“Shadows in the Magic City:
Musical Responses to Racial Violence in Birmingham, Alabama”

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Table of Contents

Introduction……………………………………………………………………..…....2

I. "Bombingham," A Southern City with a History of Racial Violence……………..6

II. Black Intellectual Discourses on Racial Violence and Trauma …………..……..16

III. John "Fess" Whatley and Sun Ra………………………………………….....31

IV. 1963 Birmingham - Fire Hoses, Police Dogs, and Four Little Girls……...….….45

V. Musical Response to the Bombing, 1963-1965………………………….……….59

VI. The Bombing's Legacy in Music, 1982-2016………...………………………..72

Conclusion……………………………………...……………….…………..89

Bibliography………………………………………...………………...………..90

Discography…………………………………………….……………...………..95

Introduction

The front page of the *New York Times* on May 4, 1963 is seared onto public memory of the Civil Rights Movement. The headline "Dogs and Hoses Repulse Negroes at Birmingham" accompanies prominently placed photographs of brutal retaliation against black demonstrators the day before in Birmingham, Alabama. The top image shows a black man on the left, staring resolutely forward as a police officer grabs his sweater. A leashed German Shepherd police dog sinks its teeth into the demonstrator's abdomen. Underneath, a second image depicts four black men and women pressed against a wall with their backs exposed as a firefighter sprays a high powered jet of water from a firehose at them from three or four feet away.[1] The *New York Times* cover highlighted the intense levels of violence that black citizens in Birmingham experienced during 1963. In June of that same year, Martin Luther King Jr. published his powerful "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and its use in Civil Rights Movement education has kept Birmingham as a center of attention in memory of the Movement. In September of 1963, the tragic bombing at Sixteenth Street Street Baptist Church remains a painful reminder of the consequences of racial prejudice. The year of 1963 left its mark on Birmingham and the city's legacy.

However, the city's history of racial tensions and violence is not limited to the year of 1963. That historical moment, immortalized in media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and in King's "Letter," was a culmination of almost a century of intense segregation laws and racial violence since the city's founding in 1871. Birmingham grew during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to a booming steel industry that lined the pockets of many white citizens,

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[1] Foster Hailey, "Dogs and Hoses Repulse Negroes at Birmingham," *New York Times*, May 4, 1963, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1963/05/04/issue.html.

whose enclaved communities made the city one of the "most segregated in America" according to Dr. King.[2] Birmingham, founded during Reconstruction, was never the home of enslaved black people. The black citizens within its limits were always free, a fact which white people perceived as a threat. Strict laws of control and segregation only accumulated and grew stricter as time passed. Birmingham became a common site of Ku Klux Klan activity during economic unrest in the 1930s, and dynamite explosions were so common in the city that it earned the nickname "Bombingham" after World War II. This broader context of violence in Birmingham makes 1963 not an anomaly but a boiling over of ninety-two years of racial tension in the city.

Besides Birmingham's infamy for the events of 1963, another one of its contributions to broader American society and culture was through its black music scene. Throughout the twentieth century, a number of successful black musicians came from Birmingham, such as Nat King Cole, Erskine Hawkings, Sun Ra, and more. Many of these musicians learned their skills in the strictly segregated public city school systems under band directors like John "Fess" Whatley. Placing the early lives of these musicians in Birmingham in the city's context as a hotbed of racial tensions and violence allows a fuller picture of their careers, obstacles, and relationships to their hometown.

Early historical studies of jazz and black musicians were in the business of legitimization of the genre and of those who played it. *Jazzmen*, a 1939 edited collection by Charles Smith and Frederick Ramsey, Jr. was a biographical collection on jazz musicians. Jazz histories like André Hodeir's 1956 book *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* and Joachim-Ernst Berendt's *The Jazz Book* periodized the evolution of jazz and compared its progress to Western classical tradition but with

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[2] Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," August 1963, http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter_birmingham_jail.pdf.

decade-long periods instead of centuries. These biographies and jazz histories did the work of codifying a canon of jazz and legitimizing the genre within white classical standards. By the early 1990s, jazz studies took a social and cultural turn with scholars like Ronald Radano, Burton Peretti, Scott DeVeaux, William Kenny, Samuel Floyd, and David Stowe. These writers often put jazz and other black genres into the context of slavery and Jim Crow. In the 2007 book *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa*, Ingrid Monson follows in this New Musicology strain of cultural and social histories of jazz. She departs from this tradition with her methodology, which utilizes a Foucauldian constellation of parallel discourses that highlight common discursive themes between the black popular music world and Civil Rights Movement activism.[3]

From its founding to the Civil Rights Movement era, Birmingham's history of white violence against black citizens has made the city an example of the extremes of racial tension in the south. The white on black violence that punctuates Birmingham's history serves as a microcosm of larger narratives of racial violence and oppression from the Middle Passage to the Civil Rights Movement. The varied discourses among black intellectuals and activists in response to that violence diverge into two broader camps: activists like Martin Luther King Jr. who advocated for peaceful yet swift integration into white society and black separatist activists like Malcolm X who rejected the fight for integration into white systems of violence and

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[3] Frederic Ramsey Jr. and Charles Smith, eds, *Jazzmen* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961); André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (London, UK: Secker & Warburg, 1956); Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *The Jazz Book: from New Orleans to Rock and Free Jazz* (Melbourne, Australia: Lansdowne, 1976); Ronald Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," Black American Literature Forum 25, no. 3 (1991): 525-60; W. Howland Kenny, *Chicago Jazz: a Cultural History, 1904-1930* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993); Samuel A. Flloyd, *The Power of Black Music Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997); David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

oppression. These opposing philosophies are visible in Birmingham, Alabama, especially in the lives of two prominent Birmingham-born black musicians: band director John "Fess" Whatley and the jazz musician Sun Ra. This thesis will argue that the Birmingham music scene in the decades before the Civil Rights Movement serves as an illuminating window into broader African American discourses on violence inflicted by white American society. In a methodological sense, this research is similar to Monson's conception of parallel discourses. By zooming in on one of the most volatile microcosms of racial violence and the reactions of Birmingham jazz musicians, this research presents a parallel discourse with a heightened intensity. One final element of Monson's method that I find particularly useful in my research is her conception of music itself as a discourse. My analysis of popular song as a means of condemnation of the violence in Birmingham in 1963 highlights the influential discourse of popular song about racial violence and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

Chapter 1: "Bombingham," a Southern City with a History of Racial Violence

Birmingham, Alabama lies in Jones Valley, a region in central Alabama bounded by Red Mountain, a red hematite ore deposit, on its south side. No Native American groups ever settled in the valley, but Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw nations used the location as a gathering place for inter-nation games and meetings. The first white settlers came to Jones Valley around 1815. The lack of natural water sources and an abundance of red, iron-filled soil meant that Jones Valley was never an agricultural region. Deposits of coal lay north and west of the site that became Birmingham, and the valley itself held deposits of limestone, dolomite, and clay. The naturally occurring elements in Jones Valley made it a center of the steel industry instead of agriculture. Therefore, in contrast to much of the southern part of Alabama, Jones Valley did not have any cotton plantations or slave labor. Throughout the 19th century, business venturists like the Elyton Land Group invested in the steel industry in Birmingham, which was officially founded in 1871. Alabama's railroad infrastructure grew up around the city, and it eventually became the hub that connected Tennessee Rail systems with Alabama lines in 1872. The city earned the nicknames "Pittsburg of the South" and "Magic City" for its booming economy when much of the south was in economic shambles during Reconstruction.[4]

After the city's founding in 1871, the city government exercised strict controls on its black population. Black people in Jones Valley migrated there for work as free people, and white people perceived this as a threat. Historian Carl Harris highlights four main types of laws that the Birmingham city government implemented to assuage white fear of this perceived threat. The

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[4] John Witherspoon Du Bose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (Birmingham, AL: Teeple & Smith Publishers, 1887), 54.

first is regulation of saloons, especially stirred from a Protestant fear of the "menace of the Negro saloon."[5] The second type was vagrancy laws, targeted at black people, that criminalized wandering about in town. The third was convict labor sanctioned by the city, county, and state which allowed for slave-like exploitation of black people caught committing minor or imaginary infractions. Finally, the county fee system exorbitantly charged black citizens on petty charges, mostly for gambling.[6] At the root of these strict regulations and rules was popular white belief in an inherent black criminality. Harris highlights a quote from the editor of the *Birmingham News* in 1906, "Anyone visiting a Southern city or town must be impressed at witnessing the large number of loafing negroes… They can all get work, but they don't want to work. The result is that they sooner or later get into mischief or commit crimes."[7] This perception of black people in Birmingham led to stricter regulations controlling their behavior, which led to more legal action against black citizens who broke those rules (or who police said broke those rules), which led to increased incarceration and convict labor among black populations, especially compared to white Birmingham residents.

Often, white citizens did not leave matters of legal punishment for perceived infractions to the government. Throughout the south from Reconstruction and into the Civil Rights era, lynchings of black people punctuated the southern landscape. According to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, there were 4,084 racially motivated lynchings in twelve southern states from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 until 1950.[8] Three hundred and sixty-one

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[5] Carl V. Harris, "Reforms in Government Control of Negroes in Birmingham, Alabama, 1890-1920," The Journal of Southern History 38, no. 4 (1972): 569.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Harris, "Reforms in Government Control of Negroes," 567.
[8] Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror - Lynchings by County," https://eji.org/files/lynching-in-america-second-edition-supplement-by-county.pdf.

of these lynchings took place in Alabama during this period. Of these, the highest number per county occurred in Jefferson County, where Birmingham is located. An incomplete record of lynchings from 1871-1920, compiled in 1921, features descriptions of the crimes the victim supposedly committed. In this early record, many lynching locations are missing, but fourteen confirmed instances from 1889 to 1913 occurred within Birmingham or its immediate surrounding areas. Charges against these individuals include nine charges of murder, two charges of rape, one "attack on woman," and one charge of passing counterfeit money. The final lynching victim was Wilson Gardner in February of 1913, described as "colored and half-witted," who was murdered for "frightening women and children" near Birmingham.[9] Historian Melanie S. Morrison described the infamous 1931 lynching of Willie Peterson in her book *Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham*. A horrific attack on three young white women in Birmingham in August of 1931 left only one survivor, 18-year-old Nell Williams. She said that a black man had committed the attack, and the same night, white mobs terrorized Birmingham's black residents, burning their businesses and arresting dozens of black men. Willie Peterson, as Morrison finds, was incorrectly identified as the attacker and executed, despite protests by the NAACP and the Communist Party in Birmingham at the time.[10] In the period from Birmingham's founding through the 1920s, black citizens in the city faced oppressive legal control and the threat of lynchings by their white neighbors for crimes they did not necessarily commit.

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[9] Robert Russa Moton, "Record of lynchings in Alabama from 1871 to 1920, compiled for the Alabama Department of Archives and History by the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute," February 21, 1921, http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/voices/id/2516.

[10] Melanie Morrison, *Murder on Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

In the 1930s, new forces arose that intensified and multiplied racially motivated violence in Birmingham. The onset of the Great Depression affected Birmingham significantly. The Roosevelt administration in 1933 said that Birmingham was "the worst hit town in the country."[11] In this moment of financial precarity, as across other parts of the United States, labor unions and communist organizations began organizing to advocate for increased labor protections. After a series of labor strikes in 1934, communists in Birmingham became the targets for intense antiradical and antilabor violence..[12] Perpetrators of antiradical violence appeared as urban vigilantes, attempting to preserve the status quo. Often, according to Robert Ingalls, these attackers took it upon themselves to enact the law with the support of organized groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the White Legion, a racist terrorist organization in Birmingham. Often vigilantes would target anyone who posed a threat to the established order. These included "Catholics, Jews, Negroes, immigrants, laboring men and labor leaders, political radicals, advocates of civil liberties, and nonconformists in general."[13]

Often, these minorities were grouped together in the minds of conservative whites, especially communists and black people. In a 1934 article in *Crisis* magazine, Louise Thompson described her experiences as "the leading colored woman in the Communist movement in this country."[14] Thompson wrote that, for the White Legion, the communist question was always linked with the black question. "Being a Communist in the South is synonymous with being a fighter for the rights of the Negro people, of being a 'n*gger lover,' of trying to bring white and

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[11]George R. Leighton, "Birmingham, Alabama: The City of Perpetual Promise," *Harper's Magazine,* CLXXV (August 1937), 239 quoted in Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s," *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 4 (1981): 522.
[12] Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham," 523.
[13] Ibid., 538-539.
[14] Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 288.

Negro workers and poor farmers together—of fighting against lynhcing, of challenging the southern ruling class traditional manner of treating Negroes."[15] As seen with later rhetoric during the Civil Rights Movement, anti-civil rights protestors often associated integration with a communist plot to encourage race mixing in the United States.

In 1937, antiradical violence perpetrated by vigilantes in Birmingham came to a head when four men attacked Joseph Gelders, a Jewish political activist who advocated for labor rights and for equality for black people. Historian Robert Ingalls summarized the attack:

> While returning home from an ILD meeting Gelders was assaulted on a deserted Birmingham street about 11:30 P.M. on September 23, 1936. Hit from behind with a club, Gelders was forced into the back seat of a waiting car by three men. As the car sped away, two of the kidnappers stomped their heels into Gelders' s face, chest, and stomach. They also amused themselves by reading from literature related to the Scottsboro case that Gelders was carrying. Laughing and cursing, they called Gelders a "damned red" and a "n*gger lover." The pair continued to beat their helpless victim until he feigned unconsciousness. After a trip of several hours during which a fourth man joined the kidnappers, the automobile finally stopped on a lonely country road about sixty miles south of Birmingham.[16]

According to Ingalls, public response to the Gelders flogging, along with the brokering of a union contract between the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, caused antiradical violence to end abruptly in March of 1937.

New Deal programs, along with the onset of World War II, lifted Birmingham out of its economic downturn, and the steel industry flourished. With renewed economic prosperity in the city, designated black housing zones started to fill up and spill towards white residential zones, sparking intense, violent retaliation. Many scholars writing on the Ku Klux Klan tend to describe the postwar years as a dormant period in Klan activity. However, historian Glenn Feldman argues

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[15] Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response*, 288.
[16] Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham," 526.

that Klan-sponsored violence was thriving in Alabama during this period.[17] In reality, between 1947 and 1965, there were nearly fifty bombings in the city, 47 of which went unsolved.[18] Birmingham's high number of fire bombings earned it the nickname of "Bombingham." The string of bombings began with a shortage of black housing in Birmingham. Some of the city's black residents moved to the fringes of white neighborhoods in an effort to solve this problem. Their white neighbors responded by bombing their homes. Historian Glenn Eskew argued that this drastic reaction to black people moving to the edges of white neighborhoods actually transformed black protest in Birmingham from a desire for separate but equal institutions into a full fledged fight for integration.[19]

This violence was wrapped up in zoning law disagreements in the city. Much of the disputed lots were in North Smithfield, located in the Graymont subdivision of Birmingham. This neighborhood became known as "Dynamite Hill" because of the frequency of bombings in the edges of the black residential section. A white realtor named William Coleman bought up lots on the edges of white neighborhoods anticipating zoning changes that would designate those lots for black housing. City officials confirmed these rezoning plans to Coleman. In 1946, he sold the lot at 120 Eleventh Court North to Sam Matthews, a black man who wanted to build a house on the lot. Despite the promises of city officials, white protesters from the Graymont and College Hill Civic Association prevented the rezoning from actually taking place. White members of the community angrily confronted Coleman about selling land to African Americans, but he insisted he would continue to do so.

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[17] Glenn Feldman, "Soft Opposition: Elite Acquiescence and Klan-Sponsored Terrorism in Alabama, 1946-1950," *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 3 (1997): 753-77, www.jstor.org/stable/2639886.
[18] Glenn T. Eskew, "'Bombingham': Black Protest in Postwar Birmingham, Alabama," *The Historian* 59, no. 2 (1997): 371, www.jstor.org/stable/24449974.
[19] Ibid.

Matthews, meanwhile, believing he owned land zoned for black residents, requested and received a building permit. After building his home, he applied for an occupancy permit that was promptly rejected because of his race. After a legal appeal by civil rights lawyer Arthur Shores, Matthews eventually gained permission to move in by July of 1947. Immediately, Matthews received threats from his soon to be neighbors—they painted a skull and crossbones on his door. Matthews began seeking to rent or sell the house out to white families, but many refused because the lot was so close to the black area of the neighborhood. On August 18th, 1947, around 10:45pm, six sticks of dynamite detonated in the living room of the empty house, destroying Matthews' investment.[20] This act is just one example among dozens of racial bombings in the postwar Birmingham era. In the vast majority of these bombings, police never caught the perpetrators, probably for lack of trying.

The most infamous incident of KKK violence encroaching in the musical scene in Birmingham occured on April 10, 1956, in the middle of the Montgomery bus boycott. That evening Nat King Cole, a famous jazz singer and outspoken supporter of civil rights activism, performed at the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium with the British Ted Heath band for an all-white audience. Cole was performing the third song of the evening, “Little Girl,” when white men from the audience jumped onto the stage. One of the men, Kenneth Adams, pulled Cole to the floor while two other assailants, brothers E.R. and Willis Vison continued the attack. Police officers pulled the attackers back and rescued Cole, who suffered a back injury in the attack. After giving himself a few minutes to recover, Cole returned to the stage where he told the

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[20] Glenn Eskew, *But For Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*, United States: University of North Carolina Press, 53-56.

audience: “I came here to entertain you. I thought that was what you wanted. I was born here. Those folks have hurt my back. I cannot continue, because I have to go to a doctor.”[21]

The three attackers, according to an article in the *Guardian* on April 12th, two days later, were charged with conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor. The leader, Jesse Mabry, only paid a fine for disorderly conduct.[22] These men did not intend to act alone, however. That same article describes a premeditated plan of attack, conceived four days before, by men from Birmingham and surrounding areas. One hundred and fifty men were supposed to participate in the attack, but the mob did not show up.[23] This coordinated effort to publicly humiliate, intimidate, and physically harm Nat King Cole fizzled out into a smaller affair; yet, a question remains that has baffled historians. Why Nat King Cole? Cole was born in Alabama and regularly toured the state with no disturbances. He was well liked and respected by black and white audiences alike. Historian Brian Weld tackles this question in his article “Civil Rights and Rock and Roll: Revisiting the Nat King Cole Attack of 1956.” Weld points out that Adams and the Vinson brothers were all members of the North Alabama Citizens’ Council. The organization was led by Asa Carter, who was a racist Klan member and speech writer for segregationist governor George Wallace.

Carter and the NACC were fierce opponents to rock and roll music, a genre typically associated with black musical styles and therefore, in the eyes of white southerners, immoral and a negative influence on the youth of Alabama. Carter said that rock and roll destroyed “the entire

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[21] Brian Ward, "Civil Rights and Rock and Roll: Revisiting the Nat King Cole Attack of 1956," OAH Magazine of History 24, no. 2 (2010): 21, www.jstor.org/stable/25701405.

[22] A year later, in September of 1957, Mabry brutally castrated Edward Aaron, a black man, as a test of his commitment to the KKK. The failure of police to properly punish these white attackers for their crimes enabled their continued terrorization of black people in Birmingham; Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response*, 410-411.

[23] “Nat 'King' Cole attacked on stage,” *The Guardian*, April 12, 1956, https://www.theguardian.com/world /2018/apr/12/nat-king-cole-attacked-on-stage-archive-1956.

moral structure of man, Christianity, of spirituality in holy marriage...all the white man has built through his devotion to God: all this was snatched away as the white girls and boys were turned to the level of animal."[24] This statement captures many important elements of racial rhetoric among white Americans in the south at this time: biblical foundations for white supremacy, fear of race mixing, and conceptions of black people as less than human. These ideas, pervasive in white massive resistance to civil rights, were particularly recurrent in rhetoric about black music.

In the aftermath of the attack, Nat King Cole received backlash in the *New York Amsterdam News*, a black-owned newspaper in Harlem. An editorial writer wrote, "We won't say he got what he deserved, because we simply can't condone violence. But we will say King Cole had no business in that auditorium in the first place."[25] Black critics of Cole condemned his performance in a segregated theater, during which he willingly participated in Birmingham's intense segregation policies, that were already deemed illegal by the Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board*. Cole's music placed him in a special position to be able to refuse that humiliation. "King Cole has something to sell—his musical talents and his voice. The white people of Birmingham wanted to buy his talents. But they offered to buy them on their terms—terms which are humiliating to King Cole and the race to which he belongs."[26] This condemnation of Cole highlights the fact that black discourses about participation in segregated society were not monolithic.

On Mother's day in 1961, the experience of Freedom Riders in Birmingham highlighted the prejudice of Birmingham police and the police commissioner, Bull Conner. The Freedom Riders were a group of activists who were testing their new constitutional right to ride

[24] Ward, "Civil Rights and Rock and Roll," 22.
[25] "A King is Uncrowned," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 21, 1956, 1, 8.
[26] Ibid.

non-segregated buses in every state, as ruled by *Boynton v. Virginia*. As they traveled across the south from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, white mobs met them at many stops. In Anniston, Alabama, the mob violently beat the activists and threw a firebomb on board. A second bus did not stop in Anniston but drove on to Birmingham, about sixty miles west. When they arrived, a mob awaited them. Police commissioner Bull Conner was aware of the situation but waited to deploy police to the scene, allowing the mob to ruthlessly attack the Freedom Riders.[27]

Throughout Birmingham's history, black citizens in Birmingham faced brutal violence at the hands of police and white citizens alike. Birmingham's laws and courts actively targeted blacks and offered them little to no protection from the wrath of white mobs. As time passed and black people began to assert their equality, whether pushing residential zoning in the 1950s or riding integrated buses in 1961, black citizens faced unparalleled violence and brutality. Birmingham, as an intensified microcosm of broader black reckoning with the realities of racial violence, will become a site to analyze broader black intellectual discourses in response to this violence and segregation in chapter 3. As seen with the case of Nat King Cole in Birmingham in 1956, black musicians faced violence not only for the color of their skin but also because of their associations with black music, which whites saw as corrupting. After a look at two camps of black intellectual discourse on integration in the next chapter, the third chapter will project those discourses onto the lives and beliefs of two Birmingham black jazz musicians: band director John "Fess" Whatley and Sun Ra.

[27] Equal Justice Initiative, "Freedom Riders Attacked in Anniston, Alabama," https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/may/14; Terry Gross, "Get on the Bus: The Freedom Riders of 1961," National Public Radio, January 12, 2006, https://www.npr.org/2006/01/12/5149667/get-on-the-bus-the-freedom-riders-of-1961.

Chapter 2: Black Intellectual Discourses on Racial Violence and Trauma

Birmingham's history of racial violence presents only a small glimpse into deeper horrors of violence that whites perpetrated against black people going back to the Middle Passage. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade ripped about ten million Africans from their homes and subjected them to brutal conditions on the Middle Passage, fifteen to twenty percent of whom did not survive the journey.[28] From 1619 until the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves of 1807, around 388,000 enslaved Africans came to the United States, a small number compared to the Caribbean and Brazil.[29] The labor of these people and their subsequent generations was the backbone of the American south's agricultural economy. On cotton plantations, enslaved black people faced brutal labor, harsh punishments, denial of sexual autonomy, and family separation. In 1863, in the midst of the American Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation made slavery illegal in the Union. At the end of the war in 1865, southern slavery ended and a period of Reconstruction began.

With the end of slavery came an influx of government control and restrictions. A new brutal system of sharecropping arose in the south with little gains and little job security for black workers, who often continued to work the land of their old masters. Reconstruction, an effort to rebuild the south by the federal government, failed, leaving newly freed black people unprotected and vulnerable to legal discrimination and violence. Legal segregation, crystallized in the 1896 court case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, ushered in the era of Jim Crow in the United States

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[28] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Middle Passage," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, January 29, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Middle-Passage-slave-trade.
[29] "The Abolition of the Slave Trade," New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, http://abolition.nypl.org/essays/us_slave_trade/.

south. Lynchings across the south were prolific during this period as white southerners perpetrated attacks on black people in the name of so-called justice.

In the midst of widespread violence in a country whose federal and local governments actively discriminated against black Americans, black intellectuals did not produce a unified, monolithic discourse about how black people should respond to these injustices and interact with white society. Instead, two main camps arose, specifically in the generation of black Americans born into slavery who came of age as free people in this period of systematic disenfranchisement. One of the most notable intellectuals in this tradition was Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave turned prominent abolitionist. Another black intellectual at that time was Martin Delany, born a free man in Virginia and widely considered the first black nationalist and Pan-Africanist. Delany passed away in 1885, and with Douglass's death in 1895, a power vacuum opened. The next two men to step into these roles as figureheads in opposing traditions were W.E.B. Du Bois, an integrationist, and Booker T. Washington, whose focus on black education and self sufficiency did not push for integration. Thomas Aiello, in his book presenting the heated debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, calls these discourses a "conversation about how to best pull the souls of black folk up from slavery."[30] This quote, inspired by the title of Du Bois's 1903 book, captures the goal of the divergent discourses that developed in these post-Civil War years and went on to influence discursive camps in the Civil Rights Movement, as seen through the philosophies of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. These camps could be generally categorized into proponents of integration, who focused on achieving equal rights into white

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[30] Thomas Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk: W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and the Debate That Shaped the Course of Civil Rights,* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, xiii.

society immediately, and black separatists, who focused on black education, self-help for black communities, and did not see value in integrating into white, oppressive societies quickly.

In his book on MLK and Malcom X, James Cone lays out this dichotomy in terms of W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness," brought about by the condition of being an "African *in* America."[31] "Here, then, is the dilemma," Du Bois wrote. "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?"[32] Cone writes that the primary difference between integrationist and black separatist traditions is their answer to that question. Integrationists say that yes, it is possible to be both, and that their platform is supported by the language of the nation's founding documents and a sense of religious brotherhood of man. Black separatists, on the other hand, rejected the American side of that double consciousness. "They have contended that [centuries] of slavery, followed by legal segregation, social degredation, political disfranchisement, and economic exploitation means that blacks will never be recognized as human beings in white society. America isn't for blacks; blacks can't be for America."[33]

Before delving into these two camps, it is important to note the reductionist nature of this categorization. As Aiello points out in his introduction, painting the history of black intellectual discourse as a succession of pairs of black male thinkers is a problematic oversimplification. Not only does it give the impression of some constant two-party system, but it erases other thinkers outside of these six men. These include other thinkers from Washington's Tuskegee Institute, allies of Du Bois like William Monroe Trotter, Ida B. Wells and her anti-lynching work, and black separatist Marcus Garvey, among others. Additionally, no black intellectuals fit purely into one camp or the other. While these two camps I have outlined above are not the only voices in

[31] James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: a Dream or a Nightmare?* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 3.
[32] W.E.B Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," quoted in Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 3.
[33] Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 4.

black intellectual discourses, their categorization is useful for my eventual goal, which is to place Birmingham jazz figures John "Fess" Whatley and Sun Ra within these opposing yet interwoven intellectual traditions.

The first camp of urgent integrationists finds its intellectual roots in the work of Frederick Douglass. Douglass was born into slavery on a Maryland plantation in 1818 to a white father and black mother.[34] At the age of eight, Douglass's slave owner sent him to Baltimore, where he worked as a house servant in Hugh Auld's household. It was illegal at the time to teach slaves how to read and write, but Auld's wife taught Douglass those skills. After returning to his slave owner's plantation to work as a field laborer, Douglass eventually escaped in 1838. He made it to New York City then to New Bedford, Massachusetts. In 1841, Douglass spoke at an antislavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts, where his oratory skills brought him attention. After that speech, he became one of the leading spokespeople for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He went on to champion not only racial equality for black people but for other races, and he was a supporter of gender equality.[35]

Douglass's own views fit within an urgent integrationist tradition in black intellectual discourse. One example of this is in Douglass's own abolitionist newspaper, the *North Star* in Rochester, New York. The paper, published from 1847 until 1851, published anti-slavery materials and advocated for equality, not just for black people but for women as well. Its slogan was "Right is of no Sex, Truth is of no Color, God is the Father of us all, and all we are Brethren."[36] This expression of Christian unity among blacks and whites and men and women

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[34] Douglass did not have any information about his own birthday, he later chose February 14th as his birthday.
[35] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Frederick Douglass," Encyclopædia Britannica, March 19, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Douglass.
[36] *The North Star* paper, Library of Congress archive, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/tr22a.html#obj46.

would become an inherent argument within the integrationist camp, especially evident in the later work of Martin Luther King, Jr. Douglass sometimes faced criticism for his willingness to converse with slave owners. He answered those criticisms in a 1855 lecture: "I would unite with anybody to do right; and with nobody to do wrong." Douglass believed that moral right and Christian unity trumped the divides between black and white populations. After the emancipation of enslaved black people in 1863 and the end of the Civil War in 1865, Douglass became an outspoken advocate for equal civil rights for freed black people.

With Douglass's death in 1895, W.E.B. Du Bois took up the integrationist mantle. Du Bois was born free in Massachusetts in 1868. He was descended from enslaved people in New York on his mother's side and the West Indies on his father's side. He wrote in an 1891 letter to Rutherford B. Hayes that he was "one half or more Negro, and the rest French and Dutch."[37] Du Bois graduated from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee 1888. After, he attended Harvard and graduated *cum laude* in 1890. He continued in Harvard's Graduate School and studied social science.[38] Du Bois was a staunch integrationist, as evident in comments during later teaching career at Atlanta University and in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folks*. His platform focused on black education as a means to participate in white society, both as an equal American citizen and as a participant in Christian brotherhood. The following are excerpts from *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> "By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men."[39]
>
> "This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture."[40]

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[37] Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk*, 22.
[38] Ibid.
[39] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*: *Essays and Sketches*, Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co., Chapter 3, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm.
[40] Ibid, Chapter 1.

> "The ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, [is] not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather [is] in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic."[41]

These passages highlight Du Bois's desire to not only achieve equal rights with whites, but to assimilate into society as "coworkers" and equal embodiments of the American ideal without respect to skin color. Du Bois also writes in *Souls of Black Folk* about the religious objections to segregation that even white citizens knew to be true:

> "Deeply religious and intensely democratic as are the mass of the whites, they feel acutely the false position in which the Negro problems place them. Such an essentially honest-hearted and generous people cannot cite the caste-levelling precepts of Christianity, or believe in equality of opportunity for all men, without coming to feel more and more with each generation that the present drawing of the color-line is a flat contradiction to their beliefs and professions."[42]

For Du Bois, Christian brotherhood among the races was an undeniable and inevitable truth. Du Bois believed that integration into white society was the next step after freedom for black Americans.

W.E.B. Du Bois's passion for integration seen in 1903 waned by 1934 in his speech "A Negro Nation Within a Nation," given at his resignation from the NAACP. Thirty years later, Du Bois's optimism for speedy integration and faith in whites to recognize Christian brotherhood had not been realized. At this point, Du Bois began to sound more like a black separatist:

> For a nation with this start in culture and efficiency to sit down and await the salvation of a white God is idiotic. With the use of their political power, their power as consumers, and their brainpower, added to that chance of personal appeal which proximity and neighborhood always give to human to human beings, Negroes can develop in the United States an economic nation within a nation, able to work through inner cooperation to found its own institutions, to educate its genius, and at the same time, without mob

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[41] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter 1.
[42] Ibid., Chapter 9.

> violence or extremes of race hatred, to keep in helpful touch and cooperate with the mass of the nation.[43]

Du Bois faded from influence until the end of his life in 1963, when the fight for civil equality that he had given up on was well underway. Du Bois's pessimism about the stagnation of integration is one instance in which the lines between integrationist and black separatist camps blur. He spent the last part of his life in Accra, Ghana, where he passed away in 1963. The end of Du Bois's life, with his "nation within a nation" and return to the ancestral homeland of people of the African diaspora, complicates his integrationist legacy. The integrationist strain of the black intellectual tradition was obviously not lost with Du Bois, however. The inheritor of that tradition found himself quite unexpectedly in the center of the first major nonviolent protest for bus integration in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Martin Luther King, Sr., was the pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. The young King went to seminary at Boston University to become a pastor, like his father and his father's father before him. In his studies, King read the work of many theologians, including Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Niebuhr's work confronted King's previous moral idealism and encouraged King to face the reality of the permeation of sin into every aspect of society, which caused injustice. One aspect of Tillich's theological system that became foundational to King's beliefs was a condemnation of separation as the highest level of moral depravity. Separation from God—and for God's children to be separated from one another—was sinful. King integrated this premises into his own thinking and steadfastly believed that white and black Christians could not perform

[43] W.E.B. Du Bois, "A Negro Nation Within a Nation," 1934 speech, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1934-w-e-b-du-bois-negro-nation-within-nation/.

God's will so long as legal and social segregation was intact. In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King wrote of Tillich's influence on his own theology and philosophy:

> Segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness?[44]

In June of 1963 in Detroit, in an address at a freedom rally in Cobo Hall, King clearly outlined this theological approach to the problem of segregation and the specific situation in Birmingham, Alabama at that time.

> For Birmingham tells us something in glaring terms. It says first that the Negro is no longer willing to accept racial segregation in any of its dimensions. For we have come to see that segregation is not only sociologically untenable, it is not only politically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Segregation is a cancer in the body politic, which must be removed before our democratic health can be realized. Segregation is wrong because it is nothing but a new form of slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity. Segregation is wrong because it is a system of adultery perpetuated by an illicit intercourse between injustice and immorality. And in Birmingham, Alabama, and all over the South and all over the nation, we are simply saying that we will no longer sell our birthright of freedom for a mess of segregated pottage. In a real sense, we are through with segregation now, henceforth, and forevermore.[45]

King's theological views on segregation echo Frederick Douglass's slogan for his *North Star* newspaper: "Right is of no Sex, Truth is of no Color, God is the Father of us all, and all we are Brethren." For Douglass, Christian unity pre-emancipation was integral to his abolitionist arguments. For Du Bois, Christian brotherhood among blacks and whites was an inevitable truth that was necessary for post-emancipation gains in equality. For King, Christian unity and a deep understanding of segregation as sinful and against the nature of God was integral to the fight for

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[44] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail;" For more background on King's theological influences during his studies see chapter 3 of Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63,* Simon & Schuster, 1988.
[45] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall, June 23, 1963, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/address-freedom-rally-cobo-hall.

equality during the Civil Rights Movement. This tradition of black liberation theology reframes Christianity as deliverance from social injustices, especially for black Christians in the American South during the Civil Rights Movement and in South Africa during apartheid. Authors like James Cone and Dwight Hopkins wrote scholarly reflections on black liberation theology in the mid to late twentieth century. However, the tradition of black liberation theology is evident much earlier in the theology of slave spirituals. These songs emphasized Jesus's role as savior through suffering, the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt in the Exodus, and promised liberation in Christ's second coming.[46]

Besides its theological similarities, King's integrationist approach also shared Douglass's and Du Bois's sense of urgency. In his 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, King condemned the white moderates in Birmingham who admonished black activists to wait:

> Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."[47]

Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplify one thread of discourse in black intellectual thought on the approach to injustice that black Americans faced. Each pushed for full integration with a focus on Christian brotherhood and a need for urgency.

The second camp in the black intellectual discourses from the end of slavery through the Civil Rights Movement was one of black separatism. Its intellectual roots go back to Martin Delany, a contemporary of Frederick Douglass. This discourse was inherited by Booker T.

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[46] James Cone, *Risks of Faith: the Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998*, Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 13-27; For more literature on black liberation theology see also Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
[47] King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

Washington, the head at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial institute. Finally, this black separatist model finds its home in Malcom X and the Nation of Islam during the Civil Rights Movement.

Martin Delany (1812- 1885) was a figure largely forgotten in black intellectual discourse until his resurrection in the 1960s and 70s as the "father of black nationalism and the epitome of proud blackness."[48] In his own time, Delany worked as an advocate for emigration of American black people back to Africa, but he also worked for integration in the United States alongside Frederick Douglass. His black separatist inclinations were strong for much of his life outside of the years immediately following emancipation and during Reconstruction. The focus here will be on the elements of his philosophy that went on to inspire a lineage of black separatist discourse, but it is important to acknowledge the nuance in his position.

Delany was born free in 1812 to a free mother and enslaved father in Virginia. His mother brought him to Pittsburgh, where she could teach him to read without breaking the law. He grew up surrounded by black intellectuals and began participating in black conventions in the 1830s. He worked as a doctor during this time treating a cholera epidemic in Pittsburgh and in 1850 was admitted to Harvard Medical School.[49] Delany's newspaper *The Mystery* advocated for abolition and women's rights in the 1840s. The slogan of the paper, "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" gives some insight into Delany's later philosophies.[50] Delany saw a tradition of knowledge going back to Africa, and throughout his life, Delany advocated for the creation of free black states in Africa where black Americans could go to live. This Pan-Africanist ideology, advocating for people of the African diaspora to return to their native

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[48] Robert S. Levine, ed, *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 5.
[49] Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 1; Delany was soon kicked out of Harvard because of protests from other students about the color of his skin.
[50] *The Mystery*, April 16, 1845, https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn95063156/issues/first_pages/.

land, became a hallmark of the black separatist movement. Delany eventually shut down the *Mystery* newspaper to work with Douglass on his *North Star* in 1847. The two men, however, had deeply contradicting views in the early 1850s. Robert Levine writes,

> Delany's emigrationism conflicted sharply with Douglass's integrationist vision of black elevation in the United States. In response to Douglass's national black convention of 1853, Delany in 1854 organized and chaired a national black emigrationist convention, where he delivered "The Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," the most important statement on black emigration published before the Civil War.

Delany's first attempt to found a free colony for black Americans in Africa failed, and Delany himself lived in Canada for a time before the Civil War, where he could practice medicine.

In this early part of his career, he saw no value in living among whites under conditions of inequality: "I am not in favor of caste, nor separation of the brotherhood of mankind, and would willingly live among white men as Black, if I had equal possession and enjoyment of privileges, but I shall never be reconciled living among them subservient to their will."[51] He did not see a path towards equality for blacks because of the stubbornness of whites. He said in 1854, "The rights of no oppressed people have ever yet been obtained by a voluntary act of justice on the part of the oppressors."[52]

After emancipation, Delany's views changed, and he argued against African-American emigration to Africa and against a Pan-Africanist ideology, saying that it "worked to reinforce white racists' notions that blacks were not an essential part of the nation."[53] This is another example of the flexible lines between the two intellectual camps discussed here. One aspect of

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[51] Martin Delany quoted in Alphonso Pinkney, *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 24.
[52] Martin Delany, "Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1854," 59, https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/314.
[53] Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 460.

Delany's platform remained unchanged however was his advocacy for practical black education to improve black citizens' standing in society. He argued that a Classical education, while beneficial, is not necessary for black people to be "useful in life."[54] Instead, he advocated for a practical, trade-school-like approach to education. "Let us have an education that shall practically develop our thinking faculties and manhood; and then, and only then, shall we be able to vie with our oppressors, go where we may."[55]

This advocacy for practical black education was taken up by Booker T. Washington. Washington was born in 1856 as a slave but moved to West Virginia with his family after emancipation. His family was poor, and he worked hard manual labor until 1872. In that year, he accepted admission to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. In 1881, Washington became the head of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, a new school for black Americans in Alabama. Washington's approach to education mirrored Delany's with its rejection of classical education and emphasis on practical skill: "Therefore seek education—first, last, and all the time. But do not fall into the notion that education means ability to read and understand Homer and Dante. Do not let Professor Du Bois's picture of Socrates and Francis of Assisi deceive you."[56]

Washington did not share Delany's belief in black emigration to Africa publicly and has not traditionally been considered a Pan-Africanist. However, recent scholarship by authors like Andrew Zimmerman and Tyrene Wright has highlighted Washington's involvement in fighting

[54] Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 212.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk*, 140.

injustices in the Congo and South Africa and in securing nationhood for Liberia, which was the epitome of the Pan-Africanist dream.[57]

While Washington's Pan-Africanist tendencies were not well-known at the time, he did publicly share a belief in black pride and black separatism. "Decline to look at yourselves through your white neighbor's eyes; look at yourselves through your own eyes. Do not take the white man as a standard; make your own standards. Be not imitators."[58] Through practical education, Washington believed that black people in the United States would bolster their own condition outside of the standards of white society. Washington felt no urgency to push towards equality until black Americans could earn it naturally through working hard and bettering themselves. "Do not push yourself forward; do not allow would-be leaders to push you forward. Do not be ambitious for social equality, or industrial equality, or political equality, or any kind of equality. Be ambitious to be men, and trust that in time the manhood will make for itself a place; it always does."[59]

The most famous black separatist figure during the Civil Rights era was Malcolm X. Malcolm was born into poverty in 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His father, J. Early Little, and his mother, M. Louise Norton, were black nationalists and organized for Marcus Garvey, a black nationalist and separatist.[60] After his father's sudden death, Malcolm's mother struggled to feed her eight children during the Great Depression. After his mother experienced a mental breakdown, Malcolm and his siblings became wards of the state, and Malcolm stayed in foster

[57] Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012; Tyrene Wright, *Booker T. Washington and Africa: the Making of a Pan-Africanist*, New York: Global Africa Press, 2015.
[58] Aiello, *Battle for the Souls of Black Folk*, 139.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 41-42.

care.[61] James Cone writes that Malcolm's anti-white and separatist tendencies began to be evident in his elementary school days. At the age of fifteen, Malcolm dropped out of school and moved to Boston to live with his half-sister.[62] He soon moved to New York City where he ended up in prison. While in prison, Malcolm joined the Nation of Islam, a religious and political organization founded in 1930 in Detroit by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad.

Malcolm X became a spokesperson for the Nation of Islam after his parole in 1952, and his anti-integrationist platform bolstered a black separatist movement that clashed with King's nonviolent, Christian-centric integrationism. For Malcolm X, black people were better off without the systems of white oppression that had mistreated them for so long. In an interview in 1964, he said that he opposed integration becaue it would result in the "disintegration of both races" and that "the Negro is better off by himself, so he can develop his character and his culture in accord with his own nature."[63] Malcolm X's ideology was consistent with Pan-Africanism, but his immediate concern was alleviating current conditions in the ghettos of urban northern cities in the United States:

> The only real answer is for our people to go back to Africa. But that will come much later. Right now, we need immediate relief from suffering and oppression… We need programs by which the Negro can clean up the Negro community materially and spiritually. We need jobs. We need to own and operate our own businesses. Instead of "sitting in" we should buy in. If the Government does not let us go back to Africa, then we should have a black nation here.[64]

Another element of his beliefs that placed him within a black intellectual tradition of Martin Delany and Booker T. Washington was his emphasis on education. "Education is an important

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[61] Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 44.
[62] Ibid., 46-47.
[63] Interview with Malcolm X, "Now It's a Negro Drive for Segregation," *U.S. World News and Report*, March 30, 1964, https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2008/05/16/now-its-a-negro-drive-for-segregation.
[64] Ibid.

element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and our people rediscover their identity and thereby increase their self respect. Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs only to the people who prepare for it today."[65]

These two threads of integrationism and separatism are woven through black intellectual discourse from before the Civil War through the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. Black thinkers dealt with the questions "Am I an American or a Negro? Can I be both?" The traditions outlined here were most common and most highly debated answers to those questions. In the next chapter, we can see how these arguments presented themselves in the daily lives of black musicians in one of the most segregated cities in America.

[65] Malcolm X Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, June 28, 1964, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity/.

Chapter 3: John "Fess" Whatley and Sun Ra

These previously outlined camps in black intellectual discourse on racial violence, trauma, and the question of integration manifest themselves in the biographies of two Birmingham-born musicians: public school band director John "Fess" Whatley and his student, the renowned jazz musician Sun Ra. The biographies of these musicians illuminate a microcosm of these larger discursive reactions to racial violence. Birmingham, a concentrated place of violence and intense segregation, serves as a heightened example of the context in which these discourses took place. Highlighting musicians also intensifies these discourses because of the special place of black music in the fearful imaginations of white opposers to integration. Something about black music and its performers stirred violence and hate from white people in Birmingham, as seen in the Nat King Cole attack of 1956. By highlighting the experiences and subsequent reactions of black musicians, this research provides not only an example of practical manifestations of broader black discourses, but a heightened and intensified case of their existence. Whatley is an example of an integrationist approach to the issues the black community in Birmingham faced, in the intellectual tradition of thinkers like Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. In his black separatism, Sun Ra's philosophy is more similar to thinkers like Martin Delany, Booker T. Washington, and Malcom X.

John "Fess" Whatley was born in 1895 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. At the age of four, according to his student J.L. Lowe, Whatley was playing under his house when he came across a metal spring that made musical sounds when he stretched it out. He pulled the spring tight across an empty wooden cigar box and made a makeshift guitar. When his father was not home, young

Whatley would borrow his father's hunting horn, which he later called his "first trumpet."[66] After attending the Ringling Brothers Circus when they visited Tuscaloosa, Whatley was inspired to make his own band. With other children in his neighborhood, Whatley would carry his father's hunting horn and lead a make-shift parade through the streets. Later, Whatley moved to Birmingham to begin school at the Carrie A. Tuggle Institute, where he joined the band on the cornet and quickly became the band leader.

Whatley's later passion for music education should be understood through the context of his own path as a musician. The Carrie A. Tuggle Institute, which provided free education for underprivileged African American children, was founded by Carrie Tuggle in 1903. Tuggle, a former slave herself, was a passionate advocate for education for black children in Birmingham. The school came into being when in her years as a social worker, Tuggle pled with a judge to allow two juvenile delinquents to stay at her home for rehabilitation rather than go to prison. She changed the lives of many young black students, including notable figures like A.G. Gaston. Her encouragement of her students is evident in this excerpt from A.G. Gaston's book *Green Power*:

> Next [Tuggle] called John [Whatley] and predicted "He's going to be a great musician." John stood grinning at the audience with his cornet stuck under his arm. He had a lip and he could blow. He was going to be a great musician. Then he threw his cornet to his mouth and blasted out the first bars of "The Saints Come Marching In." We all picked it up, and I admired the flash of my cymbals under the hot spotlight. The muscles in John's neck stood out as he hit a high one. It was fun. It was always good, with Granny Tuggle telling them that you would be great and the blare of the band.[67]

Tuggle's influence on the lives of her students was evident in their later careers. Tuggle was adept at garnering the financial support of white philanthropists in the city. By her own

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[66] J.L. Lowe, "The Fact that Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before," Whatley Scrapbook, Birmingham Public Library Archive Collection.
[67] A.G. Gaston, *Green Power*, excerpt printed in Whatley Scrapbook, Birmingham Public Library Archive Collection.

fundraising efforts and support from black and white Birmingham citizens, Tuggle created a curriculum that integrated academic and industrial education components, including training in nursing, music, and character education.[68] Tuggle's adept ability to gain support for her program was beneficial after a fire in 1919 that destroyed the school. Black and white citizens alike worked together to raise the funds to rebuild the school. Tuggle's educational approach shifted over the years, and eventually she adopted a purely industrial curriculum. Her philosophy so closely mirrored Booker T. Washington's that the *Birmingham News* described her as the "female Booker T. Washington" when she died.[69]

The educational role model of Carrie Tuggle may have been Whatley's inspiration for his own career path later in life. In many ways, Whatley's music education philosophy mirrored Tuggle's passion and impact on the black community in Birmingham. It gave young black students the skills and tools to be successful in a society prejudiced against them by using music to become financially stable and participate, although in a segregated way, in white functions and society. Some of his students eventually used those musical talents to leave the south. However, the vast majority of his students remained in the south and reinvested in black communities and public education.[70] Before placing Whatley in a broader discourse of black integration and participation in white society, it is useful to detail his tangible contributions to his students' musical careers, his advocacy for them in Birmingham's white society, and his legacy as a music educator in America's most segregated city.

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[68] Tondra L. Loder-Jackson, *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*, New York City, NY: State Univ Of New York Press, 28-30.
[69] Loder-Jackson, 30.
[70] Various newspaper clippings, Whatley Scrapbook, Birmingham Public Library Archive Collection.

Whatley became the band director at Industrial High School in Birmingham in 1917. A.G. Gaston wrote, “When Whatley started at Industrial High (now Parker) there was not one Band instrument there. Whatley carried the cornet with him and started the first music students with his instrument.”[71] Whatley incessantly supported his students, often securing grants to buy them instruments.[72] As a teacher, Whatley often encountered students with innate talents. Whatley’s goal was to refine those talents and turn his students into professional musicians. His slogan was “I did not make you come to the Bandroom, but damn if I am not going to make you learn.”[73] One of his most successful students, trumpeter Johnny Grimes, learned how to read the “score as is” under Whatley’s instruction.[74] During his time in Birmingham, Grimes was the “undisputed champion of Birmingham trumpet players.”[75] After a stint in the navy, Grimes moved to New York City. He played with the Erskine Hawkins band before the band broke up. After, he played regularly with the Reuben Phillips Apollo Theater Band.[76] He was a prolific recording artist with trumpet credits on tracks like James Brown’s 1964 *Out of Sight* sessions.

“Ninety percent of all of ‘Fess’ Whatley’s students received such thorough training until they were able to play any class of music,” A.G. Gaston wrote. “The first group of those trained in the first band was able, after finishing High School, to enter college on part scholarships. After finishing college, they went to the ‘big city’ to join the ‘named bands’ or ‘orchestras.’ Not one of

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[71] Gaston, *Green Power* excerpt.
[72] Val Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life: Black Music and the Free Jazz Revolution, 1957-1977*, London: Serpents Tail, 104.
[73] J.L. Lowe, Whatley Scrapbook, Birmingham Public Library Archives Collection.
[74] Ibid.
[75] “Tuxedo Junction: The Erskine Hawkins Story,” program, May 9-10, 1971, found in Whatley Scrapbook, Birmingham Public Library Archives Collection; The year for this program was deduced by a promotion for the Erskine Hawkins Reunion album, which the program says “goes on sale this week.” The reunion album was the last Hawkins recorded.
[76] Ibid.

them failed to pass the test when given one."[77] Whatley trained a generation of black Birmingham jazz musicians who made their marks on the national jazz scene in the United States. Among other notable students were Murray Harper, a saxophonist who accompanied blues singer Bessie Smith and Odell Williams, a clarinetist and saxophonist who played with Cecil Scott's band in New York City. Hampton "Hamp" St. Paul Reese III was a student of Whatley and a skilled arranger and composer who worked closely with B.B. King. Alton A. Davenport was the bandmaster at Tuskegee Institute.[78]

One of Whatley's most commercially successful students was Erskine Hawkins. Whatley formed his own bands of students that he hired out for gig opportunities in Birmingham. Hawkins played trumpet with Whatley's band. After graduation, Hawkins and other students of Whatley's attended Alabama State University. With Whatley's guidance, the group formed the Bama State Collegians. Eventually, they became Erskine Hawkins and his Orchestra. These Whatley-trained musicians included Wilbur "Dud" Bascomb, Marcellus Green, and Sammy Lowe on trumpet; Paul Bascomb, Haywood Henry, and Jimmie Mitchell on sax; Avery Parrish on piano; and Robert Range and Edward Sims on trombone.

While he was not the most famous of Whatley's students, trumpeter and arranger Sammy Lowe was a significant force in Hawkins's band. Lowe was the first trumpeter for the Erskine Hawkins Band and also served as the band's arranger. Lowe's story is one of the easiest of these musicians to trace because of his unpublished autobiography, *A Man From Tuxedo Junction (From Jazz to Swing to Rock to Soul): Diary of a Black Musician.* Lowe's account of his early

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[77] Gaston, *Green Power*.
[78] J.L. Lowe, Whatley Scrapbook.

years in Birmingham gives particular insight into the obstacles these young black musicians faced under the pedagogy of John "Fess" Whatley.

Sammy Lowe describes his life at home on the other side of the train tracks in Birmingham in a black neighborhood. He had a happy childhood in a musical family. One of the first instances the reader sees on how segregation influenced Lowe was on November 11, 1927, when Lowe was only nine years old. That day, Birmingham threw an Armistice Day parade and invited school bands from all over the city to participate.

> We joined the parade near the city park, in front of what is now the renowned 16th Street Baptist Church. As was the custom in the South at that time, the colored schools brought up the rear. We looked begrudgingly at the white bands with their bright-colored uniforms and shiny instruments as they filed by to start the parade; however, [my classmate] James Harris said aloud, "That's all right: white folks got everything, but we gonna outplay 'em today!"[79]

Even at such a young age, Lowe and his black musician friends sensed the injustice, not only of segregation, but of the wealth inequality between black and white schools in Birmingham. This inequality also manifested itself in the perception of black musicians by their white patrons.

Lowe recounts one story in his biography of carnivals that came to town with "merry-go rounds, ferris, wheels, and prize-winning games," and often sideshows of "Negro entertainers."[80] Two of his classmates, James Bascomb and James Harris, picked up jobs as trumpeters in these carnivals in Birmingham. After white carnival-goers had tired of games where they threw small balls at a black man's face poking out of a hole in a canvas, they would drift over to a minstrel show, where Bascomb and Harris played while black girls danced for the white audience. These

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[79] Sammy Lowe, *A Man From Tuxedo Junction (From Jazz to Swing to Rock to Soul): Diary of a Black Musician*, Birmingham Public Library Archive Collection, 20-21.

[80] Ibid., 24.

instances of black entertainment for whites show the humiliating context of another story a few pages later in Lowe's biography:

> Back in Birmingham, we played for what we thought was a rich white family party… What makes this job stand out in my memory was an incident that happened near closing. "You colored people sure have rhythm. Which one of you is going to dance for us?" asked the lady whom we were playing for. [The other players] as one pointed to me. I couldn't dance, and they knew it: neither one of us could; but they could always think faster than I. Embarrassed, I blurted out, "I have to have a partner." All of a sudden I heard, "I'll dance with you." It was the lady's young daughter of about 10. There was a prolonged silence, broken by only the colored maid's gasp. The young girl stood smiling, unaware of the no-no she had committed. Then the lady quickly changed the subject.[81]

Despite the young musicians' talents, white patrons saw them as shallow entertainers that would dance on a whim. This was all fun and games until the white daughter offered to participate. White patrons welcomed black musicians into their homes as second-class citizens and entertainers. Black musicians, despite their talents and skills, were viewed in much the same way as the black carnival entertainer who whites liked to throw balls at for a prize.

Whatley's longevity and influence in Birmingham made him a force for good on behalf of his students. In some ways, however, the criticisms that Nat King Cole faced for his performance in a segregated theater in Birmingham might also be fairly applied to Whatley's approach to shaping his students' careers. One poster, featuring a photograph of nine black students in tuxedos and holding their instruments, advertises the services of "Whatley's Saxo-Soxiety Orchestra of Industrial High School." The poster boasts that the ensemble is "a real jazz orchestra—but not that 'ear splitting,' 'nerve racking' kind" and calls them a "neat appearing group of men." "Music for all occasions," it advertises, "May we have the pleasure of playing your next affair?"[82] Whatley advertised his students' services in a way that separated

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[81] Lowe, *A Man from Tuxedo Junction*, 27-28.
[82] Poster, pictured in Burgin Mathews, "Jazz Demons!," https://burginmathews.com/tag/book-of-ancestors/.

them from common white perceptions of black music. In making his black band of highschoolers more palatable to white audiences, Whatley opened doors for them to integrate into white society—but only as second-class citizens, as Sammy Lowe recounted in his biography. This is not to begrudge the financial freedoms and mobility that Whatley gave his students through musical training. Instead, by pointing out Whatley's priority of getting his black players into white spaces, one can see that his life and influence in Birmingham point to an integrationist tradition of black intellectual discourse.

One well-known student of John "Fess" Whatley's has been conspicuously absent from this discussion so far. This student is also neglected in the gathered materials on Whatley's students in the archive at Birmingham Public Library. Later known as Sun Ra, Herman Poole Blount was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 22, 1914. The difficulties in pinning down the details of Sun Ra's life in Birmingham are more widespread than his absence in the Whatley collections at the Birmingham Public Library. Throughout his life, he misled interviewers about his connections with Birmingham because he rejected the aspects of his identity that tied him there. In childhood, Sun Ra named himself Sonny, rejecting the name his family gave to him. He rejected Birmingham as his home town, believing instead that he was from the planet Saturn, transplanted into Alabama into a family that was not his.[83]

On his eleventh "arrival day," as he called his birthday, Sonny's mother, Ida Blount, gave him a piano. He showed natural talent, playing by ear, and also quickly learned how to read music. He began composing and writing poems. Music was a venue for his artistic expression through the intense alienation he felt growing up in such a violent and segregated city. As a

[83] John Szwed, *Space is the Place*: *the Lives and Times of Sun Ra,* Boston: Da Capo Press, 4-11.

teenager in the late 1920s and early 30s, Blount encountered music at black venues in Birmingham like Tuxedo Junction that hosted shows by travelling artists like Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington, and Bessie Smith.[84] In 1929, Blount began attending Industrial High School, where John "Fess" Whatley taught. Sonny was a shy but talented piano player, and Whatley soon had him playing for the school band. Soon, Sonny became the only student player in other bands of Whatley's in Birmingham.[85] After he graduated from high school in 1932, Sonny attended the Alabama State Agricultural and Mechanical Institute for Negroes in Huntsville, Alabama. There he received classical piano lessons with Professor Lula Hopkins Randall and played piano in a band.[86] After a year in Huntsville, Blount dropped out of school and returned to Birmingham. He formed a band that did not perform, but only rehearsed, playing for the "sake of beauty and enlightenment."[87] During World War II, Blount was a conscientious objector to the draft and served time in jail before returning to his music.

In 1946, Sun Ra moved from Birmingham to Chicago where he worked as an arranger and pianist. In 1952, he began going by the name "Le Sony'r Ra." In Chicago, he formed his first group with saxophonist John Gilmore, bassist Richard Evans, and drummer Robert Barry. This was the beginning of the Arkestra, a group that evolved over the years, rotating players and performing under slight variations of its name. The big-band format of Sun Ra's ensemble was traditional in the 50s. Even then, Sun Ra's music was about the cosmos. Their first LP, *Jazz by Sun Ra*, was released in 1957, the same year the USSR launched Sputnik. Enthralled with themes of space and Egyptology since he was a child, it is not surprising that even in his early career,

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[84] Szwed, *Space is the Place*, 11-14.
[85] Ibid., 21-22.
[86] Ibid., 26-28.
[87] Ibid., 32.

Sun Ra's performance persona included elements of space, magic, and Egyptology. His group, "Sun Ra and the Arkestra" had their first New York City performance in January 1962 under the name "The Outer Spacemen."

Sun Ra obfuscated his origins after he moved away from Birmingham. Early biographers did not know that he grew up in the city, and he often told interviewers that he did not know where he grew up.

> For almost fifty years he evaded questions, forgot details, left false trails, and talked in allegories and parables. Just as artists and composers destroy their early works to protect the present moment, Sun Ra destroyed his past, and recast himself in a series of roles in a drama he spent his life creating. And in the end he almost succeeded.[88]

His insistence on his birthplace as Saturn left no room for the southern city of Birmingham in his mythological origins. Sun Ra's artistic relationship with Birmingham was a detached idealization and memorialization of his hometown with no inclination towards tangible activism. In 1978 and '79, decades into his professional career, Sun Ra performed several songs about the city. "Birmingham Breakdown" (1978) "Magic City Blue" (1979), and "West End of Magic City" (1979). Attention to his musical relationship with Birmingham and his 1965 album *The Magic City* will be given later, but here it is important to notice that music was really Sun Ra's only connection to his hometown for the majority of his life.

Sun Ra's rejection of his origins went much deeper than his hometown and family. In *More Brilliant than the Sun*, Kodwo Eshun argues that Sun Ra embraced a posthuman mythscience that rejects concepts of humanity altogether.[89] Because white American civilization stripped Africans of their humanity on the Middle Passage, to Sun Ra, western concepts of humanity were worthless. Eshun quotes Sun Ra to highlight his views about humanity denied to

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[88] Szwed, *Space is the Place*, 5.
[89] Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London, UK: Quartet Books, 154-163

black Americans: “You don’t exist, in this society. If you did, your people wouldn’t be seeking equal rights.”[90] But Sun Ra was not looking to restore humanity to black Americans. Instead, Sun Ra advocated for a posthuman state, spurred by technology, that was a state of transcendence of the limited scope of Enlightenment, western humanism. This idea is clearly visible in his 1974 film *Space is the Place*, in which he seeks to create a new colony for black people on a far away planet. This was not only an alternate future for black people, but a hearkening back to ancient Egypt, where Africans were empire builders and unaffected by white systems of slavery and colonization. Sun Ra biographer Paul Youngquist wrote, “Egypt offered a ready-made alternative to an ostensibly enlightened culture of the West responsible for chattel slavery, racism, Jim Crow, and segregation.”[91] Sun Ra’s aesthetic and philosophical connections to Egypt and his visit to Cairo in 1971 show that his cosmic philosophies really have a Pan-Africanist angle to them. The black future is one that looks like an ancient African past, and his mission in *Space is the Place* is to bring black people there through his spaceship. Sun Ra’s artistic expression of an alternate future for black people by means of technology and space places him in the tradition of Afrofuturism. The term itself did not appear in scholarship until the early 1990s, but Sun Ra was not alone in his artistic and musical creation of alternate destinies, untinged by white violence, even as far back as his 1957 *Jazz by Sun Ra* album.

Sun Ra exhibited an extreme black separatism in response to violence and suffering inflicted by white American society. His posthuman mythscience and cosmic ideas of the future captured a total rejection of white systems of thought and importantly, systems of violence and exploitation. While Eshun’s description of Sun Ra’s philosophy is quite cosmic, I believe

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[90] Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, 158.
[91] Paul Youngquist, *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 43.

Eshun's work is useful in illuminating Sun Ra's relationship with his hometown. On a smaller scale, this post-human mentality caused Sun Ra to reject Birmingham. For him, even a perfect Birmingham, free of violence and segregation, could not be inhabitable. Inconsistent application of Enlightenment era ideas of individuality and freedom imperfected western conceptions of the human. So too did Birmingham's legacy of violence and intense legal segregation imperfect the city for Sun Ra.

Sun Ra's relationship with Birmingham and his subsequent rejection of it mirror the black separatist discourses of activists like Martin Delany, Booker T. Washington, and Malcolm X. Perhaps the clearest message Sun Ra left to this effect is his poem, published originally in 1968, titled "The Visitation."

The Visitation

In the early days of my visitation,
Black hands tended me and cared for me…
Black minds, hearts and souls loved me…
And I love them because of this.
In the early days of my visitation,
Black hands tended me and cared for me;
I can't forget these things.
For black hearts, minds and souls love me—
And even today the overtones from the fire of that love are still burning.
In the early days of my visitation
White rules and laws segregated me…
They helped to make me what I am today
And what I am, I am.
Yes, what I am, I am because of this
And because of this
My image of paradise is chromatic-black.
And chromatic-black again.
Those who segregate did not segregate in vain
For I am,
And I am what I am.[92]

[92] Sun Ra, *The Immeasurable Equation: The Collected Poetry and Prose,* Germany: Waitawhile, 414.

This poem refuses Birmingham as Sun Ra's birthplace. Rather, it is the location he resided in during the beginning of his visitation to earth from Saturn. But even in this cosmic metaphor, Sun Ra's experiences in Birmingham, where "white rules and laws segregated [him]," inspired his later philosophy about integration. "My image of paradise is chromatic-black… Those who segregate did not segregate in vain." For Sun Ra, an ideal world would be one where black people lived alone, away from white society and structures of power.

Sun Ra's relationship with the Christian religion might have been another indication of his differences from an integrationist approach like Martin Luther King Jr. 's. From an early age, he rejected gospel music and Southern Baptist religious traditions. He "detested the palliative effects of religion and the way it led to the resigned acceptance of the status quo by the people around him."[93] In his later philosophy then, there was no drive towards integration as a manifestation of Christian brotherhood, like King saw.

In some ways, Sun Ra saw himself as an educator. If we remember the following Malcolm X quote, we can see how Sun Ra's music fits into the black separatist tradition's views on education. "Education is an important element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and our people rediscover their identity and thereby increase their self respect. Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs only to the people who prepare for it today."[94] We should also remember Delany's slogan from the *Mystery* newspaper: "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Sun Ra's Afrofuturist music was an echo of these ideas: that black identity and tradition can be found in Africa and that

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[93] Wilmer, *As Serious as your Life*, 103.
[94] Malcolm X Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, June 28, 1964.

recognition of that legacy, fused with aspirations for the future, space travel, and technology, had the power to liberate black people from oppression.

The intense climate in Birmingham in the decades before the Civil Rights Movement bred different responses among its black artistic community. John Fess Whatley, in contrast to Sun Ra, exhibits a willingness to remain within white constructed systems even as a second class citizen. As young musicians came through his band room, Whatley gave them the tools they needed to become financially secure and socially mobile in white society. Meanwhile, Sun Ra renounced Birmingham altogether and used his music to advocate for a cosmological black separatism with an emphasis on drawing an educational tradition, like Delany wrote, from Egypt and Africa.

Chapter 4: 1963 Birmingham - Fire Hoses, Police Dogs, and Four Little Girls

The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional. That moment was the tipping point for the Civil Rights Movement, but it was also a catalyst for an intensification of white violence against black citizens in the United States south. In Birmingham, this white resistance culminated in 1963 in the midst of political unrest in the city as Civil Rights Movement organizers fought to upend the city's Jim Crow segregation laws, some of the strictest in the nation. This chapter will outline the major events in 1963 Birmingham, highlighting their particularly violent nature in light of previous discussions of racial violence in the city from its founding. The chapter will also set up the next section, which will discuss the role of musicians in creating a musical discourse about violence in the wake of the events in Birmingham during this year.

On January 14, 1963, Alabama inaugurated its new governor, George C. Wallace. He gave an infamous inaugural address which became known as the "Segregation Now, Segregation Forever" speech. This speech, penned by KKK member Asa Carter, provides a profound example of the rhetoric that many Alabamians embraced going into 1963 and that inflamed resistance to the Civil Rights Movement. Wallace ran for governor in 1958 as a segregationist but condemned his opponent John Patterson for fully embracing the endorsement of the Ku Klux Klan. Because of this, Wallace had the support of the NAACP in the 1958 election but lost in a landslide to Patterson. After this crushing defeat, Wallace became a more outspoken supporter of racial segregation and critic of civil rights movement activism and federal involvement in the

fight for equal rights in the south. Wallace's ideological shifts in favor of political gain would become a hallmark of his political career.

In the 1962 Democratic gubernatorial primary, Wallace won a run-off against Ryan DeGraffenried by emphasizing his own willingness to deny a federal Civil Rights Commision access to voting records. With this strong position against federal authority, Wallace gained the support of intense pro-segregationists like Birmingham's police commissioner Bull Conner. DeGraffenried, who was critical of Wallace's stance against the federal government, could not gain the popular support he needed to beat Wallace in the run-off. DeGraffenried, interestingly, did win more urban counties like Jefferson County, where Birmingham is located. In the general election, Wallace won with the largest number of votes ever cast for an Alabama governor's race up to that point.[95]

Having won his race on a platform of aggressive resistance to integration, Wallace continued to embrace racist rhetoric. One of the most infamous examples is his inaugural address in 1963. Wallace's rejection of federal authority is evident throughout the speech, especially in his references to the Civil War and the Confederacy. He quotes Robert E. Lee to emphasize his duties to the citizens of Alabama to uphold "honesty and economy in our State government so that no man shall have a part of his livelihood cheated and no child shall have a bit of his future stolen away."[96] In the most infamous moment of this speech, Wallace embraces ideological and

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[95] "Alabama Governors: George G. Wallace," Alabama Department of Archives and History, February 7, 2014, https://archives.alabama.gov/govs_list/g_wallac.html; Matthew Downs, "Summer 1962: The Election of George C. Wallace," *Alabama Heritage,* published by the University of Alabama and Alabama Department of Archives and History, https://www.alabamaheritage.com/civil-rights-movement/summer-1962-the-election-of-george-c-wallace.
[96] George C. Wallace, "Inaugural Address (1963), The 'Segregation Now, Segregation Forever' Speech," https://web.utk.edu/~mfitzge1/docs/374/wallace_seg63.pdf.

historical ties to the Confederacy and draws parallels between the Civil War and white Alabamians' contemporary struggle against mandates of the federal government:

> Today I have stood, where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people. It is very appropriate then that from this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland, that today we sound the drum for freedom as have our generations of forebears before us done, time and time again through history. Let us rise to the call of freedomloving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever.[97]

This speech provides a striking picture of the power and influence white segregationist rhetoric had in Alabama in 1963 and shows important context for the escalation of violence in Birmingham.

Another important conceptual framing around the turbulent events of 1963 Birmingham lies in the tense, divisive local political scene. A movement had been put forth to change Birmingham from its city government structure with a board of commissioners to a mayor and city-council form.[98] The president of the Commission, Arthur Hanes attempted to halt an upcoming mayoral election on March 5, submitting an injunction petition on February 15. His movement failed on February 20, and a mayor election took place on March 5 between former state Lieutenant Governor Albert Boutwell and Birmingham's current Commissioner of Public Safety, Theophilius Euguene "Bull Connor." The race was too close, and a run-off election was scheduled for April 2. Before that run-off occurred, a bombing occurred on March 24 less than a mile from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that destroyed a black family's home and damaged buildings within a two block radius. While this bombing was not racially motivated according to

[97] Wallace, "Inaugural Address (1963), The 'Segregation Now, Segregation Forever' Speech."
[98] Eskew, *But for Birmingham,* 180; Barnett Wright, "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama: A timeline of events," *AL.com News*, January 14, 2019, https://www.al.com/spotnews/2013/01/1963_in_birmingham_alabama_a_t.html.

witnesses, it contributed to the chaos in Birmingham.[99] On April 2, the run-off election between Boutwell and Connor ended with Boutwell's resounding victory.

On April 3, the day after the mayoral election, civil rights organizers began their plan to tear down Birmingham's systems of segregation. The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, led by president Fred Shuttlesworth, was joined by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, under the guidance of Martin Luther King, Jr. This plan, dubbed Project C for confrontation, benefitted from the precarious political situation in Birmingham. The group planned sit-ins, boycotts of segregated businesses, mass marches, and Freedom Rides as a method of nonviolent protest against Birmingham's strict segregation rules.[100] The focus on boycotting Birmingham businesses and the "withdrawal of the black dollar" targeted white merchants who would then pressure the city government.[101] These protests continued from April 3 through 6; on the sixth, Shuttlesworth led a march toward city hall from the A.G. Gaston Motel. During this time, hundreds of black protesters were arrested. On April 7, which was Palm Sunday, Reverends A.D. King, Nelson Smith, and John Porter led a march from St. Paul Methodist Church, and Birmingham police disbanded the march with the use of police dogs. On April 10, activists attempted sit-ins, but lunch counters were closed. On April 11 Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders of Project C received a court ordered injunction against "boycotting, trespassing, picketing, sit-ins, kneel-ins, wade-ins, and inciting or encouraging such acts."[102]

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[99] Jeremy Gray, "Explosion heard across Birmingham destroyed black residence, injured 1 person (March 24, 1963)," *AL.com* News, reposted March 24, 2013, https://www.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2013/03/explosion_heard_across_birming.html.
[100] Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 210.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Wright, "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama."

The next day was April 12, Good Friday. On this day, Fred Shuttlesworth, Ralph David Abernathy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. marched through Birmingham in defiance of the injunction. Birmingham police arrested them. King stayed in jail until Sunday, April 14, which was Easter Sunday. During that time, he penned his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," condemning white moderates in the city for their apathy. The day King was released, black citizens in Birmingham attended white churches. Many of the white congregations turned them away. A group of about fifteen hundred activists marched to city hall from the Thurgood A.M.E. Church, and the police arrested more than two hundred people. The marchers sang the spiritual "We Shall Overcome" as they marched.[103]

On April 17, transfer of power from the old City Commissioners to the new mayor-council government was supposed to take place. Three commissioners refused to give up power, one of whom was Bull Connor. From April 18 through 22, the sit-ins and arrests continue. On the 22nd, Judge J. Edgar Bowron heard the case of the stand-off in Birmingham's city government, and on April 23, he ruled in favor of Boutwell and the new mayor-council city government. From April 24 to May 1, demonstrations in the city continue. On May 1, King and the others arrested on April 12 receive sentences for five days in jail and $50 fines.

The month of May brought an increase in police brutality against black protestors in Birmingham. On May 2, the infamous Children's March occurred. At mass meetings and non-violent trainings by the SCLC, children in Birmingham had been motivated to participate in the fight for their freedom. At the Children's March, thousands of children left the steps of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in groups, spreading throughout the city to protest. Police met

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[103] Staff Writer, "Negro Protest March Directed at Churches," *United Press International*, April 14, 1963, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1963/04/14/Negro-protest-march-directed-at-churches/3409521345858/.

them in the streets and arrested hundreds. The next day, and the day after, children continued to march in an attempt to pack the jails. As the marches went on, Police Commissioner Bull Connor used violent tactics against them and adult protestors who had joined. He unleashed police dogs on protestors. He utilized the Birmingham Fire Department to spray protestors with high-powered water hoses.[104] These are the photos that made it to the cover of the *New York Times* and shocked the world. May 5 through 8 were the final days of Project C in Birmingham. These final days included more marches and demonstrations and arrests, and Reverend Shuttlesworth was hospitalized for injuries after being sprayed by one of the fire department's hoses on the steps of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

On May 8, Project C leaders called for an end to demonstrations, and on May 10, an agreement was reached between demonstrators and the white business community. Project C was successful in its goals of integration of Birmingham businesses. However, racially motivated violence was not over. On May 11, the A.G. Gaston motel where the King family was staying was bombed, along with A.D. King's home. On May 12, President John F. Kennedy ordered troops to Birmingham to restore order. On May 20, the Birmingham Board of Education ordered the expulsion of 1,081 black students arrested during the marches; two days later, a federal judge reversed that decision.[105] On May 23, it seemed as if order was restored. The Alabama Supreme Court backed the change to mayor-council form of city government in Birmingham, and Bloutwell was officially in charge of the city. That same day, more than a thousand black students returned to class.

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[104] Eskew, *But for Birmingham,* 259-298.
[105] Wright, "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama."

Soon, Alabama became embroiled in conflicts over school integration. On June 11, 1963, tensions between local and federal government came to a head in Alabama. With *Brown vs Board*, school integration became mandatory under federal law. At the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, attempted to register for classes. Governor Wallace, who had promised "segregation now, segregation forever" only six months before, saw this as the perfect opportunity for a symbolic gesture to show his resistance to the federal government's supposed overstep into local affairs—he planned to stand in the schoolhouse door to block the black students' path. Previously, on June 5, the district court in the Northern District of Alabama had entered an order intended to prevent Wallace from "blocking or interfering with the entry of certain qualified Negro students into the campuses of the University of Alabama."[106] Wallace did not back down in his threat to block the students.

On June 11, President Kennedy authorized Executive Order 11111, titled "Providing Assistance for the Removal of Obstructions of Justice and Suppression of Unlawful Combinations Within the State of Alabama." The order, issued the same day as Wallace's stand in the schoolhouse door, authorized the Secretary of Defense to utilize the National Guard in Alabama. Kennedy, with this order, "command[ed] the Governor of the State of Alabama and all other persons engaged or who may engage in unlawful obstructions of justice, assemblies, combinations, conspiracies or domestic violence in that State to cease and desist therefrom."[107]

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[106] Dean Rusk (Secretary of State), "Proclamation 3542: Unlawful Obstructions of Justice and Combinations in the State of Alabama," https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-77/pdf/STATUTE-77-Pg1011.pdf

[107] John F, Kennedy, "Executive Order 11111, Providing Assistance for the Removal of Obstructions of Justice and Suppression of Unlawful Combinations Within the State of Alabama," June 11, 1963, accessed via the American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11111-providing-assistance-for-the-removal-obstructions-justice-and

Wallace did not heed this warning, and on June 11, he stood in the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama and gave a speech arguing for state sovereignty:

> I stand here today, as Governor of this sovereign State, and refuse to willingly submit to illegal usurpation of power by the Central Government. I claim today for all the people of the State of Alabama those rights reserved to them under the Constitution of the United States. Among those powers so reserved and claimed is the right of state authority in the operation of the public schools, colleges and Universities.[108]

Ultimately, Wallace stepped aside as deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach enforced the black students' right to attend the university. Wallace's rhetoric was a show of force and a symbolic stand against integration that held no real influence in the tide of integration besides inciting white protests and violence. The next day on July 12, the Fifth circuit court of appeals ordered desegregation of Birmingham City Schools. On July 23, the Birmingham City Council repealed segregation ordinances. The goal of Project C had been achieved, but the rising controversy over school integration was intensifying.

On August 5, the American Guild of Variety Artists, led by their Jewish president Joey Adams, put on a concert in Birmingham called *Salute to Freedom '63*. The event's purpose was to raise funds for the "SCLC, SNCC, NAACP, CORE, NUL, and NALC."[109] The headliner was Ray Charles, and the event also featured musicians like Nina Simone, Ella Fitzgerald, Johnny Mathis, and the Shirelles. It also featured the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights Choir, which had become an iconic ensemble in Birmingham through its performance of freedom songs at mass meetings and protest marches. Important attendees included figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Baldwin.[110]

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[108] "Governor George G. Wallace's School House Door Speech," Alabama Department of Archives and History, June 11, 1963, https://archives.alabama.gov/govs_list/schooldoor.html.
[109] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 219.
[110] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 219; Burgin Mathews, "Salute to Freedom '63," https://burginmathews.com/2019/01/1/salute-to-freedom-63/.

Initially, the event was supposed to be held at the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium, the same place where Nat King Cole was attacked seven years before. City officials promised that the event could be held there with an integrated audience, but as the event approached, that decision was taken back with the suspicious excuse that the auditorium needed repainting on August 5. Instead, *Salute to Freedom* took place at Miles College, a historically black university on the west side of Birmingham in the Fairfield neighborhood. Burgin Matthews writes about the preparations for the last minute change: "Volunteers scrambled to ready the space: in 98 degree heat a plywood bandstand was erected and lit on the football field. Audience members paid $5 admission and brought their own seating from home, many traveling several miles on foot for the show, folding chairs in hand."[111] Ultimately, the event was a success. About twenty thousand people were in attendance. Ingrid Monson writes about the event as an example of the easiest way that jazz musicians participated in the Civil Rights Movement. In a period where she says many black musicians were called out for not contributing sufficiently to activists' goals, like Nat King Cole had been in 1956, fundraising concerts were the most efficient ways for musicians to participate in the struggle for equality.[112]

On August 15, a man set off a tear-gas bomb in Loveman's department store. On August 20, someone bombed the home of black attorney Arthur D. Shores. On August 27, six buses left from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, heading towards Washington, D.C. On August 28, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom became the largest civil rights demonstration in United States history up to that time with over 250,000 participants.[113] The march included

[111] Matthews, "Salute to Freedom '63."
[112] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 61, 217.
[113] Bayard Rustin, "Official Program for the March on Washington (1963)," https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=96.

King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The following is his mention of Alabama in that speech:

> I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification", one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.[114]

King clearly saw the dangers of Wallace's rhetoric, and as the school year approached, that conflict would come to a bloody climax.

On August 30, the attorneys for the Birmingham School Board announced the desegregation of three white schools within the city school district: West End, Ramsay high schools, and Graymont Elementary School.[115] Court orders in Huntsville, Mobile, and Macon County schools also called for desegregation of public schools. In this moment, Governor Wallace continued his symbolic stand against federal imposition in the name of states' rights. Rather than passively allow desegregation to occur, Wallace utilized state troopers, delayed school openings by a week, and eventually closed down the schools rather than allow black students to attend.

On Labor Day, September 2, Wallace traveled to Birmingham and gave a speech defending his decision. "We are not fighting against the Negro people," he said. "We are fighting for local government and states rights."[116] This rhetoric concealed Wallace's racist motivations and instead centered federal overstep as the main issue with desegregation. As seen in his

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[114] Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, United States National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf.
[115] Wright, "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama."
[116] Jeremy Gray, "Amid Protests, Riots, 5 Black Students Changed Birmingham Schools Forever 50 Years Ago This Week," *AL.com News*, March 6, 2019, https://www.al.com/spotnews/2013/09/amid_protests_riots_5_black_st.html; Jeremy Gray, "Wallace Denounced Integration in Labor Day Speeches; Troopers Surrounded Tuskegee School (Sept. 2, 1963) (video)," *AL.com News*, https://www.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2013/09/wallace_denounced_integration.html.

inaugural address, Wallace's appeal to states' rights held symbolic associations with Alabama's status in the Confederacy, a connection that white opposers embraced as they waved Confederate flags at school integration protests.

Two days later on September 4, five black students across Birmingham enrolled in classes. Dwight and Floyd Armstrong, aged eleven and ten, enrolled at Graymont elementary school. Outside the school, white protestors waved Confederate flags, threw rocks, and fought with police. The boys were no strangers to this opposition—Dwight had participated in the Children's Marches from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. He was jailed during those demonstrations. The boys' father, James Armstrong, had been an activist for school integration since 1957. Across Birmingham at Ramsay High School, Richard Walker encountered similar protests as he tried to enroll for classes. Patricia Marcus and Josephine Powell encountered the same at West End High. The violence and anger at these protests had immediate consequences. This volatile moment occurred only eleven days before the climactic act of violence: the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Later, the perpetrators of that crime would confess that the bombing was related to school integration, specifically at Graymont Elementary School. One of the bombers was a father of a white student at the school.

The same day of the school protests, the second bombing of Arthur Shores's home occurred. One man was shot and died, and another twenty-one people were injured.[117] On September 8, attackers threw two bombs into A.G. Gaston's home. On September 10, President Kennedy ordered the Alabama national guard federalized and ordered Secretary of Defense

[117] Gray, "Amid Protests, Riots, 5 Black Students Changed Birmingham Schools Forever 50 Years Ago This Week."

McNamara to "use any of the nation's armed forces he deemed necessary to enforce school desegregation in Alabama."[118]

On Sunday morning September 15, 1963, the congregation of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was preparing for their worship service. The Sunday school hour had concluded. That morning, a group of young girls—Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, and her younger sister Sarah Collins—arrived late to church. They went to a downstairs bathroom at the church to freshen up after their walk. Sarah Collins later recounted that she saw Addie Mae help Denise tie the ribbon on the back of her dress. And in that moment, the world came crashing down. At 10:25am, a bundle of at least fifteen sticks of dynamite, planted beside a side entrance to the church on the 16th street side, exploded, destroying part of the back side of the church. The explosion took the lives of four of those little girls. All of them died except for Sarah Collins.[119]

An article from the *Guardian* on Monday, September 16, 1963 describes the damage at the church.

> Today the inside of the building was a complete chaos. The church clock stopped at 10:25am. The pulpit shattered. A damaged cross lay among the rubble. Glass, some of it bloodstained, covered the pews and the choir stalls. The force of the explosion was such that concrete blocks were torn loose and hurled outwards, windows were blown out of shops and houses nearby, and several cars parked outside were destroyed.[120]

The emotional damage was even more significant than the physical. "Across the street a Negro woman stood weeping. She clasped a little girl's shoe. 'Her daughter was killed,' a bystander

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[118] Wright, "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama."

[119] Karyn Miller-Medzon, Robin Young, and Ciku Theuri, "4 Little Girls Died in the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in 1963. A 5th Survived," *WBUR*, https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/04/30/16th-street-baptist-church-bombing-survivor.

[120] Staff Writer, "16 September 1963: Black church bombed in Birmingham, Alabama," the *Guardian* Online Archive, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/16/16th-street-baptist-church-birmingham-alabama-1963.

said."[121] Mr. M.W. Pippen, the grandfather of one victim, said, "Eleven years old. I helped pull the rubble off her… I feel like blowing up the whole town."[122] The bombing shocked the city and the world.

In memory of the horrifying tragedy of September 15, two lost lives often get overlooked. Two young black boys, Johnny Robinson and Virgil Ware, were murdered. Robinson was killed by a police officer, who claimed the young boy had thrown a rock at him. Ware was shot by white teenagers while he rode on the handles of his older brother's bicycle. The boys' families never got justice. When the FBI looked into the Robinson's murder in 2009, the officer who pulled the trigger had been dead for decades. Ware's attackers confessed in 1963 and were charged with first-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter respectively, but both received suspended sentences and probation and were free by summer of 1965. Late September held six funerals for young black children: funerals for Carole, Cynthia, Denise, and Addie happened on September 17 and 18, followed by Johnny's and Virgil's funerals on September 22.[123] The year of 1963 was a period of hard won victories and horrific tragedies for the black community in Birmingham.

The tragic day of September 15 created a monumental shift in the eyes of American whites in regards to the Civil Rights Movement. Journalist Howell Raines, who lived in Birmingham at the time, wrote in 1983, "The deaths of the children galvanized the consciences

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Sarah Snyder, "2 Boys Killed Sept. 15, 1963 being honored in 50th Anniversary," *ABC news*, https://abc3340.com/archive/2-boys-killed-sept-15-1963-being-honored-in-50th-anniversary; Jon Reed, "Virgil Ware and Johnny Robinson: Families want history to remember teen boys, too," *AL.com News*, September 14, 2013, https://www.al.com/spotnews/2013/09/virgil_ware_and_johnny_robinso.html; Jeremy Gray, "Teens told of shooting Virgil Ware; Johnny Robinson laid to rest (Sept. 22, 1963)," *AL.com News*, September 22, 2013, https://www.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2013/09/teens_told_of_shooting_virgil.html.

of many Southern whites and forced them to admit segregation was also immoral."[124] The bombing lived on in public memory of the Civil Rights Movement, not only in newspaper clippings and stories, but in a number of songs written in the years following the bombing and until the present day. These songs, which the final two chapters of this research will discuss, are a musical discourse of their own on the tragedy that so deeply scarred Birmingham's black community.

[124] Howell Raines, "The Birmingham Bombing," *New York Times*, July 24, 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/24/magazine/the-birmingham-bombing.html.

Chapter 5: Musical Response to the Bombing, 1963-1965

In his 1845 autobiography, Frederick Douglass wrote about the slave songs he heard on the plantation in his childhood.

> Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness… To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing chracter of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my bretheren in bonds.[125]

For Douglass, black music was an embodiment of the horrors of slavery. Similarly, W.E.B. Du Bois spends a chapter of his book *The Souls of Black Folks* on songs made by enslaved black people. Du Bois wrote in his chapter titled "Of the Sorrow Songs": [Negro songs] are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways."[126]

Many of those same songs were sung during mass meetings in the Civil Rights Movement and became the protest anthems of a suffering people. In a description of a mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery in 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "The opening hymn was the old familiar 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' and when that mammoth audience stood to sing, the voices outside swelling the chorus in the church, there was a mighty ring like the glad echo of heaven itself."[127] Traditional negro spirituals became an emotional and galvanizing force in the Civil Rights Movement, and soon, white folk singers like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez began using them to participate in the struggle for civil rights. As Douglass and

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[125] Frederick Douglass, Edited by John McKivigan Peter P. Hinks, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself, Critical Edition*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 21.
[126] Du Bois,*The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 14.
[127] Martin Luther King, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 50.

Du Bois recognized, music has the power to both mourn tragedy and cry out with hope. Music written in the wake of the Sixteenth Street Church Bombing, by black and white artists alike, did exactly that and became its own discourse, remembering tragedy and speaking up for change. This chapter will focus on a handful of songs written in the wake of the bombing, from late 1963 to September of 1965. These pieces are John Coltrane's "Alabama," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," Joan Baez's "Birmingham Sunday," and two songs from Sun Ra's album *The Magic City.*

John Coltrane's "Alabama" is an instrumental jazz work, first recorded on November 18, 1963, two months after the bombing. That recording, from the album *Live at Birdland*, opens with a low rumbling tremolo on C. Immediately, Coltrane enters with a minor solo on the tenor saxophone. Its slow and mournful sound continues over the darkness of the piano accompaniment, which remains unchanging for the first minute and twenty seconds of the recording. A new section opens at 1:20, where a swinging drum pattern enters. The timbre of the hi hat continues as the sax and piano drop out, leaving the percussion alone with a meandering bass line. At 2:45, the piano re-enters with that low rumbling sound along with a restatement of the opening tenor saxophone solo. This time however, the drum set provides ephemeral sound effects, unmetered and providing color and texture underneath the tenor sax.

Poet Jeffrey Coleman argued that Coltrane's slow, mournful sax solo actually mimics the cadence of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech eulogizing the four little girls who died in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, which Coltrane had heard a few days prior.[128] Ethnomusicologist Jonathan Henderson pushes this comparison further by arguing that

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[128] Jeffrey Lamar Coleman, "Michael S. Harper's 'Here Where Coltrane Is' and Coltrane's 'Alabama': the Social/Aesthetic Intersections of Civil Rights Movement Poetry, Four Poems," http://www.yorku.ca/jspot/5/jcoleman.htm.

"Coltrane's instrumental voice carries audible hallmarks of human lament in 'Alabama'."[129] In his study, Henderson looks at spectograms of Coltrane's solo and argues that the overtones and melodic figures mimic the sounds of human cries. However, one does not need the spectograms to hear the mourning and loss in Coltrane's saxophone solo. Coltrane's piece mimics the spirit of the King speech as well. It has sections of mourning and despair but also a more upbeat, hopeful section that may indicate optimism in the fight for racial equality. Steve Rowland's radio documentary "Tell Me How Long Trane's Been Gone" features a clip of "Alabama" and King's eulogy, and the similarities are striking.[130]

Some writers have painted Coltrane's music as politically revolutionary. John D. Baskerville called it "music for the black revolution."[131] Frank Kofsky, whose 1971 book *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* featured Coltrane prominently on the cover, wrote that Coltrane was at the forefront of the paradigm shift into avant-garde jazz that embraced black nationalism by becoming a "deviation from white-defined, Europe-oriented, standards of timbre, inflection, [and] attack."[132] Coltrane himself was not inclined to confirm his music as radically political. In a 1966 interview, Kofka pressed Coltrane on the topic of Malcolm X: "Some musicians have said there's a relationship between some of Malcolm's ideas and the music, especially the new music. Do you think there's anything in that?" Coltrane replied: "Well, I think that music, being expression of the human heart or the human being itself, does express just what

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[129] Jonathan Henderson, "Hearing Voices in John Coltrane's 'Alabama'," December 16, 2016, https://jhendersonmusic.com/2016/12/16/hearing-voices-in-john-coltranes-alabama/.
[130] Steve Rowland, "Tell Me How Long Trane's Been Gone," *WRTI 90 Radio*, September 20-24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiJ_0gp-T9A&t=121s.
[131] Baskerville, John D. "Free Jazz: A Reflection of Black Power Ideology." Journal of Black Studies 24, no. 4 (1994): 495, www.jstor.org/stable/2784566.
[132] Frank Kafka, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, United Kingdom: Pathfinder Press, 42, 155-171.

is happening...The whole of human experience at that particular time is being expressed.[133] This non-committal answer shows Coltrane's hesitation to associate himself with radical black politics at the time, but it does not undercut the interpretation of "Alabama" as an expression of grief over the tragedy in Birmingham.

Nina Simone's 1964 song "Mississippi Goddam" is thematically zoomed out from the events in Birmingham. Simone regarded "Mississippi Goddam" as her first civil rights song. In an article about Nina Simone's activism in the 1960s, Ruth Feldstein wrote that Simone immediately penned the song after learning of the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in a "rush of fury, hatred, and determination."[134] Although the bombing provided inspiration for the song, it does not figure prominently in its lyrics. Instead, Simone highlights Mississippi in her title, a state that had its own share of violence in 1963 with the murder of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers. Historically, Mississippi had a higher number of lynchings and racial violence against black communities.

> The name of this tune is Mississippi goddam / And I mean every word of it
> Alabama's gotten me so upset / Tennessee made me lose my rest
> And everybody knows about Mississippi goddam
>
> Can't you see it / Can't you feel it / It's all in the air
> I can't stand the pressure much longer / Somebody say a prayer
> Hound dogs on my trail / School children sitting in jail
> Black cat cross my path / I think every day's gonna be my last
> Lord have mercy on this land of mine / We all gonna get it in due time
> I don't belong here / I don't belong there / I've even stopped believing in prayer
> Don't tell me / I tell you / Me and my people just about due
> I've been there so I know / They keep on saying 'Go slow!'
>
> But that's just the trouble / 'Do it slow' / Washing the windows / 'Do it slow'
> Picking the cotton / 'Do it slow' / You're just plain rotten / 'Do it slow'

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[133] John, Coltrane, "An Interview with John Coltrane by Frank Kofsky," Pacifica Radio Archives, https://soundcloud.com/pacificaradioarchives/bc1266-an-interview-with-john-coltrane-by-frank-kofsky.
[134] Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1349, www.jstor.org/stable/3660176.

You're too damn lazy / 'Do it slow' / The thinking's crazy / 'Do it slow'
Where am I going / What am I doing / I don't know, I don't know
Just try to do your very best / Stand up be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi goddam

Picket lines, school boycotts / They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality / For my sister my brother my people and me
Yes you lied to me all these years / You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady / And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie
Oh but this whole country is full of lies / You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more /You keep on saying 'Go slow!' / 'Go slow!'

But that's just the trouble / 'Do it slow' /Desegregation / 'Do it slow'
Mass participation / 'Do it slow' / Reunification / 'Do it slow'
Do things gradually / 'Do it slow' / But bring more tragedy /'Do it slow'
Why don't you see it / Why don't you feel it / I don't know / I don't know
You don't have to live next to me / Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi / Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi goddam, that's it

In the opening verse, “Alabama’s got me so upset” highlights the emotional tragedy of 1963 in Birmingham. “School children sitting in jail” refers to the Children’s March in Birmingham. The reference to “school boycotts,” is not necessarily tied to Alabama, but resistance to school integration was the motivation for bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The lines “Oh but this whole country is full of lies / You're all gonna die and die like flies” point to Simone’s overarching theme that racial violence in the United States was a deep moral problem. The most obvious theme in the song is that the problems of racial violence can not be solved by waiting. The chorus, in a call and response style between Simone and the responses of “Go slow” or “Do it slow” mimic broader dialogues between white moderate integrationists and black activists and recall days of oppression under slavery as well. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” condemned the passivity and lack of urgency among white sympathizers. In his speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, King said, “We have also come to

this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."[135] Simone takes up this message in "Mississippi Goddam," and musical elements amplify the lyrical message.

The song, with its upbeat, show-tune-esque music presents a contrast against the angry, pleading lyrics. In my listening, however, the lyrics and musical content are not so polarized.The rapid movement of the bass line between tonic and dominant scale tones and the quick offbeat rhythm of the piano, followed by two-against-three, syncopated chord progressions into the lyrics "Mississippi Goddam" create rhythmic and harmonic instability that conveys a sense of urgency to the listener.

In her article, Feldstein argues that Simone's songs, and protest music in general, do important political work. The music was not merely the background to activism or as "reflection of the pre-existing aspirations of political activists."[136] Instead, Feldstein argues for a deeper connection between black cultural production and black activism. I argue similarly that music written about violence in Birmingham in 1963, especially the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, was not a mere reflection on those events. Rather, popular songs contributed to the discourse around the Civil Rights Movement in tangible, substantial ways, initiating conversations with a broader reach than many written sources or speeches.

One of the most visible white folk singers in the world of protest music in the 1960s was Joan Baez.[137] Her rendition of the spiritual "We Shall Overcome" at the 1963 March on Washington with the massive crowd singing along was a powerful moment in the history of the

[135] King, "I Have a Dream."
[136] Feldstein, "I Don't Trust You Anymore," 1350.
[137] Baez had Hispanic heritage, her father was Mexican-American.

Civil Rights Movement.[138] In her article "'Sing It So Loudly': The Long History of 'Birmingham Sunday'," English scholar Julia Cox discusses Baez's long legacy of musical activism. Baez used her song-writing and performance talents to support equality movements and anti-war movements during the 1960s and 70s. Even through her last album, *Whistle Down the Wind* in 2018, Baez sang about racial injustice and violence with her song "The President Sang Amazing Grace," written about the 2015 massacre at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.[139]

In 1963, Baez's involvement in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28 came a mere eighteen days before the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. The bombing inspired the creation of "Birmingham Sunday," written by Richard Fariña, Baez's brother-in-law. The tragic death of the four little black girls and two black boys that day in Birmingham inspired Fariña's soulful ballad, and Baez recorded the song for her 1964 album *Joan Baez/5.* As Baez sings, she recounts the bombing from the perspective of each young girl, each stanza from the second to fifth highlighting a different girl. Each stanza is followed by a one-line refrain: "And the choir kept singing of freedom."

> Come 'round by my side and I'll sing you a song
> I'll sing it so softly it'll do no one wrong
> On Birmingham Sunday the blood ran like wine
> And the choir kept singing of freedom
>
> That cold autumn morning no eyes saw the sun
> And Addie Mae Collins, her number was one
> In an old Baptist church there was no need to run
> And the choir kept singing of freedom
>
> The clouds, they were dark and the autumn wind blew
> And Denise McNair brought the number to two

[138] Video footage can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuSih-Z30TY.
[139] Julia Cox, "'Sing It So Loudly': The Long History of 'Birmingham Sunday'," *Southern Cultures* 24, no. 3 (2018): 63. doi:10.2307/26510207.

The falcon of death was a creature they knew
And the choir kept singing of freedom

The church, it was crowded and no one could see
That Cynthia Wesley's dark number was three
Her prayers and her feelings would shame you and me
And the choir kept singing of freedom

Young Carol Robertson entered the door
And the number her killers had given was four
She asked for a blessing, but asked for no more
And the choir kept singing of freedom

On Birmingham Sunday a noise shook the ground
And people all over the Earth turned around
For no one recalled a more cowardly sound
And the choir kept singing of freedom

The men in the forest, they once asked of me
How many black berries grow in the Blue Sea
I asked them right back with a tear in my eye
How many dark ships in the forest?

The Sunday has come, the Sunday has gone
And I can't do much more than to sing you a song
I'll sing it so softly it'll do no one wrong
And the choir keeps singing of freedom

With this song, Baez both eulogized the young victims and condemned the violent attack. For Baez, a white folk singer with a broad audience, one of her goals was to elicit sympathy from white listeners. To achieve this, Baez never mentioned the color of the girls' skin or the race of the congregation. She calls the girls by name and calls Sixteenth Street Baptist Church an "old Baptist church," separating the church from its organizational role in the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. Baez's focus on the names and lives of the girls also shifts attention away from the bombing itself and its perpetrators. The bombing is only referenced as a "cowardly sound" and a "noise" that shook the ground. The men who placed the bombs are even more obscure.

They appear as a "falcon of death." By centering the girls in the song, Baez emphasizes the tragic loss of their lives to garner white sympathy for the struggles of the black church in the Civil Rights Movement, which would continue to "keep singing of freedom." Centering the four little girls and obscuring the perpetrators allowed Baez to encourage empathy from white Americans without explicitly calling out the intense climate of segregation, racism, and violence in Birmingham.

In her article, Cox argues that Baez's "Birmingham Sunday" has sonic references to civil rights era violence in addition to the lyrical ones. The words are set to the tune "I Once Loved a Lass," a traditional Scottish ballad. Cox writes that Fariña's use of the ballad form resonates with the mourning of other tragic events in the Civil Rights Movement. After the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, poet Gwendolyn Brooks used the ballad form in her 1960 book *The Bean Eaters* to structure poiemes that mourned Till's death. Fariña's use of the ballad form would have been familiar to white listeners who knew the original Scottish ballad and to black listeners who associated the form with mourning poetry.

Twenty years later, "Birmingham Sunday" had tangible effects on the push for prosecution of one of the bombers, Bob Chambliss. In a 1997 interview, Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley talked about the song's personal impact on him as he worked to prosecute Chambliss. "I hoped someday that I could be part of bringing those people to justice... I got this record shortly after… She had a song on there called 'Birmingham Sunday' that mentioned the four little girls… [and] almost every morning of my life until I became attorney general, I played that Joan Baez song."[140] The song's lasting legacy was evident even in 2017, when black singer

[140] Cox, "Sing It So Loudly," 64.

Rhiannon Giddens covered the famous protest song in the same year that Doug Jones, who prosecuted the last two church bombers in 2001 and 2002, campaigned and won one of Alabama's seats in the United States Senate against Judge Roy Moore.

The last work written in the aftershocks of the bombing is Sun Ra's album *The Magic City*, recorded in September of 1965 in New York City. Recorded two years after the tragedy at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the album is less obviously a response to the event. I will argue that Sun Ra's *Magic City* should be considered a response to violence in Birmingham, especially the church bombing in 1963. This argument will take shape through two avenues: firstly through the context of Sun Ra's personal relationship to Birmingham and secondly by considering *Magic City*'s possible sonic allusions to violence in Birmingham.

In order to build the context of Sun Ra's personal connections to Birmingham around his 1965 album *Magic City*, it is important to first establish that the album is indeed about the southern city. The album's name, *The Magic City,* is a promotional slogan commonly used in the early days of Birmingham to attract workers to the booming iron and steel industry. The slogan is a reference to the geographic miracle of Jones Valley, the unique mineral composition of which meant that all the ingredients needed to produce steel were within a thirty mile radius. In 1926, city officials raised a steel sign next to the city's train terminal that read "Welcome to Birmingham, the Magic City." It was modified to read, "Birmingham, The Magic City" to avoid a small-town feel. The sign was an iconic part of the Birmingham landscape, especially for Sun Ra, who grew up close to the terminal and saw the large sign almost every day. An image of the sign is in the liner notes to the *Magic City* album. In addition to this obvious reference, Sun Ra confirmed to journalist Michael Shore with MTV News that the piece was indeed about his own

hometown.[141] This connection is easy to trace, but making an argument about the album's connection to the violent events of 1963 requires more speculative work. While an earlier section of this paper outlines Sun Ra's relationship and rejection of Birmingham in his early life, it is now beneficial to look at Sun Ra's connection to the city later in his career.

As we have seen, Sun Ra spent much of his career obscuring his origins. However, he still held some affection for his hometown. He wrote several pieces that mention the city, including "Magic City Blues," "The Place of Five Points," and "West Side of Magic City." He also covered popular songs about the state like Parish and Perkins's "Stars Fell on Alabama." One of his most profound works written about Birmingham was his album *The Magic City* (1965). Alton Abraham suggested that the album's cover represented Birmingham as magic, not in its industrial sense, but as "a city without evil, a city of possibilities and beauty."[142] In 1972, Sun Ra penned a poem under the same name about Birmingham that captured his cosmological and idealized image of the city. The first stanza follows:

Magic City (1972)

This city is the Universe
Because it is that city of all natural creation
It is surrounded by the wilderness
The encircling forest of the edge of itself
All that is endlessly beyond
This city is the Magi's thought
This city is the magic of the Magi's thought.
The idea, the calculated knowledge of it
Eternally balanced by the uncalculated presence of
The intuition potential intruder/ the beam
Harmonic precision celestial being
Chromatic rays race.

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[141] Jonathan Szwed, liner notes to *The Magic City* album, 1965.
[142] Szwed, *Space is the Place*, 213.

Sun Ra pushed away the city he grew up in, but at the same time, he created an idealistic representation of the city, creating a mythical world of the Magi in his imagination and music.

In some ways, Sun Ra's relationship with the city was not so cosmic. Szwed writes in the line notes for *Magic City*, "Even after he left town for good in 1946, [Sun Ra] followed the city's racial unrest throughout the Civil Rights Movement like the rest of America, on nightly TV." Szwed goes on to say that the daughter of one of Sun Ra's Birmingham musicians friends was a victim in the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Even though Sun Ra distanced himself from Birmingham, he had tangible connections to the black community in Birmingham from his childhood. These personal connections Sun Ra held to Birmingham and the violence of 1963 point to the possibility that his 1965 album *The Magic City* is a commentary on violence on his hometown. Further evidence is found in the music of the album itself.

I argue that the sonic traits of the album can serve as representation of the chaos and racial violence in the city. The album's first track, also titled "Magic City," is a twenty-seven minute long work that Szwed describes as a collective improvisation with a pre-planned bare structure. He calls the unity and organization of "Magic City" a miracle. It lacks any fixed themes, but its musical ideas, textures, and colors meld together to "form an incremental melody."[143] The sound tapestry of "Magic City" is not fixed. Its levels of intensity fluctuate with its density and rhythmic gestures. One moment to point out begins at 26:40 in the recorded version. From that moment, the piercing, guttural, shrieking cries of the horns present what Szwed calls a "sudden ensemble cry" before the piece fades. I believe this moment, sticking out in the otherwise cosmic, unpredictable sonic tapestry of "Magic City," is one of striking

[143] Szwed, *Space is the Place*, 213.

humanness and grief. If there is a moment that feels like the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, it is this one.

The next track of the album,"Shadow World," plays on an emphasis on doubleness that Sun Ra, as a Gemini, constantly expressed in his musical works. The interlocked saxophone ostinatos are pervasive throughout, matching up at different times with different counter melodies and percussive motives. Interpreting "Shadow World" in light of Sun Ra's relationship with Birmingham allows us to see the complexity of his idea of the city. Not only was it a distant city of the magi, but it was also the place where he "had been forced to live with day-to-day racist constraints"[144] and somewhere unspeakable tragedies like the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church could occur. The rumbling ostinatos under a cosmic, shiny stratosphere of sound mirror Sun Ra's complicated image of Birmingham: the shadow world underlies the Magic City.

Music from 1963 to 1965 written about the bombing, whether explicitly or not, each contributed unique perspectives to the musical discourse about violence in Birmingham. Coltrane used his instrument in "Alabama" to embody mourning for lives lost by mirroring MLK's eulogy and embodying human cries. Simone referenced Alabama to push for an urgent solution to racial violence in "Mississippi Goddam." In "Birmingham Sunday," Baez made an emotional appeal to white listeners that emphasized personal identities of the deceased girls without explicitly calling out broader systems of racial injustice. Finally, Sun Ra presents a complicated picture of Birmingham as a projection of his own cosmic philosophies but with undercurrents of violent realities in the city.

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[144] Szwed, *The Magic City* liner notes.

Chapter 6: The Bombing's Legacy in Music, 1982-2016

Whether through overt textual references or symbolic musical resonances, musicians contributed a powerful condemnation of racial violence in the wake of the Sixteenth Street Church Bombing. In popular music, use of the bombing as subject material did not end in the years immediately following. Through discussion of a few musical examples, I will trace how the bombing as a musical subject evolved. Over time, the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church became a starting off point in music for deeper discussions of systematic racism and racial violence. The releases of these songs sometimes coincided with events that brought the bombing back to public attention. These works include Adolphus Hailstork's "American Guernica" (1982), Chatham County Line's "Birmingham Jail" (2008), K. Lee Scott's *Band of Angels* (2013), and Amy Leon's "Burning in Birmingham" (2016).

The first of these, Adolphus Hailstork's 1982 work "American Guernica," takes a drastic turn from the jazz, folk, and popular music written about the Birmingham bombing in the 1960s. The work is composed for wind ensemble and is by far the most programmatic of the pieces in this research in its depiction of the bombing. Hailstork, an African American composer from Albany, New York, created an artistic fusion of a classical wind band style and elements of African American music to depict the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

The piece's title, "American Guernica" is a reference to the famous Picasso painting *Guernica*, commissioned in 1937 by the democratic Spanish Republican government for the 1937 Paris World's Fair. The work depicts the bombing of the town Guernica in the Basque region of Spain. Spanish nationalists' allies in Nazi Germany bombed the town because it was a

stronghold of Republican forces. On April 26, 1937, Nazi warplanes bombed the city in the middle of a market day, murdering mostly women and children. Picasso's work, a massive grayscale painting, shows dying people and dismembered horses in a state of agony. Picasso left Spain with the defeat of the republican forces as dictator Francisco Franco assumed power. *Guernica* travelled around the world for decades, and Picasso refused to let the painting return to Spain as long as Franco ruled. It stayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York CIty for a few months in 1940 then again from 1956-1981.

During that time, it is possible that Hailstork encountered the painting in New York and felt the story's parallels with the story of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. Like the attack on Guernica, the bombing in Birmingham was an attack on an perceived organizational hub for the "enemy." Many of the protest marches in Birmingham in 1963 originated from the church's front steps. Its members held mass meetings to organize action and bolster the spirit of the movement. In these ways, the congregation at the church was perceived as a threat to violent white supremacists in the same way that the republican stronghold in Guernica threatened Franco's fascist forces.

In Guernica, most of the victims were women and children, and the fighting men were gone. In Birmingham, four little girls died. In both cases, the victims were innocent bystanders in a bigger ideological struggle. While children in Birmingham did have an active role in the protests in 1963, the shock of their deaths, of innocence lost and lives gone too soon, spread across the country. By making this comparison in his piece, Hailstork compares white perpetrators of violence with fascist military forces in Europe and the black congregation of the

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church with those fighting for democracy and freedom in the Spanish Civil War.[145]

Sonically, "American Guernica" paints a graphic picture of the events on the morning of September 15, 1963. It opens, marked "harsh, brutal," with upward flourishes back and forth between the higher woodwinds and low brass. It sets the scene for chaos before the loud, hammering timpani joins, followed by high, screeching winds that are reminiscent of sirens. During this section, Hailstork's directions in the score command players to create "blatant, raw tones" and "grotesque, ugly" sounds. This chaotic whistling pervades until about 1:12, when a lone descending sound creates a siren's doppler effect into a new section. The new section consists solely of a piano, playing a bluesy motif before it is suddenly interrupted with a sonic wall of chaos, marked "raw brutal tone," around 1:30 right as the piano is about to cadence. This moment might be the impact of the bomb, breaking through the peaceful piano melody before it has a chance to finish, much like the premature deaths of the four little girls in the bombing. Here, Hailstork instructs the clave player to improvise randomly with no repeated patterns, contributing to the unpredictable atmosphere. The chaos is followed by a soaring clarinet solo that sounds like the opening to Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. At 2:30, low brass notes slowly plod, leading to the next section, where the piano solo from before returns. This solo recalls the motif from the first, but this time it is allowed to grow and develop further, always building into a final cadence that never truly happens. Hailstork marked this moment in the score with "morendo," dying, and a ritardando. In the last measures, the piano alternates between an F6 chord in first inversion and a G major chord while the timpani rolls a D. The piano solo ends

[145] Brian Coffill and Joseph Scott, "Adolphus Hailstork: 'American Guernica'," program notes University of Maryland Wind Ensemble, January 24, 2017, https://www.umwindorchestra.com/single-post/2017/01/24/Adolphus-Hailstork-American-Guernica.

holding a G chord, still over the timpani D, creating an unstable, yearning atmosphere that is cut off by the entrance of the rest of the ensemble. Again, the piano solo has been cut off too soon and denied its expected ending, like the four little girls. This time, instead of a wall of noise and indeterminate rhythms, the piano is cut off by a gentle yet dissonant section. The ending, interspersed sporadically by a sharp pull of the piano player's fingernails over the strings of the piano, dies away slowly. The piece's title and sonic elements paint a picture of a graphic, horrifying event in a black community and connects it to larger historical narratives of ideological struggle. Much like Spain's own Guernica, Hailstork's "American Guernica" is a reminder of painful loss for a noble cause.

In the early 2000s, memory of the bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church reemerged with the prosecution of two of the bombers by U.S. Attorney Doug Jones. In 1977, one of the bombers, Robert Chambliss, stood trial and was convicted for the bombing. Jones, a law student at Cumberland School of Law at Samford University in Birmingham at the time, attended the trial. Chambliss's conviction rested largely on circumstantial evidence because of the actions of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover and the FBI knew the names of the attackers and had recordings that proved their guilt, yet the documents remained classified in FBI records until the late 1990s. After declassification, more than thirty years after the bombing, Jones had the material he needed to pick up the cold case. The FBI files identified the other three perpetrators: Herman Frank Cash, Thomas Edwin Blanton Jr., and Bobby Frank Cherry. Cash was already deceased by the time Jones was able to access the FBI files. Jones successfully prosecuted Blanton in 2001 and Cherry in 2002.[146]

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[146] Becky Little, "How Doug Jones Brought KKK Church Bombers to Justice," *History.com*, December 13, 2017, https://www.history.com/news/how-doug-jones-brought-kkk-church-bombers-to-justice.

Dave Wilson, lead singer of the bluegrass band Chatham County Line, read about those convictions and was inspired to write the song "Birmingham Jail." He said later, "I picked up the paper one day and read about how those guys had been convicted for what had happened all those years ago. And I was happy because justice had been served, but it sure seemed like it had been a little long to reach that point. So I sat down and wrote those lyrics out because those guys had gotten to live their lives."[147]

> Four little girls tying their sash in the basement room that day
> Poking fun and making jokes before getting on their knees to pray
> Just so young with all their dreams and years to their end
> Strewn away in the rubble by the hatred of scared white men
>
> It was early September[148] in the year of '63
> George Wallace defied what the federal courts they did decree
> They said make your school doors open for the child of black & white
> Wallace clenched up both his fists and he called out for a fight
>
> Down in the Birmingham Jail
> Down in the Birmingham Jail
> You've had a chance to live your life but now you're locked. . .
>
> When the locals heard the news that day, their blood began to boil
> They decided the only good coloured man is down beneath the soil
> So with their hate and money, they began to conspire
> And soon in Birmingham the air was thick with powder and fire
>
> Down in the Birmingham Jail
> Down in the Birmingham Jail
> You've had a chance to live your life but now you're locked

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[147] David Menconi, "Alabama's Newly Elected Senator has a Musical Connection to this NC Band," *The News & Observer*, December 13, 2017, https://www.newsobserver.com/entertainment/music-news-reviews/on-the-beat-blog/article189584724.html

[148] The recorded album version of "Birmingham Jail" on *IV* says "early in December." In live performances, Wilson sings "September" instead, and I have elected to use that version of the lyrics because I believe it is a reference to Wallace's September 2 speech in Birmingham against integration of the city schools and the subsequent protests on September 4.

Chatham County Line created a narrative framework bookended by the bombing. By beginning with the innocent behavior of the girls the morning of the bombing, Wilson sets up the intensely personal and tragic nature of the bombing and its destruction of innocence and future for the girls. The second verse travels back to the beginning of September with Wallace's anti-school integration speeches on Labor Day in Birmingham. The songwriter connects this symbolic display of white supremacy and racially inflamed rhetoric to public perception of the civil rights struggle and specifically as an incitement of violence. The chorus takes on less of a narratorial tone and addresses the perpetrators of the violence specifically: "You had the chance to live your life, but now you're locked in the Birmingham Jail." This line places the Chatham County Line song into its historical context, after the decades late prosecution of the final two bombers.

The song has a relatively simple musical makeup and structure, but certain elements tie the sonic material to the lyrics and thematic content. The tonal center is on an A minor chord, but the harmony does not utilize any typical harmonic movement towards the tonic, like a V-I cadence. Additionally, the song utilizes the mediant relationship between A minor and C major often, at times to the point where the ear could almost hear C major as the tonal center of the harmony. In this way, the songwriter creates a sonic atmosphere that feels dark and angst driven with its emphasis on A minor and also has no firm, expected tonal resolutions. This tonal uncertainty or modal quality might be a reference to the opening verse's semantic content: "Just so young with all their dreams and years to their end / Strewn away in the rubble by the hatred of scared white men." In the same way that the little girls' lives were cut off before natural resolution, the harmonic structure of this song lacks firm resolution and direction beyond its rest on a sad, melancholic chord.

Additionally, the violin in this song provides a sonic representation of violence and destruction that is present in the lyrical content. The song opens with a solo guitar strumming sixteenth notes in a four four meter. The moment where the rest of the ensemble (violin, banjo, and double bass) comes in is quite striking. In the last measure of the introduction in the 2008 recording, the guitar plays alone on the first two beats. On the third beat, the violinist plays an explosive figure that sets its role as a sonic symbol of destruction. As the bow picks up speed, the sound crescendos into a sudden stop as the bow leaves the string at the beginning of the fourth beat. On that beat, the guitar drops out, and the listener is left with sudden silence for a beat before the beginning of the verse. This explosion of sound into sudden silence might serve as a musical metaphor for the explosion that frames the lyrical narrative. This moment shows what the violin signifies throughout the song: the rip in time and space of the explosion itself.

Finally, the violin acts as a musical symbol of destruction and violence at the end of the song in a violin solo. At 3:45 in the recording, the violinist uses a heavy bow on harmonics and open strings to create a scratchy, raw timbre as a backdrop to the banjo's solo. The very end of the song ends with a similar gesture to the violin's first opening, a quick upbow followed by a lift. Watching the violinist in the live context at a PBS Live recording of the song, however, shows a much more chaotic stroke.[149] He plays the double stop harmonic, but quickly slides his fingers down to create a portamento. He drops the violin from his shoulder down towards his side, cutting off the sound prematurely and causing a screech as his bow loses contact with the strings. These moments point to a connection between the lyrical content of the song and its sonic elements that makes the piece overall more emotionally affective and powerful.

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[149] Chatham County Line, "Birmingham Jail (Live) - PBS Season V," Bluegrass Underground YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVjC8eq_nqU.

On the PBS live show, the lead singer Wilson dedicated a performance of "Birmingham Jail" to "the memory of everyone that lost their lives [in 1963] and still lose their lives as the years go by in the fight for making every single person in this world stand on equal ground."[150] While the piece's lyrics only reference the events of the year 1963, the singer here is obviously aware of the bombing's symbolic connection to bigger fights against inequality. With the lyrical connection between Wallace's rhetoric and symbolic displays of white supremacy, we might also attribute the band with an awareness of the power of rhetoric and imagery on violence in issues broader than violence in 1963. Again, as a thematic touchstone, the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church provides a discursive window into broader issues of race and violence through music.

In 2013, the city of Birmingham prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing. On October 13, 2013, K. Lee Scott, a white Alabamian composer, premiered his work "Band of Angels: A Service of Remembrance for the children who died in racial violence on September 15, 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama." The Morning Star Publishers edition of the score for *Band of Angels* shows six pairs of angel wings, representing the four girls who died in the bombing—Addie Mae, Cynthia, Carole, and Denise—and the two boys shot by police the same day of the bombing, Johnny and Virgil. The background of the cover features the stained glass "Welsh Window," which the people of Wales donated in place of a window that was destroyed in the bombing.

Band of Angels is a thirteen movement piece for SATB choir, vocal soloists, piano, and congregation. The movements are interspersed with scripture readings, both between movements

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[150] Chatham County Line, "Birmingham Jail (Live) - PBS Season V," *Bluegrass Underground* YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVjC8eq_nqU.

and between stanzas. At the premiere in 2013 at the Alys Stephens Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, four choirs participated.[151] Scott wrote about his deliberations in choosing the format of the work that would respectfully commemorate the anniversary of the bombing. He wanted to avoid making an art piece totally out of touch with African American worship practices.

> A requiem seemed out of place considering that it was a Baptist church that was bombed. As time progressed, I settled on a format more consistent with the African American worship tradition. Rather than an esoteric piece, I wanted it to honor the rich traditions of the African American community with a work in a musical language that would resonate with them.[152]

Throughout the work, it is easy to find the elements that Scott incorporated in order to embrace a traditional African American worship style and respect the cultural context of the bombing. Originally, Scott planned to orchestrate the work. However, with the prominence of piano and organ in black church traditions, Scott chose to write for piano and added a note that organ could join on the hymns. For the premiere performance, the speakers who read the scripture readings were actually survivors of the bombing of the blast. Many of the pieces included in the work are Scott's arrangements of traditional negro spirituals and hymns.

The work opens with "Hold Out Your Light," a traditional spiritual. The piece is a traditional opening for worship services, and it serves as a sort of call to worship.[153] The melody is almost entirely pentatonic, but Scott adds some slight chromaticism in his harmonization. The sopranos begin with the main text from the hymn:

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[151] Choirs involved included members from Magic City Choral Society, Alabama A&M University, and Ramsay High School. The pianist at the performance was Valerie Harris.

[152] K. Lee Scott, *Band of Angels: A Service of Remembrance for the children who died in racial violence on September 15, 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama,* Fenton, MO: Morning Star Music Publishers, preface.

[153] Michael Huebner, "K. Lee Scott's 'Band of Angels,' a choral remembrance of four little girls, premieres Oct. 13," *Al.com News*, October 2, 2013, https://www.al.com/entertainment/2013/10/k_lee_scotts_band_of_angels_a.html.

> Hold out your light, O heav'n bound soldier, Hold out your light,
> O heav'n bound soldier won't you hold out your light,
> O heav'n bound soldier, let it shine all around the world.

Altos, tenors, and basses join in for a repetition of the verse. This second verse could be heard as a response to the soprano voices in the first. This idea is perpetuated when the soprano line in measures thirteen and fifteen maintains some rhythmic independence from the other voices, giving it primacy and independence. By the end of that stanza, a new musical idea appears. The tenor and bass voices call out "O Brother won't you hold out your light." They continue with appeals, saying "O sister" and "O Christian, shine out your light." The rest of the piece alternates between four part versions of the initial verse and appeals to different groups: the sopranos and altos sing to preacher, deacon, and servant. A full four part voicing calls out to mothers, fathers, and children to shine out their lights. Measures 57-64 feature a large choral ending that turns a cappella in measure 60 before the piano reneters for the final chords. After that ending, a stanza of the spiritual is hummed, with a key change from A flat major to G major, underneath a scripture reading of Habakkuk 2:20, Psalm 122:1, Mark 10:14b-16, and Psalm 46:1-3, 7. These first two verses announce the presence of God in the house of the Lord, in the next, Jesus blesses children, and the last paints God as a fortress and strength in the face of turmoil and announces God's presence.

The rest of *Band of Angels* features traditional hymns and spirituals like "Father, I Stretch My Hands to Thee" by Charles Wesley, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning," "A Charge to Keep I Have," "Precious Jewels," "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me," "The River of Life," "Harps Eternal," a

benediction, "In Paradisum," and "A Charge I have to Keep" as a second benediction.[154] The first benediction is a tenor solo with traditional text. It ends with a strong perfect authentic cadence in D major with a picardy third. However, it goes attacca into the next movement "In Paradisium," which is in G major. In hindsight, we can see that the end of the benediction was really a big half cadence, preparing the way into this latin traditional text in a drastically different register than the rest of the *Band of Angels* work. The end of "In Paradisium" ends with a cadence from E minor to G major, a mediant relationship and a weak cadence. At that moment in the service, a bass, from the rear of the sanctuary, sings one or two stanzas of "A Charge to Keep I Have," a Charles Wesley hymn, to close out the service.

The primary function of Scott's *Band of Angels* is one of a memorial. It is a remembrance of innocent lives and a commemoration of the resilience of this black church in Birmingham. The occasion for its composition and premiere at the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing meant that the piece did not hold overt references to contemporary issues of racial violence or injustice. However, Scott's work shows a sensitivity to his position as a white composer creating a piece of music to remember black victims of racial violence. Writing an elaborate requiem or utilizing a traditional orchestra might have distanced the tragedy from its context in a black church congregation. Instead, the piece's instrumentation and use of familiar spirituals make it accessible to church congregations to perform. Instead of abstracting the tragedy into some Western high classical form, Scott puts his music into the hands of the people for whom he wrote it. *Band of Angels* is not some esoteric, complicated piece only to be performed by professional

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[154] Huebner, "K. Lee Scott's 'Band of Angels.".

ensembles. It is an expression of personal grief and remembrance for churches to perform themselves.

The final song this research discusses is “Burning in Birmingham,” written in 2016 by Amy Leon. Leon, creatively known as AMYRA, is a black woman artist and uses her music and poetry as social commentary. “Burning in Birmingham” captures a specific cultural moment. The song and music video together display a moving tribute to the four little girls killed in the 16th Street Church Bombing. However, Leon’s piece does not only memorialize the victims. She uses the bombing and its imagery as a starting point for broader discussions of racism, sexism, and violence, especially in the wake of the 2016 election of Donald Trump and in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. The lyrics follow, interspersed with commentary about the sonic features of the song. The first section is sung to a slow, texturally sparse musical background:

> Bloody blows to my face
> Call me out on my race
> At war making love to you
>
> Broken spines down the line
> They say nothing’s mine
> It’s the joke of racism
>
> We’re burning in Birmingham, we are
> We’re burning in Birmingham, we are

This section is repeated. From this moment on, Leon’s work is in the style of spoken slam poetry with a musical backdrop. With the mention of Birmingham, Leon loses her singing voice, opting instead for intimate speech. It begins gently, with ambient, non-definite underlying music and rhythm. By taking melody and conventional tonal harmonic movement out of the equation, Leon forces the listener to pay attention to her words.

Dear God,
I've been here before
This place is the opposite of light
To love in a world like this
Is to love without breathing
Sometimes I love without breathing

I heard somewhere that black women
Are impossible to love
Most likely to lead a single life, unmarried

Here, the background begins to intensify with a repetitive bass line.

The last of the crop in every season
Black women are still picked, though

The listener begins to hear Leon's singing voice in the background, singing incoherent cries.

When you touch them
Your hands bleed from the thorns
Cotton sticking to their hips like Genesis
And they expect us to
Sit back
And swallow
They expect us to
Sit back
And ease
They expect us to
Sit back
And break every single bone in our body
Till we learn how to follow their lead

We are always second to some
White mans apology
Our children are always second
To some white mans wink, smirk and nod
I am a wink, smirk and nod
The laughing stock amongst the angels
As they await their newest sacrifice

Here, the musical background rises to its climax. Leon's words are more quickly paced and her musical voice from earlier doubles her words with a slight delay.

> Dear God,
> I have some questions about the rumbling in my heart
> This questionable shatter
> How easy it was for me to sink to the bottom of the ocean
> Ancestors wailing out in complaint
> Askin questions like
>
> Didn't I die for them?
> Didn't we do this already?
> Who let Jim back in the White House?
> I thought we got rid of that n*gga?

Here, Leon describes the election of Donald Trump as a regression in social progress, referring to him as Jim Crow. By asking "Who let Jim back into the White House?" and portraying African American ancestors' complaints and cries, "Didn't we do this already," Leon connects opposition to Trump's nativist and xenophobic rhetoric to longer struggles for civil rights. During his campaign, Trump's attacks on minorities struck fear into many other minority groups, and for good reason. In the ten days following Trump's election, the Southern Poverty Law Center collected evidence of almost nine hundred instances of harassment and intimidation, many including mentions of the recent election. Of these incidents, more than 23% were motivated by anti-black sentiments. Many included racial slurs, references to lynching, and threats telling black people to go back to Africa.[155] These hate crimes were not limited to the days immediately following the election. According to a study by Griffin Edwards and Stephen Rushin published in 2018, Trump's campaign and subsequent election brought a statistically significant uptick in hate crimes in the United States that, even when adjusted for other possible causes, were second only in the last twenty years to the surge after September 11, 2001.[156]

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[155] Southern Poverty Law Center, "Ten Days After: Harassment and Intimidation in the Aftermath of the Election," https://www.splcenter.org/20161129/ten-days-after-harassment-and-intimidation-aftermath-election#antiblack.
[156] Griffin Edwards and Stephen Rushin, "The Effect of President Trump's Election on Hate Crimes," *SSRN*, January 18, 2018, 20-21.

> No
> N*gger be electric
> N*gger be black
> N*gger be the only one
> In the wrong place at the wrong time
> And I am the only one left singing
>
> Dear God,
> What happens-
> When I lose my voice?
> When the sun refuses to rise?
> When my son refuses to die?
> When the jury refuses to acknowledge the history in my cry?
> When it’s three days later and no one’s coming?
>
> Dear God,
> What then?

At this moment, the sustained energy of the musical background ebbs away. At the climax of the song, Leon’s thematic focus is on her own voice, even as she raises it to its highest level. Leon sings,“What happens when I lose my voice?” and “When the jury refuses to acknowledge the history in my cry?” In those moments, her voice and her cry are the most tangibly felt. Her volume and the tone of her voice is one of anguish and embodies the history of her cry, all the way back to the violence that her ancestors experienced from the Atlantic slave trade through her present moment.

> What happens?
> I need to know
> Because this looks a whole lot like Revelations
> And I can’t tell if we’re being killed or saved
> All I know is
> I am blood stained
> And that these men
> Keep telling me about my body
> Force me to have a baby
> Then kill it for me
> A different kind of pillaging

Black women, stripped of the autonomy to choose whether they will carry a child in contemporary disputes about reproductive rights, are then forced later in life to watch their children die at the hands of police. The line “a different kind of pillaging” places this struggle in dialogue with past histories of colonization and exploitation, calling to mind the sexual exploitation of black women’s bodies in times of slavery and the plundering of Africa’s natural resources.

> You know, I heard somewhere that
> Black women are impossible to love
> And I get that
> Because once we love you
> Your days are n u m b e r e d
> And the eulogy
> I’ve
> Memorized
> Line
> For
> Line
> willbedelivered
>
> Early,

Leon’s “Burning in Birmingham” came not only during the election of Donald Trump but at a moment when the Black Lives Matter movement was openly confronting police brutality against African Americans after the deaths of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner, among others, since 2014. This last verse interweaves a conversation on gender with police brutality with a powerful ending that tapers off, symbolizing the early death of black men at the hands of police and the heavy hearts of the black women they leave behind. The music has ended. All that is left is Leon’s voice and the listener is forced to take account of her words and hold onto them as they slip away slowly.

As is evident in these songs, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing became a touchstone for broader discourses of racial violence and discrimination in the United States. Adolphus Hailstork's "American Guernica" connects the bombing to a different historical moment in which innocent people died in the middle of a bigger ideological struggle. Chatham County Line's "Birmingham Jail" emphasizes the theme of delayed justice and the role of Wallace's rhetoric against school integration in inciting violence. K. Lee Scott's "Band of Angels" memorializes the victims in a way that is musically accessible for any church to perform, keeping the memory of the tragedy personal. Finally, Amy Leon's "Burning in Birmingham" uses the bombing as a thematic window to discuss modern problems of police brutality in the United States and the rise of hate crimes after the election of Donald Trump. Music serves as its own discursive commentary on social events. As Feldstein argued in her article about Nina Simone, these songs are not just contemplative reactions to events and current discourses, they participate in powerful ways in shaping conversations around civil rights equality.

Conclusion

There is something, then, about music that has a particularly potent contribution in analysis of racial violence and injustice throughout history in the United States south. Black musicians held a unique place in white society as entertainers and performers but also as targets of racist attacks, like Nat King Cole in 1956. Highlighting the experiences of black musicians in Birmingham serves as a glimpse of an amplified manifestation of broader black intellectual discourses. Since before the Civil War, this discourse on violence and participation in a violent white society was not a monolith, and neither were the reactions of black musicians in Birmingham. Understanding the nuanced reactions to growing up black in a culture so radically set against black people is vital in understanding how the world of black musicians could include figures as drastically different as John "Fess" Whatley and his student Sun Ra.

Finally, songs in the musical discourse about the violence of 1963 in the years immediately following each engaged with the subject in different ways with different goals. In the decades since, the historical moment in 1963 Birmingham has captured the creative focus of musical artists. The poignancy of that tragedy holds a special place as a touchstone for bigger conversations about racial injustice. The songs work to honor the victims of that violence and to encourage deeper conversations and solutions for the problems of racial injustice in the United States. As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about slave spirituals in 1903, "Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things."[157]

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[157] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 14.

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