer has written a wide-ranging essay, “Diaspora Aesthetics and Visual Culture,” that looks at the issue of visual representations by blacks, some examples coming from new black artists such as the British Yinka Shonibare. He illuminates why it has been so difficult for black visual artists to gain visibility for their subjects and for themselves. His essay drives home an important point about the nature of black visibility and invisibility, and draws in materials from Ellison and Fanon plus an important revisionist interpretation of the idea of the mask in twentieth-century black cultural history. Tim’m T. West follows with a telling essay on the fear of homosexuality within hip-hop culture and the overdetermined policing of boundaries to contain the potential menace. Hip-hop has proved that it can travel around the world, but it is forbidden to engage the homoerotic world, and has had anxiety attacks over the homoerotic in its midst. West’s “Keeping It Real:

Disidentification and Its Discontents” is one of a very few essays that tackles hip-hop’s hypermasculinity and representational strategies that exclude queer identities. Caroline Streeter looks at another race instability in “Faking the Funk? Mariah Carey, Alicia Keys, and (Hybrid) Black Celebrity.” This is a challenging subject, and Streeter explores the ins and outs of contemporary mulatto figures in black popular culture in a skillful way, handling the complexities that these figures and their media lives present. Her essay is both a query on “faking the funk” by mulatto performers and a delicate understanding of their dilemma-ridden public personas. Part 2’s essays show traveling black cultural material, but with real obstacles and uncommon turns along the way. It is not all green lights and open highways.

From this intellectual position, the collection in part 3 moves to consider more vivid examples of world travel for black cultural material. Tyler Stovall in “Black Community, Black Spectacle: Performance and Race in Transatlantic Perspective,” explores bell hooks’s argument that black performance has two faces—that of community creation and voyeuristic spectacle. What emerges from his questioning is a distinctive look at how these faces are bound together, Janus-like, in this early example of the quest for black modernity in 1920s–early 1930s Paris. Manthia Diawara’s “The 1960s in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown,” looks at the south Atlantic transfer of black cultural material in the form of James Brown and the African performer Ali Farka Toure into the youth and young adult culture of Bamako, Mali, where it was recorded by the nearly all-seeing camera of Malick Sidibé. Diawara’s essay rediscovers this cultural episode and advances a theory about the maintenance of African culture in New World slavery versus under European colonialism in Africa. Halifu Osumare’s essay “Global Hip-Hop and the African Diaspora” brings us another vital perspective on the dispersion of hip-hop and reminds us that even though hip-hop is a commercial enterprise these days, it holds within it the promise of creating solidarities among the poor and dispossessed youth of the black diaspora, in particular in Cuba and Brazil. She is interested in what are termed “connective marginalities” of global hip-hop. She concludes with the powerful statement that “hip-hop in the African Diaspora continues a powerful legacy of accessing the Africanist aesthetic . . . to reveal and critique the world’s extant social inequalities.” Paulla Ebron’s “Continental Riffs: Praisesingers in Transnational Contexts” brings into view a famous West African performer, the *jali* or oral historian. In many West African communities, as in Gambia

from which Ebron's song examples derive, the *jali* are celebrated for their performative memory of culture and history. Giving listenings to three recorded songs, Ebron tracks the *jali*'s performance outside of Africa as it engages transnational encounters, showing how the praisesinger's songs translate to different audiences.

The last section, part 4, examines "Trafficking in Black Visual Images: Television, Film, and New Media." As we enter a period in which critics of television networks talk about the absence of black shows and black performers on prime television, Herman Gray looks at whether television, as a medium, can represent blackness as cultural identity. Is today's television the appropriate venue for pursuing this ideal? Given that today's shows are often broadcast to audiences with little or no historical experience with America's ethnic representation, what is the value of their projections? Gray takes on these major questions. Nicole R. Fleetwood's "Hip-Hop Fashion, Masculine Anxiety, and the Discourse of Americana" handles one of the most pervasive influences of black youth on today's culture—as fashion-shapers, up and down the social hierarchy and across new geographies. She uncovers an alliance—an unholy alliance for some—between hip-hop fashion and Americana, producing a type of style nationalism, particularly in young male fashion. Her essay effectively deepens our knowledge of the impact of hip-hop fashion by penetrating to its recent ideology. Harry Elam, Jr.'s "Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*" considers a much-debated film that raises the question of whether black performance is in fact little more than updated versions of minstrelsy. There are many twists and turns in Lee's film, and Elam unlocks the separate subplots that give the film its dense set of meanings and questions. It is a film that demands a commentary, for near its end, it moves swiftly through a montage that traverses a large part of black performance in film and television. For such an ambitious, pressurized presentation, Elam's critique is helpful. A similar response could be made for Jennifer Devere Brody's "Moving Violations: Globalization and Feminism in *Set It Off*." It is a rigorous scrutiny of this 1996 film, with a sense of its similarities with and differences from 1970s black exploitation films and its fit in the current issues of black women's history. Brody brings the film to life owing to her critical acumen and constant reference to a broader theoretical literature. What she accomplishes is going beneath the easy shibboleth of globalization to interpret specific states inhabited by the film's women characters. Practically no aspect of the film goes unexamined, including the emancipatory trajectory allowed one of its characters.

This anthology contains a unique feature, an Artist Interlude section. It features interview comments from hip-hop performer Michael Franti, performance artist Rhodessa Jones, theater artist Keith Antar Mason, jazz musician Christian McBride, choreographer Robert Moses, theater director Chike Nwoffiah, filmmaker Euzahn Palcy, and hip-hop theater artist Will Power. The interviews were conducted individually, and they are put here to extend the conversation of the essays. Many of the issues discussed as evidences of cultural traffic are taken up by the artists. They provide the informed and invested perspective of practicing artists. Thus, the inclusion of this section as an interlude between the scholarly essays allows for the purposeful interplay of theory and practice.

Present Heirs to Brown

When William Wells Brown traveled to England in 1849, he was pioneering a new geography of cultural import for blacks. He arrived there, having been created by vast forces, the Atlantic slave trade and the empire of slavery that still dominated the Americas. It is understandable, therefore, that for all his discipline, just under his exterior, he was a person marked by history's vicissitudes: his runaway status, mixed race heritage, his hard-won literacy, his hardscrabble existence in his early years as a free person and no less important, his assumed middle and last names. (Until his escape, he only had a single name, "William," a practice in slavery.) Brown enacted a cultural traffic and, simultaneously, was the creation of the traffic in human beings that slavery had generated. And yet he aimed to put his personal stamp on even the small details of his life. It is impossible to read *The American Fugitive in Europe* without sensing a modern or post-modern character in him. And so, as we move forward to our own times, in discussing black cultural traffics, it is important to keep in mind always how past black traffics mirror our own cultural exchanges. Brown was a black culture-naut, foreshadowing many of the features of today's cultural travels and travelers.

It is appropriate therefore to close by looking briefly at two contemporary cultural traffickers. The first is Kwame Kwei-Armah, a newly prominent black British celebrity, playwright, and public advocate. Looking at him, we can see how black cultural traffic has changed and how it mirrors past traffics. Kwei-Armah is a most captivating figure. Originally, he hails from west London, where his family from Grenada settled and where, in

1967, he was born and named Ian Roberts. In 1979, he had a transformative experience of watching Alex Haley's greatly popular television miniseries *Roots*: finally, he saw a portrayal of Africans not as savages, "with bones through their noses," but as people of capability.⁹⁷ At this point, he tells his parents of his desire to change his name. "Carrying a European name supports the notion of western superiority and I won't have that." He chose a new name, his personal name taken from Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of independent Ghana. He first came to public notice through the BBC's *Celebrity Fame Academy*, an entertainer competition show, where he sang sentimental songs such as "Try a Little Tenderness," and where he was spotted on camera praying for a favorable competition result. He lost, but went on to become an affectionate public celebrity in the tabloid press and in a television role on BBC's hospital soap *Casualty*. From this varied composite of cultural influences and performances, Kwei-Armah has emerged as a black cultural trafficker of considerable consequence.

Two triumphs have occurred. He has written a successful, tough play for the National Theatre—*Elmina's Kitchen*, set in a poor West Indian diner in east London. The title is an obvious historical reference to the Gold Coast (later Ghana) slave depot, Elmina Castle, a fortification from which West Africans were shipped to the New World. This play, actually his second (the first being the prize-winning *Bitter Herb*), focuses on the bleak prospects facing young blacks in Britain, to whom Kwei-Armah is deeply committed. The play drew more blacks into the National Theatre than had its other offerings. The other triumph is his alliance with Christian Aid, which convinced him to go to Senegal to see firsthand the economic ruin being created among Senegal's food producers because of subsidized food imports from the West that undercut local prices. He reported back on what he found. Rather than choose an abstract way of telling this story of Senegalese difficulties, he seized on narrating the fact that one of Senegal's national dishes, *thieboudienne*, was these days made more cheaply by buying rice from the United States, onions from Holland, tomatoes from Italy, and oil from Europe. The quality of the fish ingredient has been reduced because the foreign fleets offshore net the best fish, leaving what local chefs call poetically "the dust of the sea." Kwei-Armah finds himself using his composite personal history, performance fame, and plays to inspire young blacks and to tackle the straitjacketing trade assumptions of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. A latter-day black cultural trafficker finds his *métier*. William Wells Brown would have understood.

His understanding would have extended to another fascinating performer who has recently emerged as yet another promoter of black cultural mobility, the singer Angelique Kidjo. Kidjo comes from one of the most powerful cultural origin points in the black diaspora, Benin in West Africa, the source of a diversity of inputs into the New World. It is no coincidence that Melville Herskovits in his classic study of New World black culture, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941),⁹⁸ returned again and again to Benin. From Benin came slaves who became plantation labor, their singing patterns, the highly dramatic vodun religious system, and several artistic practices, in particular cloth appliqué techniques that became central to the Americas' quilting traditions. It is natural for Kidjo to blend a variety of black music and black music techniques, given her variegated Benin cultural background.

Her 2004 album *Oyaya* is a cross-pollination of West African musical traditions with funk/jazz plus Caribbean music. The term *oyaya* is, according to Kidjo, "joy" in Yoruba. When speaking of her work, Kidjo can barely restrain her excitement over finding this informal empire of black music that covers thousands of miles and hundreds of cultures. She samples thirteen Caribbean musical styles in the album, including salsa, calypso, and ska, and speaks with passion about using bata drums brought to the Caribbean by slaves from Nigeria. She, though, is no mere enthusiast. Part of her musical work today is researching and reviving old forms (such as Benin's ancient tradition of animal horn-blowing) and the work of slightly remembered performers, such as Henri Salvador, the French Caribbean jazz singer.⁹⁹ She has become a singer with a commitment to music scholarship, on the new frontiers of black cultural traffic, dispersing an ambitious performance style that does justice to the complicated traveling history of past and contemporary black culture.

NOTES

1. William Wells Brown, *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad* (Boston, 1855), 229. Subsequent page references are given in the text. Speaking of himself in the third person in the preface, he writes, "the education he has acquired was by his own exertions, he never having had a day's schooling in his life" (iv).
2. Brown begins *American Fugitive* with a "Memoir of the Author" (9–34), a narrative containing the major facts of his life.
3. Karen Halbersleben's *Women's Participation in the British Anti-slavery Movement: 1824–1865* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1993) confirms the spread of aboli-

tionism, the movement in which Brown was a participant. Cf. also William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1–15; Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chairs: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), for a new popular history of British abolition movement that caused the cessation of the British slave trade in 1807 and the freeing of Britain's colonies in 1838; and Sterling Lecater Bland, Jr., *African American Slave Narratives* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 11–12.

4. Audrey A. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73.

5. Johannes Fabian, *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 139. Fabian elaborates the idea on pp. 20–21.

6. Andrews, *Free Story*, 107–8. Andrews writes explicitly of the “stage” and “performative” aspects of the public presentation of slave autobiography. A detailed biography of Brown is William Edward Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

7. Important studies of blacks in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain are Paul Edwards and James Walvin, *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); and Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen, eds., *Black Writers in Britain, 1760–1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

8. As it turns out, once returned to America, Brown wrote a play, *The Escape; or, A Leap to Freedom*, in 1858 that dramatized the slave narrative genre and in which he played a part. Perhaps speaking on the abolitionist circuit heightened his theatrical understanding and ambition. Cf. Harry Elam, Jr., “The Black Performer and the Performance of Blackness: *The Escape or a Leap to Freedom* by William Wells Brown and *No Place to Be Somebody* by Charles Gordone,” in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, ed. Harry J. Elam, Jr., and David Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 288–305.

9. Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 145–46, “The Influence of Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The cover sheet of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book in England shows a tall woman, white, in flowing robes that partially wrap around three small black children. Her soft eyes are cast down on them. The drawing constitutes an iconography for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s public presentation.

10. James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930), 93. Chapters 7–11 are an excellent account of black performers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a reminder of the overlooked riches of this volume.

11. Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 51, has collected reports of several eighteenth-century plantation dance episodes and of whites in attendance. Cf. also Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 62–66; and Josephine Wright, “Early African Musicians in Britain,” in *Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History, 1780–1950*, ed. Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg (Crawley, Eng.: Rabbit Press, 1986), 14–24.

12. Spike Lee, dir., *Bamboozled*, 2000.

13. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1962), 90–98.

14. Brown's speech at the 1851 London meeting of fugitive slaves was a masterpiece, delicately shaded with emotion and poetic language, that broadly depicted the forces of enslavement (219).

15. *The Original Kings of Comedy*, dir. Spike Lee, filmed in 1998–99, and released in 2000.

16. Many studies exist on the movement of jazz and jazz overseas, especially in the Soviet Union. See especially S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and William Minor, *Unzipped Souls: A Jazz Journey through the Soviet Union* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

17. In 1769, Thomas Jefferson's Sandy, a runaway slave, was advertised as one whose "behavior is artful and knavish." Cited in Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 447–48. "A runaway lived a thespian's life" is a quote from Kennell Jackson, *America Is Me* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 100, where this phenomenon is documented. Runaways used many performance techniques: acquiring new clothes; appearing humble; passing for white if possible; and interestingly, traveling with a white friend or lover, pretending to be his or her slave. See also Freddie Parker, *Running for Freedom: Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1775–1840* (New York: Garland, 1993).

18. Christopher Valentine, *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), ii–xii, plus the introductory chapter, 1–15. Thorough analysis is illuminated by a tape of selections.

19. Bernice Reagan, *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) is the best rendering of gospel's unfolding and foreshadows possible new departures.

20. Peter Adler and Nicholas Barnard, *African Majesty: The Textile Art of the Ashanti and Ewe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 67–68.

21. Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 229.

22. Greenblatt, "Culture," 229.

23. Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 5–21.

24. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

25. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 88.

26. Doug Seroff, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers in England," in Wright, *Under the Imperial Carpet*, 42–54.

27. Often, in the late 1990s, the idea—and language—of black cultural mobility nested in contemporary art exhibits. In 1997, "Transforming the Crown" brought together African, Caribbean, and Asian artists' work to identify "the routes of national (British) culture." See Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd et al., *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain* (New York: Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute, 1997), 16–41. In 1999, the National Gallery of Canada put on "Crossings," featuring a Yinka Shonibare installation. *Parachute*, July–September, 1999, 44–45.

28. Joshua Davis, "Till Death Do Us Part," *Wired*, October 2003, 110–20.

29. R. J. Smith, "Trailer Park White Boy: Crossover Dream," *Village Voice*, November 6–12, 2002, 34–37.
30. Thelma Golden, introduction to *Freestyle* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 15.
31. Studio Museum in Harlem, *Black Romantic: The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary African-American Art* (New York, 2002), 12. One of the great figurative paintings of the 1970s by a black artist of a black subject was Barkley Hendrick's *Lawdy Mama* (1979). It endures as a classic owing to its power to communicate aesthetics at several levels.
32. Malik Gaines, "Kehinde Wiley: Pieces of a Man," *Iconic*, Artists in Residence, July 10–September 22, 2002, Studio Museum of Harlem (New York, 2002), unnumbered pages. *Passing/Posing #1* and *Easter Realness, 2002* are examples of his representations.
33. Tom Fletcher, *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business* (New York: Burdige, 1954), 29–117.
34. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 76.
35. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip-Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
36. B.G.'s hit appeared on the album *Chopper City in the Ghetto*, released in April 1999.
37. More than seventy articles in the *New York Times* over the past ten years have used "bling bling." Twenty-five references appeared between June 2002 and November 2003, illustrating the alacrity with which an elite paper was sampling hip-hop argot. A similar look at the *Washington Post* shows twenty-five articles in a year beginning in November 2002.
38. Della Summers, director, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (New York, 2003) described bling bling as the wearing of expensive items such as jewelry in a way that is easy to notice.
39. Verse 1 of "Bling Bling." The song is actually a catalog of expensive items necessary to the blinging life. It also explains bling bling in the relations between men and women.
40. Philip Weiss, "Hail Tony Blair!" *New York Observer*, August 4, 2003, 1.
41. Suzy Menkes, "Celebrating Fashion's African Themes," *New York Times*, April 6, 1997. Cf. also *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (New York: Berg, 2002).
42. Kennell Jackson, "What is Really Happening Here?: Black Hair Among African Americans and in American Culture," in *Hair in African Art and Culture*, ed. Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman (New York: Museum for African Art, 2000), 179–80.
43. Rick Ayers, *Berkeley High School Slang Dictionary* (Communication Arts & Sciences, Berkeley High School/North Atlantic Books: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2004).
44. Rick Ayers, "Bling Bling in His Grill? That's Hecka Ill," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 10, 2003, A5.
45. Max Decharme, *Straight from the Fridge, Dad: A Dictionary of Hipster Slang* (Harpending, Eng.: No Exit, 2000), 64–65. Cf. listings in Clarence Major, ed., *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 187–88.
46. "Grand Funk," *Washington Post*, September 28, 1995, A28. Clinton's remarks brought out the lexicographers among journalists, as illustrated by John Farrell, "Pres-

ident Backs Away from Remark,” *Boston Globe*, September 26, 1995, 3. Sadly, the journalists pursued “funk” in *Webster’s New World Dictionary*.

47. On December 9, 2003, Colin Powell, at a dinner celebrating the year’s Kennedy Center winners, appointed the performer James Brown to the position of “secretary of soul and foreign minister of funk.” “Powell ‘Appoints’ Soul Legend James Brown to New Diplomatic Post” (Agence France-Presse).

48. *XXL* magazine has reported that *CNN Headline News* “is getting all gully with its bad self” by using “phat turns of phrase such as ‘jimmy hat,’ ‘fly’ and ‘ill’” (December 2002, 54). An internal *Headline News* memo, captured by *New York Daily News*, urged newscasters to use hip-hop lingo in the scrolling text boxes that run during the news hour: “in an effort to be sure we are as cutting-edge as possible, please refer to this slang dictionary when looking for just the right phrase. . . . All you homeys and honeys add a new flava to your tickers.”

49. See Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (New York: Plume, 1998), 33–100; and Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998) for discussions of the dispersion of rhythm and blues and impediments in its path.

50. A decade after Pat Boone was domesticating black rhythm and blues for white consumption, Mick Jagger was studying black dance steps to augment his bad boy image, a detail reported by British singer Tom Jones, *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, December 11, 2003.

51. John A. Johnson, *American Bandstand: Dick Clark and the Making of a Rock ‘n Roll Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56–57, describes the decision to make sure that blacks and whites were not shown dancing together because it would have sunk advertising revenue.

52. Pianist and band leader Dave Peyton’s “The Musical Bunch” from the *Chicago Defender*, 1928, is presented as “A Black Journalist Criticizes Jazz,” in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 57–59. Robert W. S. Mendl, a British critic, published the first book about jazz in Great Britain, *The Appeal of Jazz* (London: P. Allan, 1927), remarking, “Jazz has secured and still retains a more widespread vogue among its contemporary listeners than any other form of music ever known” (80).

53. Nina Darnton, “Lagos Hairstyles Reflect African History (and the Afro Is a Put-on Wig),” *New York Times*, January 6, 1977, 1–3.

54. Okot p’Bitek, “Pop Music, Bishops, and Judges,” in *Africa’s Cultural Revolution* (Nairobi: Macmillan Books for Africa, 1973), 5. His worries appear to be realized, as reported by Paul Redfern, “Anglophone Youths Now Adopt a Global Culture,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), November 1, 1999.

55. Margaret Danner, “The Convert,” in *A Broadside Treasury*, ed. Gwendolyn Brooks (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971), 40–42. Cf. also her “Her Small Bells of Benin,” 39, and “Etta Moten Barnett’s Attic,” 39.

56. Langston Hughes, *Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

57. Langston Hughes, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (New York: Knopf, 1927).

58. Hughes, *Fine Clothes*, 22, 23, 30.

59. I am indebted to Arnold Rampersad, the Hughes biographer, for the information on Hughes’ reception among black critics.

60. Hughes, *Fine Clothes*, 74.
61. Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 57.
62. For some hints of the incorporation of outside elements in African cultural life, see William Fagg, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories* (London: Batchworth Press, 1959) for sculpture, and Lalage Brown, *Two Centuries of African English: A Survey and Anthology of Non-fictional English Prose by African Writers since 1769* (London: Heinemann, 1973), particularly 24–25, citing a coastal Nigerian trader in 1786 who kept his records in English.
63. A remark by Aminata Dramane Traore sums up this historical situation: “There is nothing new about cosmopolitanism in Africa.” “African Fashion: A Message,” in *The Art of African Fashion*, ed. Els van der Plas and Marlou Willemsen (The Hague: Africa World Press, 1998), 20.
64. Cf. Allison Blakley, *Blacks in the Dutch World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 78–170, 225–75; and Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).
65. Stuart Hall, “What Is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 27.
66. *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words*, ed. Thomas Brothers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 82–110, contains his writings, often detailing his musical contexts, from 1918 to 1931. An excellent view of Armstrong’s synthesis of vast musical material and its extension through his own powerful will to innovate is presented by Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 143–235.
67. Ennis Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) for an exceptional analysis of the coming together of disparate parts to make the Rastafarian community.
68. David Kerr, *Dance, Media-Entertainment, and Popular Performance in South East Africa* (Bayreuth: E. Breitingen, 1998), 31.
69. Sabine Mabardi, “Encounters of a Heterogeneous Kind: Hybridity in Cultural Theory,” in *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, ed. Rita de Grandis and Zila Bernd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 2.
70. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers’ Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 147–75.
71. Langston Hughes, “Harlem and Its Negritude: The Twenties,” Schomburg Library, New York, “Sent to AMSAC—for the African Forum, 1–18–66.”
72. Hughes, “Harlem and Its Negritude,” 2.
73. Hughes, “Harlem and Its Negritude,” 12.
74. Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) records the time before the 1840s in which African customs and cultural practices were brought to the Americas by Africans caught in the Atlantic trade in humans. Under “Festivities and Pastimes,” A. C. Saunders’s *Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal: 1441–1555* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) writes of dances (one called the *guineo*, no doubt after West Africa’s Guinea coast) and singing by blacks as well as comments on their drumming and flute playing at public festivals. Blacks also held parties of their own, one the *fiesta*

dos negros where they elected a king. All black gatherings were outlawed in Lisbon in 1559.

75. Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin'*, 42–43, presents data on the free black festivals in New England surrounding the election of a “Negro governor.” From 1740s to 1850s, these were public performances, communicating black cultural material.

76. To this add the performances of black boxers, many of them Americans, who competed in Britain to great fanfare, beginning with Bill Richmond, “The Black Terror” in 1804–18. For their profiles, see Nat Fleischer, *Black Dynamite: Story of the Negro in the Prize Ring from 1782–1938*, vol. 1 (New York: C. J. O’Brien, 1938), 21–122. All of them bore signal-sending monikers, for example “The Virginia Slave,” “The Black Wonder,” “The Liverpool Darkey.”

77. Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (Paris: Floury, 1938), 64.

78. Abiola Irele, “Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1965): 321–48, especially 330–38 on multiple renaissances. The companion essay, also pioneering, is Abiola Irele, “Negritude-Ideology and Literature,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 4 (1965): 499–526.

79. Lawrence Cohn, *Nothing but the Blues: The Music and the Musicians* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 90–91.

80. Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press; Oxford: J. Currey, 2001), 3.

81. Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 93–94.

82. Alfred Appel, Jr., *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 7–84.

83. Okwui Enwezor, ed., *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* (New York: Prestel, 2001), 3–32. Probably most evocative of 1960s Africa are the photographs from the time, pp. 180–216.

84. Two of the latest entrants in the story of Ghana’s magnetism are Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham DuBois* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Doran H. Ross, ed. *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998).

85. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Jazz Folk Here and There: A Transatlantic Conversation,” St. Clair Drake Memorial Lecture, Stanford University, May 23, 2003.

86. André Magnin, *Malick Sidibé* (New York: Scalo, 1998); Michelle Lamunière, *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, distributed by Yale University Press, 2001).

87. Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 86–119.

88. Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, 101, where Diawara discusses how the speaking of English by Malian youth was an innovation in a “Francophone country, where one acquired subjecthood through Francité—that is, thinking via French grammar and logic.” Diawara spoke English to a traveling African American musician in Junior Wells’s band and became an overnight sensation in Bamako. The youth dream then had been to “be as adept at Francite as Senghor, who spoke French better than the French.”

89. "What Are Some Landmarks in the History of Rap Music and Hip-hop Culture?" in Jackson, *America Is Me*, 382–84.
90. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," *Dance Review* 41 (fall 1997): 11–30.
91. Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power," 13.
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