

Popular Music (2021) Volume 40/3-4. © The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the same Creative Commons licence is included and the original work is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use, pp. 388–405
10.1017/S0261143021000441

American music writing: an unruly history

ERIC WEISBARD 

The University of Alabama, Department of American Studies, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA

E-mail: EWeisbard@ua.edu

Abstract

Popular music writing has made for strange colleagues and quickly lost legacies. I want to sketch some of them and suggest how they continue to influence the US version of popular music studies, arguably more so in our moment than in the previous period that codified an academic approach. I'll be anecdotal, alive to particulars of language, affiliation, method and form rather than attempting a quantification. Ranging from William Billings in 1770 to Daphne Brooks in 2021, I'll explore how such key framings as vernacular, sentimental and literary have shaped the nature of books on song. My hope is that, in synthesizing the larger history, I can suggest why so often this work could be characterized as, to use one of Robert Palmer's favourite words, unruly.

At the University of Illinois, Bruno Nettl related in his memoir *Encounters in Ethnomusicology* (Nettl 2002), he joined a poker game with a colleague even friendlier towards popular music as a subject, musicologist Charles Hamm. The two set up a plenary on pop topics at a joint American Musicological Society/Society for Ethnomusicology gathering in 1971, with Albert Goldman, Charles Keil and bossa nova scholar Gerard Béhague, irritating more established scholars. Researching a book on US popular music books (Weisbard 2021), I came across this anecdote and wondered about linkages. Hamm, Nettl and Keil were three influential scholars rarely in the same conversation, Goldman the scorned biographer of Elvis Presley and John Lennon, and why didn't I know the name Gerard Béhague?

Popular music writing has made for strange colleagues and quickly lost legacies. A decade after Nettl and Hamm's controversial plenary, critics and academics met at Brooklyn College for the conference 'The Phonograph and Our Musical Life' (Hitchcock 1980). A John Cage performance playing vinyl and cassettes fed into a Muzak executive's presentation. Jazz's Martin Williams talked record aesthetics with rock historian Charlie Gillett and blues scholar Bill Ferris. Hamm hailed vernacular recording outdoing printed score. The proceedings were published by H. Wiley Hitchcock, who ran Brooklyn College's Institute for Studies in American Music, a space for young scholars Richard Crawford and Carol Oja but also *New York Times* critic Robert Palmer, who wrote *A Tale of Two Cities: Memphis Rock and New Orleans Roll* with ISAM help (Palmer 1979).

Hitchcock's *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (nicknamed MinUS by its author) kept tabs, across four revisions (Hitchcock 2000), of the unfolding literature that its author administered. Hitchcock, a music PhD who had studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, early noted: 'we know less about our own music than about that of western Europe' and pledged to cover 'pop songs as well as art songs' (Hitchcock 2000, preface, n.p.). His influential formulation, declaring a US musical schism between 'cultivated' and 'vernacular' modes, drew on John Kouwenhoven's *Made in America* (1948) and anticipated Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow* – interdisciplinary American studies. However, he remained Boulanger's pupil, giving a full chapter only to Charles Ives, the composer who reworked the popular from the art margins. Through the final edition, edgy composers took priority; guitar symphonies by Glenn Branca got more space than Jimi Hendrix.

Hitchcock then co-edited the decidedly plus-sized *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*: 900 contributors, over 5000 topics (Hitchcock and Sadie 1986). Hamm wrote the popular music overview. Another *Times* critic, John Rockwell, assigned pop-rock entries to peers such as Greil Marcus, Dave Marsh, Jon Pareles and Ken Tucker. Paul Oliver spoke to blues, Gunther Schuller to jazz, Bill Malone to country, Arnold Shaw and Henry Pleasants to pop, Gerald Bordman to musical theatre, Edward Berlin to ragtime, Crawford to psalmody. Judith Tick addressed the role of women; Eileen Southern the African American tradition; Nettl ethnomusicology. Rock critics were asked to accept stiff prose edits (Robert Christgau withdrew from the project), which made it fun to see them try to elide the restrictions: Marcus (pp. 532–3) called Creedence Clearwater Revival 'as far-seeing an account of the limitations and opportunities of the American way of life as the rock idiom has produced'.

The constraints of the enterprise emerged in the minstrelsy entry, which positioned blackface in opposition to the genteel tradition but never attempted the reading of racial power dynamics that Robert Cantwell (1984) had already attempted with *Bluegrass Breakdown* and Eric Lott would soon turn into *Love and Theft* (1993). Cultural studies approaches – Cage's sexuality in relationship to his music, popular genres as constructed forms to unpack – were not part of this A–Z. Instead, 'Amerigrove' marked the end of three decades of exploration ushered in by Gilbert Chase's 1987 *America's Music* (Chase contributed a symbolic entry, on populist composer and pioneering music historian Arthur Farwell), studies of canonical figures and jazz swelling into takes on multiple genres. Never had so much vernacular knowledge been put down in one place. American music had almost become a field.

Without attempting a sustained contrast, I'll note editor Charles Hiroshi Garrett's eight volume *Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd edn, which in 2013 supplanted the earlier effort. The preface stressed how thoroughly country music coverage had expanded in the now 9000 entries by 1500 contributors. Yet if the topics had become even more populist, the steering figures were now all academics, from Frances Aparicio on Latinx music to Sherrie Tucker on jazz, Loren Kajikawa on hip-hop or Jacqueline Warwick on post-1945 pop among many section editors. The legacy of critics and non-university types was pushed into the background of many a bibliography. Custody of American music had been given over to music departments.

The networks that long supported writing on American popular music have begun fading from memory now – Béhague, a student of Chase's and colleague of Nettl's, who would go on to found *Latin American Music Review*, for example. In this article, I want to explore some of them and suggest how they continue to influence the US version of popular music studies, arguably more so in our moment than

in the previous period that codified an academic approach. Connecting themes in my overview, *Songbooks* (Weisbard 2021), as well as registering work done since that book was turned in, I'll be anecdotal, alive to particulars of language, affiliation, method and form rather than attempting a quantification. My hope is that in synthesizing the larger history I can suggest why so often this work could be characterized as, to use one of Robert Palmer's favourite words, unruly.

Vernacular voices and the books that contained them

Writing about American vernacular music, from William Billings's *New-England Psalm-singer* a quarter-millennium ago, has been a twisted sister of European discourse: 'every composer his own carver', Billings declared in 1770, then got Paul Revere to create the frontispiece for a collection whose 'Chester' became a revolutionary anthem. From one regard – the 1950s Gilbert Chase regard – Billings was an American rebel who 'gloried in his musical independence'. From another – 1990s Richard Crawford – he was a working songwriter who learned how to meet the needs of singing congregations: the tune 'Amherst' 'owed its circulation chiefly to its metrical structure: It is cast in the pattern 6.6.6.6.4.4.4.4., the so-called hallelujah meter ... ['Amherst'] was chosen by many compilers because it best filled the hallelujah meter pigeon hole' (Crawford 2000, p. 139). Michael Broyles (2004) noted Billings's fascination with tales of crime and broken families, a tabloid orientation we might equate, via Dale Cockrell (1997), with early blackface performers such as George Washington Dixon. The first century-plus of American songbooks favoured psalmody and shape-note collections, but also blackface verses sold as songsters to create a profession for Stephen Foster, a mix of sacred and profane songbooks. Daniel Goldmark (2015) has traced how-to songwriting guides as a Tin Pan Alley staple. In one such, 'In the Baggage Coach Ahead' penner Gussie Davis advised: 'you must always wear your hair long enough to show people that you are the real article' (Rossiter 1898, p. 12).

The vernacular moved in the 1920s to 1950s from dialect or theatre slang on a page to individual voices captured on record, radio and film, so songbooks responded in kind. Artists and scenes were rendered as an iconic, jazzy modernity. There was a mainstream layer: the flapper fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1920, 1925); the slick magazine criticism of Gilbert Seldes (1924); the Tin Pan Alley histories of Isaac Goldberg (1930); the biography Algonquin Round Table member Alexander Woolcott (1925) gave Irving Berlin and the memoir Sophie Tucker (1945) wrote herself; the hack music surveys of 'tune detective' Sigmund Spaeth (1925, 1927, 1933, 1936, 1948) and founding middlebrow David Ewen (1944, 1947, 1957, 1961, 1964, 1977); the infinitely adaptable musical novel *Show Boat*, by Edna Ferber (1926) – ephemeral stage lights and eternal river. Jazz and popular music became institution worthy: Marshall Stearns's Institute of Jazz Studies; Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis's genre history of ragtime (1966); Américo Paredes's University of Texas-sponsored folklore of Mexican borderlands *corridos* (1958) via an outlaw story that became a movie; Chase's insistence to music teachers that *America's Music* was a vernacular tale.

Other work pushed, with mixed success (but books can last), to centre the vernacular on Black American expression, the new essence of sacred and profane. Louis Armstrong's trumpet solos filled two books (Armstrong 1927a, b), but his speaking voice filled others, from memoirs (Armstrong 1935, 1954) to the jazz criticism primer

Jazzmen (Ramsey and Smith 1939) and the collective oral history *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya* (Shapiro and Hentoff 1955). Zora Neale Hurston, at times partnering with Langston Hughes and Alain Locke, established vernacular – as performed language, ‘lyin’ up a nation’ – at the root of a Black studies perspective that could stretch from anthropology (*Mules and Men* 1935) to fiction (1937). With Ethel Waters (1951) setting a raw tone in her memoir that Billie Holiday’s (2006) soon exceeded, Black musicianship became a ‘cabaret blues’, to amplify Michael Denning’s term in his Popular Front study (1996). Appreciations extended from modernist jazz critic Barry Ulanov (1946), alert to Duke Ellington’s farflung ambitions, to *New Yorker* jazz critic Whitney Balliett’s parsing of the music’s rising brow status (1959) and even Jack Kerouac’s use of jazz to exemplify the Beat Generation as, in Joel Dinerstein’s distillation (2017), a kind of literary ‘Lester Leaps In’. Combine *On the Road* (1957) with the grainy voice of folksinger Woody Guthrie’s *Bound for Glory* (1943) and a rebel vernacular was primed for a new round of white love and theft.

From the 1960s into the 1970s, vernacular music took countercultural shape, Black American expression jostled by a new emphasis on the radicalized audience as sacred and profane. Tom Wolfe (1965), in the role of New Journalist, and Amiri Baraka (1999), creating a Black Arts aesthetic movement, were the dominant prose voices, electrifying syntax. Baraka argued with Ralph Ellison (1964, who japed that *Blues People* could even give the blues the blues), with room for Phyl Garland (1969) to comment in *Ebony*, for Eileen Southern to springboard from *The Music of Black Americans* (1997) to chair Afro-American studies at Harvard, for Ishmael Reed to write a novel of the vernacular surreal – *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) – and Gayl Jones to top even Toni Morrison and Alice Walker with her blues novel *Corregidora* (1975). Jazz researchers became socially conscious blues researchers like Samuel Charters (1959), Paul Oliver (1960) and Charles Keil (1966), or like Marshall and Jean Stearns (1968), shifted from musicians to *American Vernacular Dance*. Rock critics like Nik Cohn (1996) and ‘noise boys’ Richard Meltzer (1970) and Nick Tosches (1977) replaced jazz critics, using Wolfian sentences (Ellen Willis’s beloved phrase, ‘From the Vinyl Deeps’ [1981, 2011]), came from Wolfe’s *Kandy-kolored* first collection [1965]). Aware that a commercial sound had transformed them, they were collected in the *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll* (Miller 1980) and epitomized by Greil Marcus’s *Mystery Train* (2021). Yet there were Joel Whitburn (1973) chart books and 10 editions of *This Business of Music* (Krasilovsky and Schemel 2007), a Clive Davis insider memoir (1975), a Lilian Roxon *Rock Encyclopedia* (1969): road maps to pop diversity. Great genre studies proliferated: Bill Malone on country (2018), Charlie Gillett on rock and roll (1984), Anthony Heilbut on gospel (1971). A dynamic duo, Deena Epstein (2003) and Lawrence Levine (1977), fashioned an archival history of Black folk vernacular from banjo to the dozens. Memoirs as different as those of Charles Mingus (1971), Sammy Davis, Jr (1965) and Loretta Lynn (1976) made their musical stories into a reaction to life in a nation whose mores were being vernacularized – loosened up.

Then punk spat at what rock had become, disco records were blown up by mainstream rock fans, the counterculture generation saw Reagan and Thatcher come to power, and Greil Marcus, as evidenced by his Europe-focused punk book *Lipstick Traces*, could for a good while no longer write American studies. This 1980s moment can be overlooked but it presented the vernacular in a ‘god that failed’, after the revolution rethinking. The sacred and profane was now a Rock Hall induction, a Led Zep ‘shark incident’ paperback (Davis 1985) or Pamela Des

Barres (1987) groupie memoir. August Wilson's 10 plays for 10 decades look at Black American musicking was elegiac, like Nelson George's critical history, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (1988) or Nathaniel Mackey's avant-garde epistolary novel series *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* (Bedouin Hornbook, 1986). *Love and Rockets* cartoons (Hernandez 1985) gestured to Latinx-punk insurgency as lost borderland. Robert Christgau (1981) updated his 1970s *Consumer Guide* ratings to showcase the 'semi-popular', editing a *Village Voice* music section that gave vernacular an upper-bohemian copy edit – Lester Bangs (1987) reconsidering 'White Noise Supremacists'; Greg Tate (1992) calling for 'Cult Nat Freaky Dekes' – 'what black culture needs is a popular poststructuralism'. Older classics – Chase, Marcus, Heilbut, Malone, Gillett – got new editions that removed much anti-pop, anti-genteel belligerence. And Birmingham culture studies, an outlier in the pre-punk *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1976) days, provided, starting with Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (1979), a toolkit for reigning in, academicizing, the vernacular. This opened space for the *Voice's* Britbeat columnist, Simon Frith circa *Sound Effects* (1981), to fuse elements of cultural studies and elements of rock criticism. Musicologist Hamm, whose *Yesterdays* (1979) gave a pithy history to American song, helped found IASPM, his essays devoted to, as he cheekily called it, *Putting Popular Music in its Place* (1995).

However, our current, Vernacular: The Next Generation perspective owes to the 1990s, when academics began to achieve field reshaping numbers and most writing on popular music trended toward studies. Dissecting assumptions rather than, as earlier, manifesting or deepening them, the approach showcased early as rock criticism by Frith or folklore by Robert Cantwell became jazz studies via Robert O'Meally's (1998) Columbia cohort; new musicology taught by Susan McClary with a flashy heavy metal example by her partner, Robert Walser; ethnic studies through George Lipsitz (1990 and 1994), colleague to McClary (1991) and Walser (1993) in the Wesleyan University Press Music/Culture series; pop-conscious ethnomusicology in conversations between Keil and Steven Feld (1994); a *Black Atlantic* vision inaugurated by Paul Gilroy (1993); hip-hop studies starting with Tricia Rose (1994); a rethinking of blackface by Eric Lott (1993); sound studies in the vein of Jonathan Sterne (2002); Latin American conjunctures mapped by Frances Aparicio (1998) and Lise Waxer (2002a, b); country studies by Richard Peterson (1997) and Diane Pecknold (2007); Broadway musicals by Stacy Wolf (2002). Even cyberpunk science fiction joined the trend: 'the street finds its own use for things', William Gibson (1986) wrote, echoing Hebdige and Stuart Hall. To reread the *Spin Alternative Record Guide* (Weisbard 1995), which started with an Abba entry, is to see in Rob Sheffield and Ann Powers capsules what pretty soon would be called pop-timism; they too had theory training, like such fellow entry writers as wry future novelists Colson Whitehead and James Hannaham, or Alex Ross, *New Yorker* critic of classical alongside Björk and Radiohead.

Had sacred and profane vernacular become a text to deconstruct? Not quite, the image of Vaginal Davis on the cover of José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) suggested; performance studies scholars with 'minoritarian' allegiances, theory sharp as anybody, aspired to summon, if not an unmediated vernacular, then a no less transgressive cultural imaginary. Meanwhile, Black scholars of Black music like Guthrie Ramsey, Jr, worked to save vernacular expression from popular music studies insta-hybridity: with *Race Music* (2003), Ramsey made the Afromodernism of a Dinah Washington singing

the salacious ‘Long John Blues’ a North–South, country–city, secular–sacred and class-crossing example of just how far a blues trope might stretch. Put Muñoz and Ramsey together and you’d maybe get Fred Moten, poet-philosopher of ‘the break’ in Black music (2003), who made the ontology of jazz, blues, funk and all the rest a space of analytical boom bap. In his *Black and Blur* (2018, p. 293), Moten demanded of the Black UK and Birmingham-schooled Gilroy, felt by Moten to be antithetical to US Blackness, ‘Who the fuck you talking to?’

Something was happening here.

Sentimentality’s unfinished business

In the first chapter of *In the Break*, ‘The Sentimental Avant-Garde’, Moten restored the sentimental as a radical rather than soft category because slavery’s trauma – Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) was central, on Frederick Douglass recalling the screams of his whipped Aunt Hester – paired better with post-soul suffering, rerouting the confident vernacular authenticity claims of countercultural figures like Baraka. Embodiment, staying black and proud, was a rigged John Henry fight. The avant-garde message needed to once again be abolition: of racism, capitalism, macho. How could that be expressed? Moten elaborated in *Black and Blur*, marking ‘the unfinished business of abolition and reconstruction that is our most enduring legacy of successful, however attenuated struggle’. And note this part: ‘sentimentalism is too often and too easily dismissed by students and devotees of power, especially in its connection to what they dismiss as identity politics’ (Moten 2018, p. 186).

With Moten’s pointers in mind, we can rethink writing from before the recorded vernacular cast its spell – and beyond, into our own post-vernacular era. *Slave Songs of the United States* (Allen *et al.*, 1867), the spirituals collection published just after the Civil War, came at the instigation of Lucy McKim Garrison, whose abolitionist and feminist parents sent her South to captured territory during the Civil War; there, she published the song ‘Roll, Jordan Roll’ and wrote her best girlfriend a sentimental account. ‘Kneeling in that poor cabin with those who suffered scourgings at our hands . . . I vowed that if I ever forgot them, so might Heaven forget me!’ (Charters 2015, p. 121). Yet describing black singing for the magazine *Dwight’s*, McKim became musicological: her sentimentality was adaptable to a professional discursive mode. Sentimentalism could involve political identification with the downtrodden, bourgeois self-reflexivity over managing mood, and an aesthetic commitment to form-advancing uplift. Not to mention strong women, like the first rich female songwriter, Carrie Jacobs-Bond, whose *The Roads of Melody* (1927) documented her crafted feelings becoming her business. Literary scholar Lauren Berlant’s *The Female Complaint* (2008) called all this ‘the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture’, connecting genealogies of the novel and theatre pieces *Show Boat* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to challenge Lott’s cultural studies view of minstrelsy. Berlant insisted that sentimentality’s adaptability made it as forceful as blackface: *Show Boat* (Ferber 1926) novelist Edna Ferber’s teary Americana united traumas of race, gender, class, and implicitly, Jewish religion. Berlant wrote recognizing that, in the commodified, Céline-Dion-singing-‘My Heart Will Go On’-in-*Titanic* sense explored by Carl Wilson’s work on taste (2014), sentimentality still shaped romantic notions and popular art forms.

For much of the 20th century, the rise of the vernacular meant the purging of the sentimental. In books on American popular music, vernacular ideals rose as sentimental affiliations fell. Hughes and Hurston critiqued Harlem Renaissance respectability politics. Stephen Foster wrote blackface ditties, yet aspired to sentimental weepers and was valued for that in his day: friend Robert Nevin wrote in *The Atlantic* in 1867 that 'his art taught us all to feel with the colored man the lowly joys and sorrows it celebrated'. Yet Irving Berlin ragged 'Swanee River' metaphorically in 'Alexander's Ragtime Band', which Gilbert Seldes praised as 'utterly unsentimental' in his 1924 *The Seven Lively Arts*. Lawrence Levine (1977) stressed folk vernacular in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: African American secular song*, he claimed, 'cut through the sentimentality that marked most popular music'. Gayl Jones wrote: 'The ballads were in the vernacular but they were oral. The "people" made them, not "writers"' (Jones and Harper 1977, p. 694).

Yet we now value Berlin's sentimental later songs, too, like 'White Christmas'. He wouldn't have lasted without them. Sentimentality has been a mode of the vernacular all along. David Ritz, turning from academia to ghost writing, worked this relationship in his flowery as-told-to books (Ritz 2012), revering the better-than-true *Lady Sings the Blues* (Holiday 2006) as his model. So too did young rock critic Cameron Crowe, celebrating the taste of older sisters as his *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1981) moved from book to film. Wayne Koestenbaum (1993, p. 235) used opera queens to revamp vernacular and sentimental altogether under the rubric of catharsis: 'the wish, condemned as effeminate, never to reassemble the socialized self, but, instead, to remain in tears forever, to stay where Puccini's *La Boheme* (1896) places us'. Tia DeNora analysed *Music in Everyday Life* (2000) as professional women using sentiment as a tool. Jonathan Lethem (2011, p. 121) urged that his fan-fiction and non-fiction be read for 'impulses to beguile, cajole, evoke sensation, and even to manipulate'. Ellen Willis (1981, 2011), among her critic peers, brought feminist critique to question rock as a grass-roots art form. The Birmingham Centre cultural studies writers considered belief in a counterhegemonic vernacular simplistic at a time of what Stuart Hall (1979) called 'the great moving Right show'. Frith (2007, p. 176), joining Willis and Birmingham, was pointed: 'It makes better sense to define pop as the sentimental song'. And rock, kick though it might, was pop.

Ideas of sentimental and vernacular have pulled at each other over time, vernacular impulses purging the sentimental, then cultural studies impulses purging the vernacular. If the vernacular ultimately debated Blackness, the sentimental turned on gender and sexuality. Seldes (1924) and Chase (1987) scorned what Seldes called 'the exact equivalent of a high-toned lady', Chase 'the emulation of the elegant'. What Karl Hagstrom Miller (2010) termed the 'folkloric paradigm' validated anti-genteel vernacular: ideas of a jazz, rock or hip-hop centred genre language of vernacular overcoming conservative constraints. Tin Pan Alley, too, modernized via a slangy, theatrical, minstrel mock vernacular. It wasn't proper, but it sold. Sentimentality became the doggie in the window: sweet sounds the most compromised. Yet liberatory presentations faltered once the revolution was over. Feminists like Willis, Phyl Garland (1969), Angela McRobbie (1980, 2000) and Susan Douglas (1994) dissected rebellious masculine street identities and celebrated bedroom fans. Eric Lott's revisioning of blackface abandoned the question of minstrelsy's truth as vernacular to present it as a contested terrain of sexualized cross-racial identification – the love that went with the theft. Cultural nationalist and not

incidentally strong feminist Greg Tate (2016, p. 249) complained: ‘Oh, the selling power of the Black Vernacular’. The dark princes discovered in Miles Davis’s autobiography (1989) and Kitty Kelley’s trashing of Frank Sinatra, *His Way* (1986), turned out to be no less compelling when their constraints were highlighted instead of downplayed.

Noticing how sentimental and vernacular rhetoric thread through otherwise distinct music books can help us read and listen better. If a Céline Dion song is sentimental, and a Louis Armstrong scat is vernacular, Armstrong singing ‘What a Wonderful World’ is a delicious hot toddy of a reminder not to assume purity in either category. The vernacular was long presumed to fight, thrill and endure over time, recognized as art, while the sentimental faded, exposed as a kitschy fraud of well-meaning sanctimony. Figures like Armstrong or Elvis Presley were thought by the Gunther Schullers (1968) and Peter Guralnicks (1994) to battle dual impulses, rebellious and conformist, the split positioned as vernacular America against sentimental Europe, vernacular working class against sentimental middle class, vernacular black – or black *acting* – against sentimental white and vernacular male against sentimental female. However, Guralnick was only able to cement his *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* biography when he abandoned his rock critic conviction that the best Elvis was the blues Elvis, learning to revere the balladeer and the southern women whose sentimental depictions of Presley had the power to reshape scholarship. Generations of Armstrong analysts battled to work through how to reckon with both, to use critic Gary Giddins’s formulation (1988), The Genius as Entertainer and The Entertainer as Genius. Richard Peterson (1997), a sociologist of culture who lived from a bebop adolescence to alt-country explorations as a septuagenarian, had the perfect catchphrase: ‘the dialectic of hard-core and soft-shell’. Jessica Hagedorn (1993, pp. 188–94) – poet, novelist, musician, playwright, immigrant – offered another strong formulation: ‘pulp songs stupefy some,/awaken others./Revolution’s sentimental, after all’.

Literatures of popular music

Marlon James’s (2014, p. 512) novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* fictionalized an assassination attempt on Bob Marley, staging at one point a confrontation between Jamaican gangsters and a white *Rolling Stone* critic writing about their culture. They forced him to read his words aloud as they tortured him: ‘Man, people like me just excite you, eh? Put a white journalist beside him own “Stagger Lee” and your brain go bananas’. A door shut. But another opened. Zadie Smith’s (2016) *Swing Time*, focused on the nexus of dance and pop from the Astaire movie used as the title to a Madonna stand-in character, had enviable criticism: ‘for Astaire the person in the film was not especially connected with him’ (p. 121). Bête noire Tracey’s ‘world seemed childish to me, just a way of playing with the body, whereas I could walk down the hall and attend a lecture called something like “Thinking the Black Body: A Dialectic”’ (p. 286). Former *Village Voice* television critic Colson Whitehead’s *John Henry Days* (2001) traced the condescending early 20th century scholarship of Guy Johnson and Howard Odum in a panoramic view of lore that placed the historical Henry alongside Tin Pan Alley song pluggers, downhome recorders, Paul Robeson and a couplet that went ‘Roland Barthes got hit by a truck/That’s a signifier you can’t duck’. While Jonathan Franzen (2010, p. 200) laughed about ‘that era when we pretended rock was the scourge of conformity and consumerism,

instead of its anointed handmaid', endorsing the Mekons, novelists as different as Pulitzer winner Jennifer Egan (2010, p. 349) and mystery writer Sharyn McCrumb (1998, p. 160) evoked treacherous tropes that had lasted generations: 'it was another girl, young and new to the city, fiddling with her keys'; 'There's always a new dead girl to sing about. Always a dead girl'. Popular music had never seemed so essential to American fiction.

Then again, popular musicians had never seemed so literary. Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize aside, it was striking that in his memoir, *Chronicles* (2004), the chapter that came closest to exploring his heralded electric rocker period started with an awkward encounter with Archibald McLeish, a Popular Front type glad to hear mentions of Pound and Eliot in Dylan songs and eager to collaborate; Dylan wondered if McLeish knew Robert Johnson and anticipated failure. However, he also, in that same chapter, heard Frank Sinatra, Jr, performing in the Rainbow Room. Dylan, time would show, felt as warm to standards as he was cold to being cast as 'the Big Bubba of Rebellion, High Priest of Protest, the Czar of Dissent, the Duke of Disobedience, Leader of the Freeloaders, Kaiser of Apostasy, Archbishop of Anarchy, the Big Cheese' (Dylan 2004, p. 120). It's an easy connection to compare *Chronicles* with the Patti Smith of *Just Kids* (2010), a National Book Award winner in non-fiction for its account of the Dylan peer's relationships with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and figures like collector Harry Smith – the bohemian mix was everything: 'I tacked pictures of Rimbaud, Bob Dylan, Lotte Lenya, Piaf, Genet, and John Lennon, over a makeshift desk' (p. 45).

Yet a sense of the literary was no less vivid in Jay-Z's *Decoded* (2010), which lingered, like Dylan, on seemingly minor encounters and anti-vernacular showmanship. An argument with *Village Voice* writer Elizabeth Mendez Berry, questioning the rapper's Che Guevara t-shirt, was the friction needed to write 'Public Service Announcement' and end the book's first chapter. The former Def Jam CEO related to managerial uses of music: 'guys in corporate offices who psych themselves up listening to my music, which sounds odd at first, but makes sense' (p. 295). He didn't discount authenticity, but the bigger triumph was reconciling sentimentality and vernacular, like Scarface getting terrible news at the studio and compressing it into his guest verse on the spot. Blues truth? Tin Pan Alley schlock? He told another story about the hard-knock lies he'd concocted to clear an *Annie* interpolation: a sweet, utterly untrue tale of winning an essay contest and getting to see the show. And returned to his central theme. 'Rap is built to handle contradictions'. Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson's *Mo' Meta Blues* (2013), arching an eyebrow at the quintessential genre of vernacular recordings, was a life told through his relationship to spinning LPs. Poet and mover-shaker Kevin Young, a *New Yorker* poetry editor and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture director en route to running the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, published *The Grey Album* (2012). Named after a full-length DJ Danger Mouse mash-up of Jay-Z's *Black Album*, lyrically, and the Beatles' so-called White Album, musically, it meditated on how vernacular Blackness had become literary Blackness, engaging the dialect-vernacular blend in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poetry of masks and caged bird song, the 'Crazy' blues of Mamie Smith long before Danger Mouse and Cee-lo hit with the same concept as Gnarls Barkley.

Scholarship moved to address the intersection of popular music as literary expression. Brent Edwards made the connection essential to jazz: the scatology of Armstrong's scat, to consider why that free flow was part of a syntax, a way of

dropping words that also dropped sounds – he had to photograph the great man’s own documents when transcription wouldn’t do; an argument that ‘the literary is less an *analogy* for Ellington’s music than an inherent element in his conception of music itself and a key formal bridge or instigating spur in his compositional process’ (Edwards 2004, p. 331, 2017). Increasingly, in books as different as Edward Comentale’s *Sweet Air* (2013), the second volume of Thomas Brothers’s Armstrong biography (2014) and Elijah Wald’s *Escaping the Delta* (2004), musicians once seen as primitive masters, savants, were recast as vernacular modernists – their recordings non-representative art, attempts to wrestle a meaning out of broader shifts. For Paige McGinley, it was pivotal to see characters inside and outside of the music as *Staging the Blues* (2014), not *Stomping* them (as Albert Murray put it [1976]), or being essentialized to a place and time (e.g. Delta blues); for Kimberly Mack, *Fictional Blues* (2020) characterized Robert Johnson as much as Jack White, each narrating rather than personifying the blues. Daphne Brooks, in her new, hugely ambitious *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (2021), connects, in a feat of imaginary conjuration that she attributes to Muñoz, the criticism of an Ellen Willis and the Afromodern culture writing of Willis’s hero, playwright Lorraine Hansberry; then ends by exploring what it means for the contemporary jazz singer, and MacArthur Fellow, Cécile McLorin Salvant, to cover – as theatre, not realism – ‘The Murder Ballad’, a 30 minute number that Jelly Roll Morton set down during his multi-hour 1938 recording session with Alan Lomax at the Library of Congress (Lomax 2002).

Jelly Roll Morton? Perhaps the literary ‘tinge’ had been there all along, like the Latin one Morton famously placed inside jazz. Jazz critic Martin Williams, in liner notes to the first LP issue of the Morton tapes, criticized the distorted, self-centred narrative Morton gave of musical migrations. Later, rock critic Nik Cohn (2005) said he’d been transformed by the image of a mixed-race prostitute illustrating a page of the book that Lomax made out of the session: the Morton in *Mister Jelly Roll* who heralded that mighty wind Cohn’s founding pop-rock fantasy history called *Awopbopaloobop* (1996). Revisionist folklorists situated Lomax against his dad John (a racist but charismatic blues stager in McGinley’s account), but also against Hurston, with whom he’d also tried to research, to mixed results. Morton’s creole origins, his nonchalance recounting whorehouses, race riots and social rhythms from classical gatherings to gay balls, made him endlessly adaptable, although Lomax protested the tap musical *Jelly’s Last Jam* and as late as the 1990s, Rounder Records was asked to delete the dirtiest bordello material, to prevent political outrage. The permanent wink in Morton’s voice could never be fully captured in words. However, his book-sized contribution remained a challenge for all synthesizers of American popular music. Could our conceptions of its multilayered meanings ever encompass his cosmopolitan ramble?

Literary sentimental vernaculars and US popular music writing

It’s early 2021 and we’re watching Regina King and Kemp Powers’s adaptation of the Powers play, *One Night in Miami*, not long after viewing a George C. Wolfe and Ruben Santiago-Hudson adaptation of August Wilson’s *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (1985). The artistic wing of Black Lives Matter has been soul sustaining during our lockdown – in contrast to vernacular populism’s latest chapter in the great moving right show: outright white supremacist fascism. These filmed plays aren’t

revolutionary and epic in the manner of Louis Armstrong's opening to 'West End Blues', James Brown's groove-chorus ignition 'Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud', Spike Lee's video for Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power', Beyoncé's *Homecoming* or even the Marvel film *Black Panther*. *One Night* imagines a meeting, right after Cassius Clay becomes champ, between the fighter, his mentor Malcolm X and his friends Sam Cooke and running back James Brown, in the 'Change is Gonna Come' moment between Afromodernism and Black Power. *Ma Rainey* turns on a studio session featuring the mother of the blues, considering what it cost to lock her voice and her band inside a Paramount Records product.

Attacked by some for their sins against biographical accuracy, the theatre pieces turn on stutters and pauses in history's unfolding, stray meetings. The viewpoint is literary, teary, multivalenced and pessimistic. The creators don't, I'd argue, abandon the Black vernacular to cultural studies hybridity. They find new ways to marshal its force, queer and exegete its impact. Add to the category the dance scenes in Steve McQueen's *Lovers Rock*, a home-party dancehall sublime kept from state and marketplace, counterpart to the brutally regulated dancing in McQueen's film of the 1853 novel that fed sentiment into Black music studies from the start, Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. Or Arthur Jafa's short film *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, made public during the quarantine as a balm – a few edited minutes of a montage set to a Kanye West track: athletes dunking, gospel singers exhorting, regular people dancing, but also police sticks pounding, Hurricane Katrina engulfing, the whole mess running in a loop. The Mississippi-raised Jafa, it turned out, had been part of the discourse for quite some time: Greg Tate's banter buddy through decades of post-soul unfolding; the source of Tricia Rose's conceptualization in *Black Noise* of hip-hop as flow, layering and rupture; cinematographer for his then partner Julie Dash's abstract Gullah film *Daughters of the Dust*.

When Greil Marcus deluged readers with references and linkages, as I have been doing, he called it – borrowing the concept from fellow category-breaker Nick Tosches – 'secret history'. On the page, this summoned spirits, especially pre-Internet: Marcus's collector networks let him access songs and narratives otherwise all but lost and his criticism made the margins speak to the mainstream. *Mystery Train* came out in 1975, when Elvis was still alive, the conclusion an incandescent 'Presliad'. Breaking southern white working-class barriers that Hank Williams couldn't, his films inadvertent French surrealism, this King throwing it all away was an American studies symbol of contradictions to rival Melville's white whale. Marcus footnoted a dream he'd had about a Vegas ad appearing on the singer's penis. And nobody subsequently slammed Albert Goldman harder than Marcus, outraged at a basic bigotry that extended to the pathographer mocking Presley's 'ugly hillbilly pecker'.

Dick swinging contests proved less attractive to academics, however, than a barely published book from the next year, the Birmingham Centre's subcultures study, *Resistance Through Rituals*, whose influence swelled over time, like a Velvet Underground album rising from the cut-out racks. The apparatus of culturalist Marxism was navigable: Gramsci citations easier to track down than Harmonica Frank and Kleenex records. Next-generation vernacular studies, of the sort documented fully in the second edition Amerigrove, looked for recuperable instabilities in genres and discourses about them, often too-fierce assertions (sexist, racist, classist or just dunderheaded) of the vernacular's revolutionary appeal; put forward a modicum of archival research as new evidence; then wrapped themselves protectively in kindred citations, a reflex that soon swelled into companion books of the *Handbook of*

and *Guide to varieties*. Secret history lost out to cultural studies mapping – in popular music, standard IASPM fare.

This disposition to prefer a sober literature of the stuffed bookshelf variety over the firestarters, more presumed than examined, comes under challenge with the newer US writing I'm pointing to, if with a twist: now the renegades write as Black authors, women, LGBTQ figures, immigrants, working class. Daphne Brooks (2021, p. 39) asks:

What would it mean to put it all together and to put it in the service of the sisters? What if we could get everybody in the same room and around the same table to do some hardcore Black thinking, some mindful meditation on the capaciousness of Blackness, some deep listening to the sounds and performances that evade easy logic, and what if, still more, we could mix it up in the mosh pit with rock and roll criticism in order to tell a different story about popular music culture, one that takes seriously the women who made new sounds and, likewise, thought hard about how to go about writing down and recuperating the value of said sounds for the ages?

Drawing on Moten, she locates secret history. 'In the world of Black studies, the "right to obscurity," as Fred Moten famously argues, "corresponds to the need for the fugitive, the immigrant and the new (and newly constrained) citizen to hold something in reserve, to keep a secret"' (p. 39). She cites Marcus (1997) on Dylan's basement tapes, demanding – like a child of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), grappling us from the lower frequencies – a basement of her own.

And she casts her project as *Liner Notes*: a form that explicates, but with the intent to heighten appreciation of a work, not complicate its premises. It's a form she has participated in for artists as prominent as Aretha Franklin and Prince. Here is Brooks on that live 'Murder Ballad':

We who are there in that glass temple of jazz hovering over Central Park watch and listen carefully to Salvant, the storyteller, to ourselves, and to the room – reacting in phases to the shock value of Morton's quixotic blue tale. We listen to the reverberations in the room as the f-bomb, the b-bomb, and the n-bomb fly fast and furious, as detailed descriptions of maiming and throat cutting and crotch shooting, of lesbian sex, and of potently forthright sex talk, sexual desire, and questions posed from one woman to another on how best to pleasure each other linger in the air as Salvant and band soldier on through the strophic insistence of the song in something akin to a 'bardic trance' jam. (p. 414)

The prose evokes rock criticism, *Village Voice* style, Pop Conference style as that gathering's mix of academic and non-academic voices has solidified in yearly meetings since 2002, Brooks there every time. Yet it still represents an outlier to the IASPM or *Popular Music* norm of popular music studies style.

I expect a similar experience, in a different idiom, from the next book on my reading list: Regina Bradley's *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-hop South* (2021). These, I want to point out, are university press books: Brooks on Harvard, Bradley on University of North Carolina. One press, University of Texas, has made something of a cottage industry of the approach, with bomb-throwing critic Jessica Hopper (2015) steering one series, *Rock She Wrote* co-editor and former *Voice* music editor Evelyn McDonnell another. Poet, essayist and Marcus-admirer Hanif Abdurraqib's *Tribe Called Quest* secret history, the expansive and nakedly sentimental *Go Ahead in the Rain* (2019), put the press on the *New York Times* best-seller list for the first time in half a century. *Why Bushwick Bill Matters*, a new book from *Country Soul* historian Charles Hughes (2015, 2021), will be far more freewheeling than his last, a former dissertation, but in service of an argument about disability.

The trends I'm documenting in 2021 are not, I hope I have shown, wholly new. We do better to see American popular music writing – I'll leave aside the question of how to compare it to other writing legacies elsewhere – as contested, provisional, capsules of insight, the creative progeny of unlikely bedfellows. Unruly, to use the word Robert Palmer attached to the history he fashioned as a book companion to his role as chief consultant for the 1995 PBS television series *Rock & Roll*. Palmer grew up in Arkansas, played in bands, organized blues festivals, then went to New York, where he became chief pop-music critic of the *Times* and wrote for *Rolling Stone* and *Penthouse* yet also the *Journal of American Folklore* and *Ethnomusicology*. *Blues & Chaos* (2009), compiled by Anthony DeCurtis a decade after Palmer died needing a liver and lacking health insurance, put his drug addiction on record: 'I'm from the William Burroughs school of junkies', he told rocker Robbie Robertson. Nobody explored the depth of vernacular music, Muddy Waters microtones to Black Sabbath thud, Jajoukan mysticism and art drone, with the ease of Palmer, whose exposition made peers of general interest readers, scholars and musicians. Yet this tour guide was a rock and roller from the Lou Reed school of Dionysians.

When Palmer wrote about James Brown for *Rolling Stone* in the early 1970s (see *The James Brown Reader* [George and Leeds 2008] and *Rolling Stone Illustrated History* [Miller 1980]), then again for *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History*, he vaulted over other rock critics for his southern sensibility, valuing of rhythm over song, and ability to write about musicianship accessibly. In 1975, in *Down Beat*, Palmer lectured: 'we need a set of procedures which will allow us to evaluate Charles Ives and James Brown' (Palmer 2009, p. 4). He created them. Palmer centred a 'preference for impure sounds', the use of electricity to amplify rawness and physicality, a crossroads meeting of trickster mojo, personalized lore, and 'wide open' sin towns. He asked at the end of *Deep Blues* (1981): 'How much history can be transmitted by pressure on a guitar string?'

Marybeth Hamilton (2008), in her revisionist account of blues mythologizers, wondered at Palmer's role in this; at one point he asserted functional illiteracy as vital to Waters, Bobby Bland or Joe Turner's singing, too captured by an 'I'm Gonna Murder My Baby' ethos pushing white rock from black blues. John Lennon called Palmer on his shit, singing 'Pardon me if I'm sentimental' at the Dakota after the critic called 'Starting Over' sappy in the paper of record (Palmer 2009). Ruminating English critic David Toop (1995) challenged Palmer for calling Ornette Coleman's first free jazz recordings meandering and lacking a bluesy 'basis in vernacular rhythms'. Toop shot back: 'passion existed before blues and besides, music not going anywhere is one of the most fertile developments of the twentieth century' (p. 193). This was not just a squabble between two enormous La Monte Young fans. Where Palmer, fan of unruly rock 'n' roll anchored in African American electric eruptions, hailed vernacular, Toop's ambience revived Euro-Asian sentimental.

Is there room for this kind of conversation and the others I have been tracing to enter the front rooms of popular music writing, the classrooms, as much as the basements and secret histories? We have been given, this past decade and a half, a paradigm shift: YouTube, Spotify. Journal articles used to be easier to access than Elvis on Milton Berle; that's no longer true. The quintessential music text of pop, the record, has been challenged by another, the filmed performance. So much to pass around – who needs to rely on a cultural studies footnote? We are all Jelly Roll Mortons now, Alabama bound, songs infiltrating our books in progress. Our popular music studies are being asked to become popular music performances, joining all of the

vernacular-sentimental-literary rest of them. It doesn't seem quite proper, maybe, but when was American music writing ever anything like tightly composed?

Let me end where I began, with music and poker games. One link might be to a poker routine clip by Black blackface comedian-singer Bert Williams a century ago: silent pantomime because Williams's voice was never recorded at the same time as his body, any more than his face was his face – he said his songs were not so much written as assembled and acts of assemblage secured his legacy. 'The smile that hovered above blood and tragedy', W.E.B. Du Bois offered a tribute book (Rowland 1923); Jessie Fauset's brilliant *New Negro* chapter (Fauset 1925), 'The Gift of Laughter', resembled Ellen Willis later on Bob Dylan as the cartography of an icon's mask. In 1970, Ann Charters, a Beats scholar (her husband Sam wrote studies of *Country Blues* early and a biography of Lucy McKim Garrison late; their collaborative marriage is an untold history), published *Nobody*, the 'story of a man neatly trapped by the prejudice and intolerance of his time'. Yet Gilroy's diasporic Black Atlantic taught scholars to appreciate a problematized conjuncture. Louis Chude-Sokei's insightful *The Last 'Darky'* (2006) began with Lorca and Soyinka on masks and called Williams's legacy 'as troubling then as it is productive now'. For others, that sense came from the audio discs that Williams set down starting in 1901, collected a century later by Archeophone with extensive liner notes. Tim Brooks's *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry* (2004) lingered over each release, finding triumph rather than compromise.

Duke Ellington held onto his cards longer than Williams's Jonah Man character ever could, leading jazz for decades but imagining an art 'beyond category' – and not just musical category. In the memoir *Music is my Mistress* (1973), compiled by Stanley Dance from hotel pads that Ellington filled in spare moments, Sir Duke allowed his poetry ('Music' as a 'topless chick' you 'like to see shake it' but 'never quite make it' [pp. 39–40]) and prose poems on subjects as critical as 'Categories' to paint and splatter what jazz conservators had rendered 'quite scholastic'. Ellington mocked 'the music people insisted on calling jazz', more interested in the hybridities of his satiric musical *Jump for Joy* or the Shakespeare inspired *Such Sweet Thunder*. 'The whole world is going oriental', he predicted, 'and nobody will be able to retain his identity' (p. 203). R.D. Darrell invented Ellington criticism in *Phonograph Monthly Review* and the 1932 essay 'Black Beauty': 'Ellington has emancipated American popular music from text' (Tucker 1993). Ellington sought greater emancipation: 'I am trying to play the natural feelings of a people' and 'what is being done by Countee Cullen and others in literature is overdue in our music' (Tucker 1993, p. 46). And as jazz-as-pop critic Gary Giddins remembered, using the anecdote to kick off the multi-part Ellington monograph he smuggled into *Visions of Jazz* (1998, pp. 102–4), the bandleader left behind a signal piece of wisdom: 'You can't write music right unless you know how the man who'll play it plays poker'.

References

- Abdurraqib, H. 2019. *Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest* (University of Texas Press)
- Allen, W.F., Ware, C.P., and McKim Garrison, L. (eds.) 1867. *Slave Songs of the United States* (A. Simpson & Co.)
- Aparicio, F. 1998. *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Wesleyan University Press)
- Armstrong, L. 1927a. *Louis Armstrong's 50 Hot Choruses for Cornet*. Transcribed by Elmer Schoebel (Melrose Bros)
- Armstrong, L. 1927b. *Louis Armstrong's 125 Jazz Breaks for Cornet*. Transcribed by Elmer Schoebel (Melrose Bros)
- Armstrong, L. 1935. *Swing That Music* (Longmans, Green)

- Armstrong, L. 1954. *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (Prentice Hall)
- Balliett, W. 1959. *The Sound of Surprise: 46 Pieces on Jazz* (Dutton)
- Bangs, L. 1987. *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, edited by G. Marcus (Knopf)
- Baraka, A. [writing as LeRoi Jones]. 1999. *Blues People*. Introduction (Quill, originally published by William Morrow & Co., 1963)
- Berlant, L. 2008. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (pp. 69–106) (Duke University Press)
- Billings, W. 1770. *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (Edes and Gill)
- Blesh, R., and Janis, H. 1966. *They All Played Ragtime: The True Story of an American Music* (revised edn, Oak Publications, originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1950)
- Bradley, R. 2021. *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-hop South* (University of North Carolina Press)
- Brooks, D.A. 2021. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Harvard University Press)
- Brooks, T. 2004. *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890–1919* (University of Illinois Press)
- Brothers, T. 2014. *Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism* (W.W. Norton)
- Broyles, M. 2004. *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (Yale University Press)
- Cantwell, R. 1984. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (University of Illinois Press)
- Charters, A. 1970. *Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams* (Macmillan)
- Charters, S. 1959. *The Country Blues* (Rinehart)
- Charters, S. 2015. *Songs of Sorrow: Lucy McKim Garrison and Slave Songs of the United States* (University Press of Mississippi)
- Chase, G. 1987. *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present* (3rd edn, University of Illinois Press, originally published by McGraw–Hill, 1955)
- Christgau, R. 1981. *Christgau's Record Guide: Rock Albums of the '70s* (Ticknor & Fields)
- Chude-Sokei, L. 2006. *The Last 'Darky': Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Duke University Press)
- Cockrell, D. 1997. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge University Press)
- Cohn, N. 1996. *Awopbaloobop Alopbamboom: The Golden Age of Rock* (Da Capo Press)
- Cohn, N. 2005. *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Comentale, E. 2013. *Sweet Air: Modernism, Regionalism, and American Popular Song* (University of Illinois Press)
- Crawford, R. 2000. *The American Musical Landscape. The Business of Musicianship From Billings to Gershwin* (University of California Press, originally published 1993)
- Crowe, C. 1981. *Fast Times at Ridgemoor High: A True Story* (Simon & Schuster)
- Davis, C., with James Willwerth. 1975. *Clive: Inside the Record Business* (William Morrow)
- Davis, M., with Q. Troupe. 1989. *Miles: The Autobiography* (Simon & Schuster)
- Davis, S. 1985. *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (William Morrow)
- Davis, S., Jr, Boyer, J., and Boyar, B. 1965. *Yes I Can* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
- Denning, M. 1996. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Verso)
- DeNora, T. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press)
- Des Barres, P. 1987. *I'm With the Band: Confessions of a Groupie* (William Morrow)
- Dinerstein, J. 2017. *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press)
- Douglas, S. 1994. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up with the Mass Media* (Times Books)
- Dylan, B. 2004. *Chronicles: Volume One* (Simon & Schuster)
- Edwards, B.H. 2017. *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard University Press)
- Edwards, B.H. 2004. 'The literary Ellington', in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. R. O'Meally, B.H. Edwards and F.J. Griffin (Columbia University Press)
- Egan, J. 2010. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Ellington, E.K. 1973. 'D.' *Music is my Mistress* (Doubleday)
- Ellison, R. 1952. *Invisible Man* (Random House)
- Ellison, R. 1964. *Shadow and Act* (Random House)
- Epstein, D. 2003. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (University of Illinois Press, originally published 1977)
- Ewen, D. 1944. *Men of Popular Music* (Ziff-Davis)
- Ewen, D. 1947. *Songs Of America; A Cavalcade Of Popular Songs, With Commentaries* (Ziff-Davis)
- Ewen, D. 1957. *Panorama of American Popular Music: The Story of Our National Ballads and Folk Songs, the Songs of Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and Hollywood, New Orleans Jazz, Swing, and Symphonic Jazz* (Prentice-Hall)
- Ewen, D. 1961. *History of Popular Music* (Barnes & Noble)
- Ewen, D. 1964. *Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley* (Funk and Wagnalls)
- Ewen, D. 1977. *All the Years of American Popular Music* (Prentice-Hall)
- Fauset, J. 1925. 'The gift of laughter', in *The New Negro*, ed. A. Locke (pp. 161–7, Albert and Charles Boni)
- Ferber, E. 1926. *Show Boat* (Doubleday, Page & Co.)
- Fitzgerald, F.S. 1920. *Flappers and Philosophers* (Charles Scribner's Sons)
- Fitzgerald, F.S. 1925. *The Great Gatsby* (Charles Scribner's Sons)
- Franzen, J. 2010. *Freedom* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

- Frith, S. 1981. *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (Pantheon)
- Frith, S. 2007. *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays* (Ashgate)
- Garland, P. 1969. *The Sound of Soul: The Story of Black Music* (Henry Regnery)
- Garrett, C. (ed.) 2013. *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press)
- George, N. 1988. *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (Pantheon)
- George, N. and A. Leeds (eds.) 2008. *The James Brown Reader: 50 Years of Writing about the Godfather of Soul* (Plume)
- Gibson, W. 1986. *Burning Chrome* (Arbor House)
- Giddins, G. 1988. *Satchmo* (Doubleday)
- Giddins, G. 1998. *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (Oxford University Press)
- Gillett, C. 1984. *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (revised edn, Pantheon, originally published by Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970)
- Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press)
- Goldberg, I. 1930. *Tin Pan Alley: A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (John Day)
- Goldmark, D. 2015. "'Making songs pay": Tin Pan Alley's formula for success', *Musical Quarterly*, 98/1–2, pp. 3–28
- Guralnick, P. 1994. *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Little, Brown)
- Guthrie, W. 1943. *Bound for Glory* (E.P. Dutton)
- Hagedorn, J. 1993. *Danger and Beauty* (Penguin)
- Hall, S. 1979. 'The great moving right show', *Marxism Today*, January
- Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds.) 1976. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (Hutchinson University Library)
- Hamilton, M. 2008. *In Search of the Blues* (Basic Books)
- Hamm, C. 1995. *Putting Popular Music In Its Place* (Cambridge University Press)
- Hamm, C. 1979. *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (W.W. Norton)
- Hartman, S. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press)
- Hebdige, D. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Methuen)
- Heilbut, T. 1971. *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (Simon and Schuster, 1971; reprinted as Anthony Heilbut, 25th Anniversary Edition, *Limelight*, 1997.)
- Hernandez, L.B. 1985. *Love and Rockets: Music for Mechanics* (Fantagraphics)
- Hitchcock, H.W. (ed.) 1980. *The Phonograph and our Musical Life: Proceedings of a Centennial Conference, 7–10 December 1977* (Institute for Studies in American Music)
- Hitchcock, H.W. 2000. *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (4th edn, Prentice-Hall, originally published 1969)
- Hitchcock, H.W., and Sadie, S. (eds.) 1986. *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (Macmillan)
- Holiday, B., with W. Dufty. 2006. *Lady Sings the Blues*. 50th Anniversary Edition, introduction by D. Ritz (Harlem Moon/Broadway Books/Random House, originally published by Doubleday, 1956)
- Hopper, J. 2015. *The First Collection of Criticism by a Living Female Rock Critic* (Featherproof Books)
- Hughes, C. 2015. *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (University of North Carolina Press)
- Hughes, C. 2021. *Why Bushwick Bill Matters* (University of Texas Press)
- Hurston, Z.N. 1935. *Mules and Men* (J.B. Lippincott)
- Hurston, Z.N. 1937. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (J.B. Lippincott)
- Jacobs-Bond, C. 1927. *The Roads of Melody* (D. Appleton)
- James, M. 2014. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (Riverhead)
- Jay-Z. 2010. *Decoded* (Spiegel & Grau/Random House)
- Jones, G. 1975. *Corregidora* (Random House)
- Jones, G., and Harper, M. 1977. 'Gayl Jones: an interview', *The Massachusetts Review*, 18/4, pp. 692–715
- Keil, C. 1966. *Urban Blues* (University of Chicago Press)
- Keil, C., and Feld, S. 1994. *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues* (University of Chicago Press)
- Kelley, K. 1986. *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra* (Bantam Books)
- Kerouac, J. 1957. *On the Road* (New York, Viking)
- Koestenbaum, W. 1993. *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (Poseidon Press)
- Kouwenhoven, J. 1948. *Made in America: The Arts In Modern Civilization* (Doubleday)
- Krasilovsky, M.W., and Schemel, S. 2007. *This Business of Music* (Billboard Publishing Company, originally published 1964)
- Lethem, J. 2011. *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc.* (Doubleday)
- Levine, L. 1977. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press)
- Lipsitz, G. 1990. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (University of Minnesota Press)
- Lipsitz, G. 1994. *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (Verso)
- Lomax, A. 2002. *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and 'Inventor of Jazz'* (University of California Press, originally published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950)
- Lott, E. 1993. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford University Press)

- Lynn, L., with G. Vecsey. 1976. *Coal Miner's Daughter* (Regnery)
- Mack, K. 2020. *Fictional Blues. Narrative Self-Invention from Bessie Smith to Jack White* (University of Massachusetts Press)
- Mackey, N. 1986. *Bedouin Hornbook* (University of Kentucky Press)
- Malone, B.C. (with T.E.W. Laird) 2018. *Country Music, U.S.A.: a Fifty-year History* (revised edn, University of Texas Press, originally published 1968)
- Marcus, G. 1989. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Harvard University Press)
- Marcus, G. 2010. *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (revised edn, Picador, originally published by Henry Holt & Co., 1997 as *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*)
- Marcus, G. 2015. *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (6th revised edn, Plume, originally published by E.P. Dutton & Co, 1975)
- McClary, S. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, & Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press).
- McCrumb, S. 1998. *The Ballad of Frankie Silver* (Dutton)
- McGinley, P. 2014. *Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism* (Duke University Press)
- McRobbie, A. 1980. 'Settling accounts with subculture: a feminist critique', *Screen Education*, 34, pp. 37–49
- McRobbie, A. 2000. *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (2nd edn, Routledge, originally published by Macmillan, 1990)
- Meltzer, R. 1970. *The Aesthetics of Rock* (Something Else Press)
- Miller, J. (ed.) 1980. *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (revised edn, Rolling Stone Press/Random House, originally published 1976)
- Miller, K.H. 2010. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Duke University Press)
- Mingus, C. 1971. *Beneath the Underdog* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Moten, F. 2003. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press)
- Moten, F. 2018. *Black and Blur* (Duke University Press)
- Muñoz, J.E. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press)
- Murray, A. 1976. *Stomping the Blues* (McGraw-Hill)
- Nettl, B. 2002. *Encounters in Ethnomusicology: A Memoir* (Harmonie Park Press)
- Nevin, R. 1867. 'Stephen C. Foster and Negro minstrelsy', *Atlantic Monthly*, November, pp. 608–16
- Northup, S. 1853. *Twelve Years a Slave* (Derby and Miller; Derby, Orton and Mulligan; Sampson Low, Son & Company)
- Oliver, P. 1960. *Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* (Horizon)
- O'Meally, R. (ed.) 1998. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (Columbia University Press)
- Palmer, R. 1981. *Deep Blues* (Viking)
- Palmer, R. 1995. *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History* (Harmony)
- Palmer, R. 1979. *A Tale of Two Cities: Memphis Rock and New Orleans Roll* (Institute for Studies in American Music)
- Palmer, R. 2009. *Blues & Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer*, ed. A. DeCurtis (Scribner)
- Paredes, A. 1958. 'With His Pistol in His Hands': *A Border Ballad & Its Hero* (University of Texas Press)
- Pecknold, D. 2007. *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Duke University Press)
- Peterson, R. 1997. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (University of Chicago Press)
- Ramsey, F., Jr. and Smith, C.E. (eds.) 1939. *Jazzmen* (Harcourt, Brace and Company)
- Ramsey, G., Jr. 2003. *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (University of California Press and Center for Black Music Research)
- Reed, I. 1972. *Mumbo Jumbo* (Doubleday)
- Ritz, D. 2012. 'Divided byline: how a student of Leslie Fiedler and a colleague of Charles Keil became the ghostwriter for everybody from Ray Charles to Cornell West', in *Pop When the World Falls Apart: Music in the Shadow of Doubt*, ed. E. Weisbard (pp. 40–46, Duke University Press)
- Rose, T. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press)
- Rossiter, W. 1898. 'How to Write a Song and Become Wealthy' (Rossiter)
- Rowland, M. (ed.) 1923. *Bert Williams, Son of Laughter* (The English Crafters)
- Roxon, L. 1969. *Rock Encyclopedia* (Grosset and Dunlap)
- Schuller, G. 1968. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (Oxford University Press)
- Seldes, G. 1924. *The Seven Lively Arts* (Harper & Brothers)
- Shapiro, N., and Hentoff, N. (eds.) 1955. *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz As Told By the Men Who Made It* (Rinehart and Company)
- Smith, P. 2010. *Just Kids* (Ecco/Harper Collins)
- Smith, Z. 2016. *Swing Time* (Penguin)
- Southern, E. 1997. *The Music of Black Americans* (3rd edn, W.W. Norton, originally published 1971)
- Spaeth, S. 1925. *Barber Shop Ballads and How to Sing Them* (Simon & Schuster)
- Spaeth, S. 1927. *Read 'em and Weep: The Songs You Forgot to Remember* (Doubleday, Page & Company)
- Spaeth, S. 1933. *The Art of Enjoying Music* (Whittlesey House)
- Spaeth, S. 1936. *Great Symphonies: How to Recognize and Remember Them* (Garden City)
- Spaeth, S. 1948. *History of Popular Music in America* (Random House)
- Sterne, J. 2002. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke University Press)

- Stearns, M., and J. Stearns. 1968. *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (Macmillan)
- Tate, G. 1992. *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (Simon & Schuster)
- Tate, G. 2016. *Flyboy 2: The Greg Tate Reader* (Duke University Press)
- Thompson, A. 2013. "'Questlove,'" and B. Greenman', in *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (Grand Central)
- Toop, D. 1995. *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (Serpent's Tail)
- Tosches, N. 1977. *Country: The Biggest Music in America* (Stein & Day)
- Tucker, M. (ed.) 1993. *The Duke Ellington Reader* (Oxford University Press)
- Tucker, S. 1945. *Some of These Days: The Autobiography of Sophie Tucker*. Doubleday (Doran & Company)
- Ulanov, B. 1946. *Duke Ellington* (Creative Age Press)
- Wald, E. 2004. *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (Amistad)
- Walser, R. 1993. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Wesleyan University Press)
- Waters, E., with Samuels, C. 1951. *His Eye is on the Sparrow* (Doubleday)
- Waxer, L. 2002a. *City of Musical Memory: Salsa, Record Grooves and Popular Culture in Cali, Colombia* (Wesleyan University Press)
- Waxer, L. (ed.) 2002b. *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Music* (Routledge)
- Weisbard, E. 2021. *Songbooks: The Literature of American Popular Music* (Duke University Press)
- Weisbard, E., with Marks, C. (eds.) 1995. *Spin Alternative Record Guide* (Vintage)
- Whitburn, J. 1973. *Top Pop Records 1955–1972* (Record Research)
- Whitehead, C. 2001. *John Henry Days* (Doubleday)
- Willis, E. 1981. *Beginning to See the Light: Pieces of a Decade* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Willis, E. 2011. *Out of the Vinyl Deeps: Ellen Willis on Rock Music* (University of Minnesota Press)
- Wilson, A. 1985. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Plume)
- Wilson, C. 2014. *Let's Talk About Love: Let's Talk About Love: Why Other People Have Such Bad Taste* (expanded edn, Bloomsbury, originally published by Continuum, 2007)
- Wolf, S. 2002. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (University of Michigan Press)
- Wolfe, T. 1965. *The Kandy-kolored Tangerine-flake Streamline Baby* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- Woollcott, A. 1925. *The Story of Irving Berlin* (G.P. Putnam's Sons)
- Young, K. 2012. *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Graywolf Press)