

KILLING IN THE NAME OF STRUGGLE: AMIRI BARAKA'S REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE

DOUGLAS KERN

PhD

THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE, FILM AND TELEVISION

JANUARY 2014

ABSTRACT

This study explores representations of murder, killing, and death in the revolutionary drama of Amiri Baraka. After a brief Introduction, Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to Baraka's birth as an activist and provides background regarding the U.S. racial climate in the 1960s as it relates to his activism. Moreover, it presents Baraka's Black Arts Repertory Theatre School and how it helped establish the Black Arts Movement.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed study of *Dutchman*, Baraka's first success, to initiate an analysis of killing and murder within his plays. In addition, it examines *The Slave* and *Slave Ship*, which present revolutionary models whereby Black Power is sought, and in the case of *Slave Ship* achieved through the killing of whites.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed look at Baraka's move towards Third World Marxism. After categorically denouncing Nationalism, Baraka's public embrace of Marxism in 1974 isolated him from the Black theatre he had helped establish. Case studies examine representations of Capitalist killers in *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* and *Song*.

Chapter 4 begins with a brief introduction to Baraka's activism in the early 1990s, along with details of his son's tragic shooting, and culminates with in-depth analyses of *Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial*, *The Election Machine Warehouse*, and *General Hag's Skeezag*, all published in the '90s and performed together for the Nuyorican Poets Café Theater in 1996. Rather than depict onstage killing or murder, these plays present America's threat of death.

The study closes with an Afterword which discusses the continuing controversy which surrounds Baraka (including being stripped of the title of Poet Laureate of New Jersey for allegedly expressing anti-Semitic views in his poem 'Somebody Blew Up America. '), as well as his influence on his son's campaign for Mayor and other modern American playwrights.

LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
List of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Declaration	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	7
The Birth of an Activist in a Decade of Struggle: Amiri Baraka and the U.S. in the 1960s	
CHAPTER 2	29
Justifiable Homicide: From <i>Dutchman</i> to a Revolutionary Theatre	
CHAPTER 3	68
Killing Capitalism: Amiri Baraka and Marxist Drama	
CHAPTER 4	98
Death Threats: Continuing to Dramatize the Struggle	
AFTREERWORD	126
BIBLIOGRAPHY	133

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Mary Luckhurst for her patience, unwavering faith in my abilities, and commitment to always see me through. Dr Christopher Hogg is a true friend who continues to inspire me; I thank him for his loyalty and for steering me safely through the submission of this work. Dr Nik Morris, Dr Tom Cantrell, Dr Oliver Jones, and Professor Michael Corder have consistently provided advice and encouragement. Thank you to my faculty mentors, colleagues, and friends at the University of Maryland, College Park: Dr Michael Olmert, Dr Gene Robinson, Dr Leigh Ryan, Dr Linda Macri, Louise Clement, Nabila Hijazi, Lyra Hilliard, Paul Cote, Tom Earles, and Heather Lindenman. I thank the students and tutors at both Maryland and York who have taught me so much. In particular, thanks to my Teaching Assistants who offered countless conversations to support my process: Maya Freund, Elle Everhart, Katrina Rodis, Melissa Crastnopol, Hannah Gerstein, Shirelle Ellis, Brittany Boyd, Angela Ambrosi, and Courtney Guth.

I would also like to acknowledge my debt to the staffs of the Yale University Library, the Archives Division of the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History in Atlanta (especially Kerrie Cotten Williams and Dr Wesley Chenault), the Special Collections Research Center at the Syracuse University Library, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at The New York Public Library. Of course, I am equally grateful to Amiri Baraka, whose writings, lectures, presentations, and brief encounters always spurred me on.

Personal thanks go out to Erik C. Lee, Christopher Lenhart, Spanish Mike, and Lauren Smith. I am, of course, indebted to my family. Thank you, Mom and Dad for your endless support. Thank you to the Wells family for continued encouragement. Most of all, I thank Carrie Wells for her kindness, openness, and unfailing confidence and perseverance throughout this process.

DECLARATION

I declare that all written work and use of expression, unless cited, is my own.

Introduction

The struggle's intensification made it necessary to unveil the people themselves, their own voices and the tearful accents of their personal tragedies—brought together to make national and international tragedy. (Baraka, *Preface to Woza Afrika!* xiv)

A single piece of artwork, depicting a rather simple sketch of a face, sits by my side as I write. The otherwise unremarkable portrait from 1996 portrays a bespectacled Black man in a hat, bearing a loose resemblance to an aging Amiri Baraka, the drawing's artist. In large letters above the man's hat, Baraka has written, 'Play On!' Down the left side of the 'swathmore' acid free paper he has scrawled, 'Suppose you wanted to know the truth about everything!' (Baraka, *Play On*). Together, the writing which accompanies this sketch details the overall message of this study: Baraka's consistent goal to expose American corruption through drama. For all its strengths, America doesn't much like the truth. It is a country built on myths regarding race and oppression, often sweeping harsh realities regarding historical racism under the proverbial rug; Baraka too often attempted to dramatize such truths too dirty for America to face.

This work explores representations of murder, killing, and death in the revolutionary drama of Amiri Baraka and aims to expose his marginalized drama to the masses. Put simply, Baraka wrote and preached for drama which would scream to the heavens and shake America's faulty foundations. In terms of African-American literature, Baraka has already proven himself. It's hard to find an anthology of Black American Literature which does not contain at least one poem from Baraka. The dramatic work is another matter; his *Dutchman* remains the only play to receive consistent attention. Though this study references key moments where his poetry directly links with his drama and vice versa, Baraka was essentially a performance poet, so there is something of the theatrical in almost all that he does. In terms of a broader literary canon, though, I think it's important to recognize the embarrassingly high level of neglect towards African-American artists. In an anthology of theatre, readers will be lucky if they get Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* or August Wilson's *Fences*. Too often, *Othello*, as worthy of study as that play is, is passed off as 'the example' of a play capable of expressing the 'Black' experience. Baraka is not alone in remaining silenced in the broader sense of a Western twentieth century canon, but I feel this close study of his dramatic work will encourage further discourse and, ultimately, place him among other, now commonly studied, non-Black playwrights.

Baraka passed away on 9 January 2014. It was strange: friends called and texted me to offer their condolences as if I had lost a family member. It did hit hard. I spent a lot of time with Baraka's writings and, though I was lucky enough to meet and speak with him on several occasions, it felt strange that I would not be able to shake his hand and thank him one last time. I embarked

on this work, in part, to draw attention to Baraka as one of the most prolific American writers to date. As tragedy often can, his death has made this broad study of his rather neglected dramatic works all the more urgent. Baraka's output rivals that of W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes. In terms of theatre, Baraka is widely deemed the Father of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), and despite renowned scholar Henry Louis Gates' opinion that the BAM is the shortest living movement coming out of black America, modern playwrights remain inspired and influenced by the expressive politics born from Baraka's theatrical models. The end of Katori Hall's 2010 Oliver Award winning *The Mountaintop*, for example, openly challenges Martin Luther King's non-violent stance with a Malcolm X-like declaration of war. To label Baraka strictly in terms of African-American art, though, is to reduce his significance as a political writer capable of making international waves. In his book, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*, Jerry Gafio Watts claims, 'To bring up Baraka in a symposium on art and politics is to bring a conversation to a standstill.[...] 'Baraka is admired, hated, feared, dismissed, adored, and despised' (x). To add to Watt's list, I can say Baraka was also quite intimidating; while meeting him for the first time at an event held in honor of his 75th birthday in 2009, I told Baraka I was an admirer of his work. He simply raised his head, stared, and coldly questioned, 'Really?' Still, I could not blame him. As Baraka often acknowledged, black Americans have plenty of reasons to remain suspicious of white Americans.

In his essay, 'Reading Malcolm X with White Students,' Noel Ignatiev proclaims, 'The white club does not require that all members be strong advocates of white supremacy, merely that they defer to the prejudices of others. It is based on one huge assumption: that all those who *look* white are, whatever their reservations, fundamentally loyal to it' (101). As I read through the words of activists such as Malcolm X and Baraka, I found it increasingly difficult to shake this notion of white privilege. In his book *Theatre & Race*, Harvey Young notes, 'To talk about race feels dangerous. There is the possibility of slippage, a verbal gaffe, or, perhaps worse, a sincere and honest opinion that does not jibe with contemporary groupthink' (3). Baraka tapped into such danger throughout his dramatic work, and though I think we can agree that progress has been made over the past years, it is impossible to address Baraka's work without acknowledging its modern-day significance. Above all, I embarked on this research to better understand Baraka's struggle.

Baraka never stopped writing throughout this struggle. Early on in the 1960s, he was working, writing, and publishing in Greenwich Village as LeRoi Jones for and from within a white system of power he ultimately attempted to subvert. Once he broke from this system to establish an all Black school in Harlem, his own *Dutchman*, the very play both awarded and praised off-Broadway was then denounced as racist and full of hatred. Since the early '60s, Baraka has couched himself in controversy, and struggled to produce his self-proclaimed Black Revolutionary

Theatre; though, it's interesting to note that those artists who came before him seemed to suffer a similar fate: DuBois was exiled as a communist, and Paul Robeson the same. Richard Wright fled America, and even Hughes suffered to have his most political drama staged. These examples, of course are just a few of many whereby Baraka was influenced by others. Hughes' own *Mulatto*, first performed on Broadway in 1935, presents the killing of a white man by a Black mulatto long before Baraka had a chance to present his Revolutionary Theatre. From his essay written in the 1970s, 'Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance,' Baraka confirms the work as a potential, if not obvious, influence: 'Hughes's mulatto [...] attacks and kills his white father for disowning him and victimizing his mother' (*Daggers and Javelins* 158). In his introduction to Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Arnold Rampersad notes a brief history of other representations of violence depicted in early texts written by Black authors:

[I]n his short story "Of the Coming of John" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and in his novel *Dark Princess* (1928), W.E.B. DuBois, probably the leading African American intellectual and polemicist of his day, had depicted young black heroes enraged by racism and literally striking whites who had offended them. Black had hailed Claude McKay's 1919 sonnet "If We Must Die" as a call to militant self-defense against marauding whites. Jean Toomer's modernist landmark *Cane* (1923) included one sketch in which a black man coolly kills a white man who draws a knife on him. However, such episodes were few and far between. (Rampersad xi)

First published in 1940, Wright's own *Native Son* depicts the killing of a white woman by a Black man, and was ultimately adapted for the stage by both Wright and Paul Green. The theatrical version was first presented by Orson Welles as a Mercury Production for the St. James Theatre in New York City on 24 March 1941. Of course, this list is far from extensive, neglecting, for example, David Walker or Frederick Douglass, to name but two additional Black writers responsible for presenting violence towards whites as a path towards retribution and freedom.

As I will show in the ensuing chapters, Baraka is often commenting on and responding to such works, exposing a rich theatrical and literary heritage. To take another case in point, Baraka's short play, *Junkies are Full of Shhh...* seems a direct response to Charles Gordone's award winning *No Place to be Somebody*. It's just that, unlike Gordone's play, Baraka's work sits outside of mainstream American theatre and offers commentary on what Baraka saw as issues within American politics and society. Sure, Baraka's plays owe much to the likes of Hughes and DuBois, or even Edward Albee and Clifford Odets. Though, if you really want to situate his work with another, it seems most practical, to me, at least, to trace Baraka's routes back to Malcolm X.

Baraka always called himself a child of Malcolm, and Malcolm's politics remain a cohesive characteristic of Baraka's politics and plays. However, a closer look at his work reveals Baraka's vast knowledge of literature, theatre, and criticism crossing a wide range of cultures. To understand his political agenda in relation to his drama, then, it's important to contextualize his views. Each ensuing chapter addresses a particular aspect or decade of Baraka's dramatic output in relation to his politics. After juxtaposing Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement with Malcolm X, Chapter 1 essentially analyzes select essays from Baraka's 1966 collection *Home: Social Essays* to shed light on Malcolm's emerging influence regarding Baraka's Black Revolutionary consciousness during the early 1960s. Chapter 2 delves into the middle 1960s and early 1970s by employing *Raise Race Rays Raze: Essays Since 1965*, first published in 1972, to aid with close readings of *Dutchman*, *The Slave*, and *Slave Ship*. Chapter 3 addresses the late 1970s and 1980s, by detailing Baraka's move towards Third World Marxism and engaging with *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979*, published in 1984, to enhance the study of *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* and *Song*. Chapter 4 moves into the 1990s and uses his most recent collection of essays, *Razor*, from 2011, to provide in-depth analyses of *Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial*, *The Election Machine Warehouse*, and *General Hag's Skeezag*, all performed together for the Nuyorican Poets Café Theater in 1996.

As I traveled through these texts, I saw what Baraka saw; America's real lack of change. Baraka himself said it best, and the main title of this study gets to the heart of this: his plays suggest the killing of America, in whatever form. So, though Baraka's drama may never instigate a mass revolution, his plays remain revolutionary and radical for subverting mainstream theatrical ideals. Broadway serves as a microcosm of Capitalist America and the American mainstream. They will not produce Baraka's work because his work consistently challenges what they promote. To be certain, Baraka made sure he remained controversial, and this work sets out to reveal much of this controversy. The more controversy he spun, the less likely theatre producers were willing to take the risk. We must not forget, however, that minorities in America remain underprivileged in this regard. Baraka is not the only artist neglected in the American mainstream art scene. The powers that be seem to think that revolutionary political art and agendas seem a bit easier to swallow when filtered through systems or executives representing the very thing this art attempts to subvert. As Baraka moved from the height of his prominence in the 1960s to the 1970s, he became a sort pariah to critics and theatre producers. In *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s*, Alex Houen explains:

Since his shift to Third-World Socialism, critical responses to Baraka's literary writings have thus been largely unfavourable. For that reason, the main studies of his literary and political career say little about his activities after his socialist turn, and even Baraka's

autobiography comes to a close at 1975. From having upheld art in the sixties as something that could create new concrete potentials, 1975 marks the point at which Baraka committed himself to concrete reality. If in his eyes the potentialist aesthetics he'd called for were ultimately not adequate as political activism, the literary writing he has subsequently produced has frequently struggled to find acceptance as a literature that can move. (102)

Furthermore, in response to his own book's critical shortcomings, Watts explains, 'Although this study is limited to Baraka's political beliefs and actions through the middle 1980s, I do not want to imply that his more recent work is unworthy of critique. But by ending my study with the mid-1980s, I have been able to concentrate on Baraka's creative life and political involvements during the height of his prominence' (464). Much like Watt's describes, too often, critical responses to Baraka's work compartmentalize his output and much of what is written about regards the 1960s. By expanding my study to offer a more comprehensive look at Baraka's career as a playwright, I argue that this critical marginalization is more a backlash regarding his politics, and not necessarily a reduction in quantity or quality.

To close this introduction, then, I would like to reference a rather unlikely example of such work, which premiered just two years after Baraka's '96 trio at the Nuyorican. Warren Beatty's film *Bulworth* (1998), co-written by Beatty and Jeremy Pikser¹, links directly with Baraka's dramatic message to expose American corruption. The film depicts Senator J. Billington Bulworth's transformation from a complacent, big money puppet to a forthright, avant-garde politician ready and willing to spill the truth regarding race and Capitalism in America. Though the film was promoted and distributed in the mainstream by 20th Century Fox, *Bulworth's* clear anti-American message is relentless. After his fully-fledged conversion spurred on by a Black prophet, Bulworth, played by Beatty, suggests whites, or any other source of contention against self-determination of the people, be eliminated. In the end, for speaking the 'truth,' Bulworth's life hangs in the balance as he is shot by an unnamed and unseen assassin. The message clearly echoes Baraka's dramatic representations, so it is not surprising that Baraka himself plays the prophet and is given the last line of the film. In a recent article from *The Nation*, published in 2013, Beatty's co-author, Pikser, discusses Baraka's line and ultimate involvement with the script and film:

"You can't be no ghost, Bulworth. You got to be a spirit!" he demands. (These wonderfully poetic lines were written by the great poet himself, as was all the glorious dialogue spoken by his character—so if he's magical, it's Baraka's own magic.) The meaning was clear to the 16-year-old girl in the test screening in the north Bronx. "He's saying," she told the

¹ For their collaboration in writing *Bulworth*, both Beatty and Pikser were nominated for an Academy Award for best screenplay.

interviewer, “you’ve got to make a difference with your life.” The point isn’t if you live or die, but whether your life is worth living. (Pikser)

Within *Bulworth*, Baraka is still interested in invoking unique representations of death for audiences. A ghost conjures a weak or reduced appearance of the dead, while a spirit carries the strength to provoke change. In his preface to *Amiri Baraka & Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters*, edited and collated by Claudia Moreno Pisano in 2013, Baraka remembers, ‘[A]s I moved more directly into political activism and away from the icy literary world, I grew impatient with a mere infatuation with language. That language that I still admired was to signify action, a move away from the given, the static, the dead’ (xxiii). By both writing and performing his own dramatic lines in the film, Baraka helped shape *Bulworth*², which continues to call upon audiences as it spreads his political message against mainstream America.

To perform Baraka’s plays now as potential challenges to the mainstream seems appropriately responsive, as all of his dramatic works set out to teach the audience. Certainly, Barack Obama’s election as President stands as a leap forward in American politics; nevertheless, Baraka’s drama remains piercingly relevant. Baraka himself acknowledged the significance of Obama’s election; I heard him say so in person on more than one occasion. Yet, he remained critical because he both felt and saw a real lack of change. It is important to note, that since 1960, Baraka had placed himself in ‘real’ politics. He was directly responsible for getting the first Black mayor elected in Newark New Jersey, he served as leader and chair of the Congress of African people, and helped lead the first Black political caucuses in the United States. Interestingly, though, in his brief article for *The Nation*, Pikster also addresses how Obama has recently “‘talked longingly of going Bulworth,” in the face of “hindrances on him”” (Pikster). Here, Obama references the film to express his desire to speak out regardless of the risks. Given the climate of mainstream politics in America, with unstable bipartisan relations to repair, the President’s offhanded comment is more a less a fantasy. Nonetheless, the statement does, however loosely, connect Barack with Baraka in supposing that the ‘truth’ should be laid (or played) out for audiences; now, that remains revolutionary.

²The film is dedicated to an A.B. among others. Most likely, the initials stand for Amiri Baraka.

Chapter 1

The Birth of an Activist in a Decade of Struggle: Amiri Baraka and the U.S. in the 1960s

To register people to vote [...] Malcolm [X] called out “The Ballot or the Bullet,” which should still resonate today, after two stolen elections and the Democratic presidential nomination of a colored guy named Obama. From Alabama to Barack Obama, “The Ballot or the Bullet” still makes great sense. (Baraka, *Home* 18)³

The above, quoted from Amiri Baraka’s new introduction to the 2009 Edition of *Home: Social essays*, originally published in 1966, suggests that, 45 years after his assassination, Malcolm X’s highly politicized call for action still remains sharply relevant. What makes this citation noteworthy, though, is Baraka’s connection to the message as a committed follower of Malcolm X’s political agenda, both during the 1960s and, to a large extent, today: ‘[A] great number of my generation[...] were Malcolm’s Children’ (Baraka, *Home* 19). By echoing ‘The Ballot or the Bullet’ during the 2008 U.S. Presidential election, Baraka demonstrates a link between the injustices committed against Blacks of his generation and the continuing struggle to erase racism in the United States today. As a political activist, poet, essayist, novelist, and playwright since the late 1950s, Baraka fought for justice and used his writing as a tactic to gain power for black Americans and the working-class. This chapter traces Baraka’s birth as an activist as a follower of Malcolm X and addresses his relationship to the Black Arts Movement. In order to understand Baraka’s political development, the racial climate in the U.S. during the 1960s, which spawned both the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, must first be brought into focus.

I should also address Baraka’s name before I continue. Baraka’s story is one of transformation, and a discussion of his political journey as an artist should recognize this. In fact, born Everett Leroy Jones in 1934, in Newark, New Jersey, Baraka actually published under the name *LeRoi* Jones before deciding to embrace ‘blackness’ by ‘discarding [his] “slave name”’ in 1967 (Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* 376). Baraka explains, ‘It was [Hajj] Heesham who gave me the name Ameer Barakat (the Blessed Prince).[...] Later, under [Maulana] Karenga’s influence, I changed my name to Amiri, Bantuizing and Swahilizing the first name and the pronunciation of the last name as well.[...] hence Baraka’ (*Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* 376). It should be noted, then, in most instances, except those cases where I feel it especially significant to refer to the author as LeRoi Jones, I will address my subject by the name he has chosen, Amiri Baraka.

³ Malcolm X gave his ‘Ballot or the Bullet’ speech at Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio on 3 April 1964 to encourage his audience to gain political power through the right to vote, or take up arms if politicians did not keep their promises: ‘We’re going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet. It’s one or the other in 1964. It isn’t that time is running out—time has run out!’ (Breitman 23, 25).

Finally, it should be noted that I am well aware of the rather conflicted debate regarding the use of the term Black over African-American. A study of the 1960s in America will actually reveal a wide range of terms (some of which are now considered highly offensive), including Negro, Colored, Black, Afro-American, and, eventually, African-American. I would like to make it clear, when writing on my own terms (that is, in my own words), I choose to use the term Black in place of African-American, for much the same reason I use Baraka instead of Jones, because 'Black' is how the majority of the authors I have encountered identify themselves.

The United States during the 1960s⁴

In 1955, a non-violent bus boycott was led by a young Baptist minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. in response to Rosa Parks' now famous refusal to let a white man take her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama (Scharine 141). Today, young people are inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott, but it is important to consider why blacks in Montgomery were moved to action. Black passengers were forced to pay their fares at the front door and then were sent to the back doors to board the bus:

No matter if a white person never got on the bus and the bus was filled up with Negro passengers, these Negro passengers were prohibited from sitting in the first four seats because they were only for white passengers. It went beyond this. If the reserved section for whites was filled up with white persons, and additional white persons boarded the bus, then Negro passengers sitting in the unreserved section were often asked to stand up and give their seats to white persons. If they refused to do this, they were arrested. (King Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* 53)⁵

Across the United States steps toward equality were halted by such backward laws⁶, but although King and several others were arrested on boycott charges, open seating was finally allowed more than a year later (Scharine 141).

⁴ I am aware that this summary is quite selective in content. I highlight moments necessary to better understand the racial climate during the 1960s. This study is meant to focus on Baraka's activism through theatre. For more regarding a history of the United States during this decade, places to start are Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York: Bantam Books, 1993 and David Farber's *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994. For a broad range of primary source materials see *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader*, Ed. Brian Ward, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

⁵ Several authors writing in or about the 1960s will use the term Negro. 'Black' was not yet the accepted term.

⁶ For a detailed essay on segregation in America during the 1960s, see Thomas Noer's 'Segregationists and the World: The Foreign Policy of the White Resistance' in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003. To give just one example of the horrors of the time, 'In the 1950s and early 1960s, this white-owned and operated television station [WLBT in Jackson, Mississippi] used its airwaves to support the segregation of whites from African-Americans. National newscasts about the civil rights movement were censored, segregationist views were openly espoused, and no African-Americans[...] were allowed any airtime on the

There were, of course, a number of important Black political activists and organizations before the bus boycott, such as Marcus Aurelius Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)⁷, which was started in 1914 and preached Black Nationalism with the belief that black Americans should return to Africa (X and Haley 79). However, before King's successful non-violent action, the Civil Rights movement 'had only one main cutting edge: litigation' (Wofford 103). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), organized by whites⁸, led 'lawsuits in the 1940s and 1950s successfully striking down segregation in one area of public life after another' (Wofford 103). For example, The U.S. Supreme Court officially outlawed segregation in state schools on 17 May 1954, affirming 'that "separate but equal" facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 107). In other words, there had been supposed progress for black Americans before 1955, but the new laws were not always upheld and did little to quell racist attitudes. Beyond the unjust bus practices, throughout the United States, and especially in the south, Blacks could still not go to the so-called white schools, enjoy public parks, or attend any of the main cinemas. As King wrote, 'in Atlanta, I could not attend any of the theaters. There were one or two Negro theaters, but they didn't get any of the main pictures' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 8)⁹. As a result, new organizations, led by black Americans, such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) or the Southern Leaders Conference (later the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or SCLC), both led by King, emerged to combat the resistance to civil and human rights through protest and public rallies.

By 1960, individuals and organizations inspired by King, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), were participating in mass protest: 'The young students of the South, through sit-ins and other demonstrations, gave America a glowing example of disciplined, dignified non-violent action against the system of segregation' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 137). These students would 'sit down and demand equal service at variety lunch counters' and, despite severe hostility and resistance, achieved 'integration in hundreds of communities at the swiftest rate of change in the civil rights movement up to that time' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 137). Variety stores, such as Woolworths, are retail stores which are relatively inexpensive and sell a wide variety of items. During the 1960s, many of these stores housed segregated lunch counters

station' (Streeter 42). The U.S. government did not intervene until 1971, when, for the first and only time in the medium's history, the government permanently took away the station's license to broadcast (Streeter 42).

⁷ For an extensive look at Garvey and the UNIA see *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Ed. Robert A. Hill, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983-1990.

⁸ At a sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, King exclaimed, 'We must never forget that such a noble organization as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was organized by whites, and even to this day gains a great deal of support from Northern and Southern white persons' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 48).

⁹ King uses the American term 'theaters' here when referring to segregation in cinemas.

which served inexpensive meals to whites only. King remembers, 'In many of the stores downtown [in Atlanta], I couldn't go to a lunch counter to buy a hamburger or a cup of coffee' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 8). King's support and involvement in these peaceful demonstrations would also influence another key moment in American History, the presidential election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

In October of 1960 King was arrested 'along with some two hundred eighty students in a sit-in demonstration seeking to integrate lunch counters' in Atlanta, Georgia (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 145). The charges for the sit-in were eventually dropped, but, as a result of his arrest, King was transferred to State Prison and held for violating probation for an earlier traffic offense (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 142). In response, on 26 October 1960, Senator Kennedy, the Democratic presidential candidate, called King's wife, Coretta Scott King, to express his concern (Wofford 18-20). Shortly after, Kennedy's brother and then-advisor, Robert Kennedy, called Judge Oscar Mitchell requesting King's release from prison (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 142). King was released the next day and publicly announced that he was indebted to the Kennedys for their actions (Wofford 22). At that time, 'King had a larger personal following than any other Negro leader and could reach the mass of Negro voters as no one else then could' (Wofford 12). As a result, Kennedy received strong support from Black voters and became the first ever Catholic President by winning one of the closest elections in American History on 8 November 1960. King later ruminated, '[Kennedy] was running for an office, and he needed to be elected, and I'm sure he felt the need for the Negro votes. So I think that he did something that expressed deep moral concern, but at the same time it was politically sound' (King, Jr., *The Autobiography* 148). However, despite King's influence and growing support for the non-violent movement, the black community remained divided.

In his 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'¹⁰ written in April of 1963, King describes the opposing force:

It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best-known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America.
(King Jr., *The Autobiography* 197)

Muhammad's organization, the Nation of Islam (NOI), gained national attention through the efforts and help of Minister Malcolm X, an admitted ex-convict who discovered Muhammad's movement

¹⁰ King was arrested on 12 April 1963 for violating a state circuit court injunction against protests. Shortly after his arrest, white Birmingham ministers wrote to King to ask that demonstrations be stopped. The 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' is King's response (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 170, 187).

while in prison. Malcolm had, in fact, encountered the concept of Black Nationalism as a young boy; his father was a 'dedicated organizer' for Garvey: '[...] in my childhood I had been exposed to the Black Nationalist teachings of Marcus Garvey – which, in fact, I had been told had led to my father's murder' (X and Haley 79, 493). With Muhammad now as his guide, Malcolm X preached his own Black Nationalist policy: 'No sane black man really believes that the white man ever will give the black man anything more than token integration.[...] The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches that for the black man in America the only solution is complete separation' (X and Haley 348). The NOI's views, as expressed by Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and another young minister, Louis X (known now as Louis Farrakhan), were aired to the American public in late 1959 through a television program titled 'The Hate That Hate Produced.' Today, Louis Farrakhan remains the controversial acting head of the NOI. The television program, hosted by Mike Wallace, contains audio sound bites from Farrakhan's play *The Trial*, documentary footage of speeches by Malcolm and Muhammad as well as interviews of Black Nationalist figures conducted by Louis Lomax. *The Trial* is an original play written by Farrakhan, which dramatizes a symbolic trial of the white man for his crimes against non-whites. The play was performed in 1960 in New York's Town Hall just off Broadway and at Boston's John Hancock Hall as part of a larger pageant dealing with the history, plight and ultimate salvation of black Americans titled *Orgena* ('*Orgena* Tells True History[...] 6). Presented in such pageantry, the separatist doctrine of these nationalist organizations shocked white America: 'In a way, the public reaction was like what happened back in the 1930s when Orson Welles frightened America with a radio program describing, as though it was actually happening, an invasion by "men from Mars"' (X and Haley 339). The title and content of this broadcast attacked the status quo and led many viewers to label Malcolm X and the NOI as teachers of hate and 'black supremacists'. On the other hand, the story was 'hot, hot copy, both in the white and the black press. *Life*, *Look*, *Newsweek* and *Time* reported [on the NOI]' and before long Malcolm X became their spokesperson and was invited to defend his position on panel discussions and debates on television and radio (X and Haley 346). Just as King's non-violent movement was gaining momentum, America was introduced to Malcolm X.

In her essay, 'Black Nationalism: The Sixties and the Nineties,' Angela Davis recalls:

I remember the moment when I first felt the stirrings of "nationalism" in my—as I might have articulated it then—"Negro Soul." This *prise de conscience* occurred during a lecture delivered by Malcolm X at Brandeis University, where I was one of five or six Black undergraduates enrolled. I might have said that I felt "empowered" by Malcolm's words—except that the notion of power had not yet been understood in a way that separated the exercise of power from the subjective emotions occasioned by an awareness of the possibility of exercising it. (Davis 317)

Like Davis, many black Americans found that this desire for empowerment or self-determination, sparked by Malcolm, was not being fulfilled by King and his movement. As the 1960s rolled on King's achievements in the South were mere tokens for those continually suffering the debilitating brutality of racism across the United States. Though the Montgomery bus boycott and non-violent peaceful protests led to the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, black Americans who gave their vote to Kennedy grew tired of waiting for the new government in Washington DC to act on promises made concerning civil rights during the presidential campaign; civil rights policies were put on hold as the President's administration decided what to do about Cuba and their revolutionary leader Fidel Castro (Farber 25). A logical response to these frustrations was to break from the oppressive system, and the Muslims of the NOI continued to preach nationalism and fervently practiced their separatist views; whites were barred from attending NOI mass rallies – 'the first time the American black man had ever dreamed of such a thing,' according to Malcolm (X and Haley 351). In actuality, the NOI were simply adhering to standards long established by whites: 'If you wanted to visit a church attended by white people, you would not be welcome. For although your white fellow citizens would insist that they were Christians, they practiced segregation as rigidly in the house of God as they did in the theater' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 171). As minister of the NOI Muslim Temple Number Seven—later known as Muhammad's Mosque Number 7—in New York City, Malcolm continued to recruit members and teach the hypocrisy of America's so-called democracy, while King prepared to be heard in Washington.

On 28 August 1963 King delivered his 'I Have a Dream' speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and cried out for a time when black and white Americans could live together in peace and equality. According to King, 'It was a shout which reached the ears of a President and stirred him to unprecedented statesmanship' (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 218). During his first two years as President, Kennedy felt pressure to toe the line as a result of 'his razor-thin margin of victory,' but in 1963 began developing a new proposal for civil rights (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 218, 235-236). Nevertheless, Malcolm X, along with his militant supporters, disregarded King's dream and recognized the ongoing nightmarish conditions of race relations in America:

I observed that circus. Who ever heard of angry revolutionists all harmonizing "We Shall Overcome ... Suum Day..." while tripping and swaying along arm-in-arm with the very people they are supposed to be angrily revolting against? Who ever heard of angry revolutionists swinging their bare feet together with their oppressor in lily pad park pools, with gospels and guitars and "I Have a Dream" speeches? (X and Haley 388)

Malcolm saw the March as nothing more than a show, referring to the demonstration as the "Farce on Washington" (X and Haley 388). But, although Muhammad made him the Nation's first

National Minister in 1963, Malcolm's outspoken militant persona and the increasing publicity centered on him caused several high ranking members of the NOI, including Louis Farrakhan, to criticize his methods. With King under scrutiny from militant black groups and Malcolm receiving disapproval from his own organization, the tragedies and events which followed the March on Washington would force both leaders to consider their positions:

On September 15, 1963—just eighteen days after Dr. King dreamed of “all of God’s children” joining hands—a bomb interrupted Sunday school at the Birmingham Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Four children died and twenty-one other people were injured.[...] Ten weeks after the Birmingham bombing, John F. Kennedy, who had in the first six months of 1963 moved from seeing racial problems as “low priority” to the proposal of the most comprehensive civil rights bill in America’s history, was assassinated. (Scharine 150)

In response to the murder of the four black girls in Birmingham, King acknowledged his militant opposition and expressed an understanding of their beliefs:

We have been consistent in standing up for nonviolence. But more and more we are faced with the problem of our people saying, “What’s the use?” And we find it a little more difficult to get over nonviolence. And I am convinced that if something isn’t done to give the Negro a new sense of hope and a sense of protection there is a danger we will face the worse race riot we have ever seen in this country. (King Jr., The Autobiography 233)

Without ever abandoning his values, or ever explicitly going against his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964, King’s rhetoric began to shift ever so slightly after the Birmingham bombing. And, although he also stayed true to his personal and political beliefs, Malcolm explicitly disobeyed strict orders from his mentor and teacher, Muhammad, that no minister should make any remark at all concerning the assassination of Kennedy. On 4 December 1963, after delivering his ‘God’s Judgment of White America’ speech, which focused on the March on Washington and the failure of Black leadership, Malcolm was asked to give his opinion regarding President Kennedy’s assassination (Karim 20). Despite Muhammad’s demands, Malcolm replied that he saw it as a case of “the chickens coming home to roost” (X and Haley 411). In his autobiography, Malcolm explains what he meant: ‘I said that the hate in white men had not stopped with the killing of defenseless black people, but that hate, allowed to spread unchecked, finally had struck down the country’s Chief of State’ (411). Malcolm’s statement made headlines and, regardless of his meaning, as far as the NOI was concerned, the damage had been done. The next day, Muhammad suspended and silenced Malcolm X for ninety days (X and Haley 411). After the suspension was announced, Malcolm’s detractors in the NOI began to accuse him of rebelling against Muhammad. Malcolm felt his life was being threatened and, without losing any of his

fervor for activism, officially split from the NOI shortly after being silenced (X and Haley 420). In the year or so after separating from the NOI, Malcolm traveled to Africa and Mecca for a holy pilgrimage, founded two separate Black-only organizations, The Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), and continued to serve as a leader of the Black community with a slightly different outlook: “‘I’ve had enough of someone else’s propaganda.[...] I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity *as a whole*’” (X and Haley 483).

In fact, while he continued to call for action against racism ‘by whatever means necessary,’ Malcolm actually accepted an invitation to Selma, Alabama by the SNCC (X, ‘The Ballot or the Bullet’ 24). While there, on 5 February 1965, Malcolm met with Coretta Scott King and, according to her, expressed the need to present an alternative to King’s non-violent struggle so that “‘it might be easier for whites to accept Martin’s proposals’” (X and Haley 51). Just sixteen days later, on 21 February, Malcolm X was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in New York. However, despite his death, black American’s desire for power, which Angela Davis remembers feeling while hearing Malcolm speak, would carry on. On 16 June 1966, during a huge mass meeting in a city park while on a march with King, the leader of the SNCC, Stokely Carmichael (who later changed his name to Kwame Ture), proclaimed, “‘What we need is black power’” (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 320). Although the phrase is widely considered to have appeared first in Richard Wright’s *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, the concept of Black Power, as expressed by Ture that day, readily appealed to ‘people who had been crushed so long by white power and who had been taught that black was degrading’ (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 320). The phrase initiated a movement which aligned itself with Black Nationalism. In his book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, co-written by Charles V. Hamilton in 1967, Ture explains the slogan:

It is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society. (Ture and Hamilton 44)

Through the Black Power movement Malcolm’s teachings lived on, and King himself recognized the appeal. In a speech titled ‘The Necessity for Temporary Segregation’ given on 25 March 1968, King relented:

There are points at which I see the necessity for temporary segregation in order to get to the integrated society.[...] I’ve seen this in the South, in schools being integrated, and I’ve seen it with Teachers’ Associations being integrated. Often when they merge, the Negro is

integrated without power.... We don't want to be integrated out of power; we want to be integrated *into* power. (King Jr., *The Autobiography* 325)

However, perhaps in response to King's growing shift away from the status quo, in which he became increasingly verbal about his ardent disapproval regarding the war in Vietnam, just over a week later, on 4 April, King, too, was assassinated at Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Coincidentally, King delivered his first antiwar speech at New York's Riverside Church on 4 April 1967, exactly one year prior to his assassination.

Despite certain successes, with King's demonstrations in Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma inspiring the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the general hopelessness felt by the black masses in America spawned an ever-growing need for a multifaceted agenda concerning Black Nationalism. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's proposal in 1957, the first major step towards civil rights taken by the American government since 1875 (when Amendments to the U.S. Constitution supposedly granted citizenship and the right to vote to former slaves), established a Commission on Civil Rights which guided further government action in the sixties (Wofford 123, 461). The Act of 1960 introduced federal inspection of voter registration polls and proposed penalties for restricting the right to register or vote, while the Act of 1964 'essentially outlawed racial discrimination at all places of public accommodation, including hotels, restaurants, and theaters'¹¹ (Farber 96). Finally, to combat officials who continued to refuse to register black voters, despite the Civil Rights Act of 1960, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 'mandated Justice Department intervention to provide federal examiners anywhere voter registration discrimination occurred' (Farber 110). The government's actions could not change minds overnight, however, and these laws' general lack of influence over how Blacks were treated created a desire for Black solidarity which would instill racial pride and self-determination. After Malcolm X, along with the Black Power movement, came the Black Arts movement and a driving force within that movement, Amiri Baraka. Having laid out the background of the struggles and rapid fluxes of the 1960s in relation to racial politics, it is now possible to discuss Baraka's political activism and his move towards a revolutionary theatre.

Developing a Manifesto

In 1954, Baraka (then Jones) dropped out of Howard University and, in 1957, received an 'undesirable' discharge from the U.S. Air Force for allegedly harboring communist sympathies (Baraka later explained that these accusations stemmed from the fact that he was studying a great deal of European literature, including works on the avant-garde, surrealism and dada). That same year, he moved to Greenwich Village in New York (Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* 131,

¹¹ As with King's use of the term, the word 'theaters,' here, is used instead of cinemas.

175-77, 182)¹². It was there that he first began publishing his early poems¹³ and essays and met his first wife, a Jewish white woman named Hettie Cohen (now Hettie Jones).¹⁴ Interestingly, although she concentrates on the importance of naming in her essay 'Keeping up with the Joneses: The Naming of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones,' Deborah Thompson does not mention Baraka's curious need to change some of the names and titles mentioned in his autobiography. Thompson draws upon the significance of Baraka's personal alteration: 'Baraka's book says, on the cover, "*The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* [by] Amiri Baraka.'" This seeming contradiction—that the name of the writer does not match the subject of the autobiography—is only the first of many clues not only that names matter a great deal[...] but also names are a primary material of creative and artistic activity' (Thompson 85). Given this statement, it seems strange that Thompson does not go on to mention Baraka's 'creative and artistic activity' as it relates to some of the 'fake' names and titles provided in the autobiography. Most obviously, his ex-wife, Hettie Cohen, becomes Nellie Kohn in his memoirs¹⁵. These thinly veiled disguises seem, in part, to be declarations of Baraka's conflicted feelings towards the relationships he developed while living in the Village. What is important to understand here is that, while in Greenwich, Baraka found himself mostly associating and assimilating with white America. In the original introduction to *Home: Social Essays*, first published in 1966, Baraka admits, 'Having read all of whittie's books, I wanted to be an authority on them. Having been taught that art was "what white men do," I almost became one, to have a go at it' (22). It was during this time that Baraka set out to publish, with Cohen, his own magazine with works by poets and writers, which, according to his autobiography, he titled *Zazen* (220). Besides Thompson, other critics have failed to raise the point regarding Baraka's license with names. In his book, *Contemporary African American Theater: Afrocentricity in the Works of Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, and Charles Fuller*, Nilgun Anadolu-Okur does not seem to catch the distinctions. He provides the actual name of Baraka's wife, but fails to provide the genuine magazine title: "In 1958 he married Hettie Cohen with whom he ventured on several projects of publishing and editing, the first of which was *Zazen*" (78). The actual title of the magazine is *Yugen*, and contains material written by Baraka and others, such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 222):

¹² All citations from Baraka's autobiography are taken from the updated Lawrence Hill edition, published in 1997.

¹³ *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, Baraka's first collection of poems, was published in 1961.

¹⁴ Baraka and Hettie Jones had two daughters, Kelli and Lisa Jones. Lisa Jones is the author of *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair*, New York: Anchor Books, 1995. For more on Baraka's first wife, see her own autobiography, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, New York: Grove Press, 1997.

¹⁵ It should be noted that both the original Freundlich Books edition from 1984 and the reprinted Lawrence Hill edition from 1997 of Baraka's autobiography contain this name change.

The first issue was evenly divided between black and white writers. By the third issue there was not one black writer at all (though I was still an editor)! At the same time the normal trepidation I felt when confronted with anything in the U.S. which I knew historically must be in some way linked to white supremacy made me wary as I entered into these new relationships. I did think that white people would be opposed to a black dude even being a writer, even saying it.[...]

I was 'open' to all schools within the circle of white poets of all faiths and flags. But what had happened to the blacks? What had happened to me? How is it that there's only the one colored guy? (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 223, 231)

It is clear, even early on, that the turbulent racial climate of the late 1950s had already caused Baraka to feel slightly detached from white society. And yet, his passions had not yet sent him searching for answers: 'I thought my function was simply to talk about everything as if I knew ... it had never entered my mind that I might really like to find out for once what was actually happening someplace else in the world' (Baraka, *Home* 24).

However, in 1960, Baraka traveled to Cuba and published an essay about his trip titled 'Cuba Libre' that same year. I find his conclusion to this early composition vital in understanding his budding political awareness:

The rebels among us have become merely people like myself who grow beards and will not participate in politics.[...] But name an alternative here. Something not inextricably bound up in a lie. Something not part of liberal stupidity or the actual filth of vested interest. There is none. It's much too late. (Baraka, *Home* 78)

This statement is a paradox; for, while he claims no solution or reason for involvement, the essay itself and what it communicates with regard to the Cuban Revolution is, in fact, a political report. It seems to me that Baraka finds his way into activism through his writing, and, as he becomes less and less complacent, his writings exponentially reveal a revolutionary political agenda. Despite his ultimate criticisms of Baraka, even Watts admits:

In the United States, where the viability of armed revolt appears at best remote, the most militant, self-professed revolutionary intellectuals like Amiri Baraka are usually found talking more about picking up the gun than actually doing so. The choice confronting Baraka and other intellectuals in the United States is not to put the pen down but whether or not to intensify the fire coming through it. The choice centers on the decision to be or not to be politically engaged. (15)

Indeed, Baraka admits, 'there is a political consciousness lurking, albeit somewhat submerged, under the focus and banner of my attention then to "Art"' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 222). And, while he was clearly influenced by his trip to Cuba, by the early 1960s, the SNCC's non-violent sit-ins and the violence inflicted upon the demonstrators sparked Baraka's interest in politics at home: 'I was now taking published potshots at the nonviolence movement. "Tokenism: 300 Years for Five Cents" was one article, "What Does Nonviolence Mean?" another' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 266). Fascinatingly, in relation to Baraka's use of the word 'tokenism,' Hettie Jones remembers that the term caught on and that both the article and the expression were used and acknowledged by King on the radio a few weeks after the article was published in 1962 (Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* 199-200). But, despite King's recognition, Baraka, much like Angela Davis, was provoked by another black leader: 'I'd heard of the Nation of Islam and had even heard Malcolm speak on television and he charged me in a way no one else had ever done. He *reached* me' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 273). Baraka's political evolution was rapid, and it seemed to shift suddenly. In his 1962 essay "'Black" is a Country,' Baraka suggests, 'The struggle is for *independence*, not separation—or assimilation for that matter. Do what you want to with your life... when you can. I want to be independent of black men just as much as I want independence from white. It is just that achieving the latter involves all black men' (105). In the essay 'What Does Nonviolence Mean?,' written in 1963, however, Baraka pronounced his belief in Malcolm's teachings: 'The Negro must take an extreme stance, must attack the white man's system, using his own chains to help beat that system into submission and actual change. The black man is the only revolutionary force in American society today, if only by default' (*Home* 174). In a sense, the chauvinism here is a defense against a society that, in all actuality, did not consider a Black man equal. Of course, female activists, such as Angela Davis, have spoken out against this misogyny: '[E]ven though we may have considered the feminism of that period white, middle class, and utterly irrelevant, we also found compulsory male leadership utterly unacceptable' (Davis 320). Still, with Malcolm's words fueling his fire, Baraka began to edge ever closer towards a concept of Black Nationalism: 'To understand that you are black in a society where black is an extreme liability is one thing, but to understand that it is the society that is lacking and is impossibly deformed because of this lack, *and not yourself*, isolates you even more from that society' (Baraka, *Blues People* 185).

After publishing *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, his seminal piece on jazz and the Black experience in America written in 1963, Baraka became 'involved with a drama/playwright's workshop initiated by Edward Albee and his producers at the Cherry Lane Theatre, Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 275). The Cherry Lane Theatre in Greenwich was established in the 1920s and 'became a key venue' for off-off Broadway theatre, presenting the first U.S. production of Albee's *The Zoo Story* in January 1960 (Bottoms 18,

21). In fact, Baraka's own *Dutchman* shares key structural elements with Albee's *The Zoo Story*, further emphasizing Baraka's rich literary heritage and vast knowledge of theatre. But, Baraka clearly saw a deep void in Black theatre, as well as in other forms of artistic expression. In *Blues People*, Baraka proclaims:

I think it is not fantastic to say that only in music has there been any significant Negro contribution to a formal American culture. For the most part, most other contributions made by black Americans in the areas of painting, drama, and literature have been essentially undistinguished. The reasons for this tragic void are easy to understand if one realizes one important idea about the existence of any black culture in this country. The only Negroes who found themselves in a *position* to pursue some art, especially the art of literature, have been members of the Negro middle class. (131)

Baraka considered the majority of Black middle class artists to be engaged in a process of assimilation with white, European standards, but saw jazz and blues as a distinct Black addition to American culture. In terms of literature, to break from the standard, Baraka felt Black writers must embrace and expose their black American experience. During an address, titled 'The Myth of a "Negro Literature",' given at the American Society for African Culture on 14 March 1962, Baraka pronounced:

A Negro literature, to be a legitimate product of the Negro experience in America, must get at that experience in exactly the terms America has proposed for it, in its most ruthless identity. Negro reaction to America is as deep a part of America as the root causes of that reaction, and it is impossible to accurately describe that reaction in terms of the American middle class; because for them, the Negro has never really existed, never been glimpsed in anything even approaching the complete reality of his humanity. The Negro writer has to go from where he actually is, completely outside of that conscious white myopia. (Barak, *Home* 133)

In the Foreword to Baraka's *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*, Lindsay Barrett suggests, '[...] Baraka moved from being a precociously influential poet in his youth to become a profoundly influential dramatist in his maturity. [...] and his ideas gained force by being translated into active drama rather than passive poetry in the mid-sixties' (Barrett 7-8). While essentially a poet, then, in response to his political awakening, Baraka began to see the advantages of expressing this Black experience through drama:

I can see now that the dramatic form began to interest me because I wanted to go "beyond" poetry. I wanted some kind of action literature, and the most pretentious of all literary forms is drama, because there one has to imitate life, to put characters upon a

stage and pretend to actual life. I read a few years ago in some analysis of poetry that drama is a form that proliferates during periods of social upsurge, for those very same reasons. It is an action form, plus it is a much more popular form than poetry. It reaches more people and its most mass form today is of course television and, secondarily, film. (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 275)

His play, *Dutchman*, first produced on 24 March 1964 for the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York by Albee, Barr and Wilder, pits a twenty-year-old black man (Clay) against a thirty-year-old white woman (Lula) in a New York subway in the 1960s. *Dutchman* opened as part of a triple bill at Cherry Lane. It was always the last of three short plays to go on, the others being *Play* by Samuel Beckett and *The Two Executioners* by Fernando Arrabal (Taubman, 'The Theater: "*Dutchman*"' 46). In Baraka's play, Lula is predatory from the start, but, as both sexual and racial tensions rise, the play grows even darker. Lula continually attacks Clay's ethnicity, calling him a 'liver-lipped white man' and an 'Uncle Tom,' until he eventually erupts in rage (Baraka, *Dutchman* 31, 32). Clay's verbal rant is lengthy and loaded and does not go unpunished; when he has finished, Lula stabs him to death. Directed by Ed Parone, the first production was described as 'an explosion of hatred rather than a play' (Taubman, 'The Theater: "*Dutchman*"' 46). But Baraka explains:

When the magazines and electronic media coverage of the play and local word got out, I could see that not only was the play an artistic success, despite my being called "foul-mouthed," "full of hatred," "furious, angry," I could tell that the play had made its mark, that it would not quietly fade away. (*The Autobiography* 276)

Although not his first play, but easily the most written about and discussed, as he evidently predicted, *Dutchman* represents Baraka's move into political activism through drama. In his essay, '*Dutchman*: Theatrical Ghost of a Future Politics,' Kimberly Benston notes, '*Dutchman* registers simultaneously the confrontation of the Civil Rights Movement's pacifist integrationism with Black Power's militant separatism[...] and self-professed "schwartzte Bohemien" LeRoi Jones's imminent metamorphosis into "revolutionary" black nationalist Amiri Baraka' (133).

From the outset, I believe Baraka saw the theatre as a political tool which could be used to bludgeon the concepts of racism and white supremacy and advocate the need for Black self-determination: 'It is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fatbellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on' (Baraka, *Home* 237). Perhaps his early success helped him to see theatre's potential; *Dutchman* earned an Obie Award for best off-Broadway play for 1964, while Baraka developed and recorded his manifesto in his essay 'The Revolutionary Theatre':

The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE! Show up the insides of these humans, look into black skulls. White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them. Because they themselves have been trained to hate. The Revolutionary Theatre must hate them for hating. For presuming with their technology to deny the supremacy of the Spirit. They will all die because of this. [...]

This is a theatre of assault. The play that will split the heavens for us will be called THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICA. (Baraka, *Home* 236, 241)

Clearly influenced by the Black Nationalist teachings of Malcolm X, Baraka proposed a theatre which would instill self-confidence and promote political self-determination for and within black Americans. Indeed, in his autobiography, Malcolm declares that Black Nationalism provides 'the confidence that the black race needs today to get up off its knees, and to get on its feet, and get rid of its scars, and to take a stand for itself' (X and Haley 493). Tragically, shortly after Baraka positioned himself politically with this forceful call-to-arms, Malcolm was assassinated. Baraka had become even closer to Malcolm's politics; shortly before the murder, Baraka and Malcolm had 'been featured speakers at a rally at Manhattan Center' in New York (Jones, *How I Became* 222). Reflecting on his Black Nationalist beliefs, Baraka found it difficult to remain in the Village, and the assassination proved to be the catalyst for his departure. Hettie Jones explains, 'The United States still lived on assumptions: when blacks died the country was shocked; when whites died, it mourned' (223). In his essay, 'The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation,' written shortly after Malcolm's death in 1965, Baraka eulogizes:

Malcolm's legacy to Black People is what he moved toward, as the accretion of his own spiritual learning and the movement of Black People in general, through the natural hope, a rise to social understanding with the new context of the white nation and its decline under hypocrisy and natural "oppositeness" which has pushed all of us towards "new" ideas.

[...]The Black artist, in this context, is desperately needed to change the images his people identify with, by asserting Black feeling, Black mind, Black judgment. (*Home* 271, 276)

Understandably, Baraka was moved to action and, heeding his own credo, proceeded to leave his (white) wife, children, and Greenwich for Harlem to pursue his new project, the Black Arts Theatre (Jones, *How I Became* 222). James Edward Smethurst confirms, 'Baraka's coinage of the term[...] came to designate the movement' (100). And Baraka remembers, 'We needed a group of black revolutionaries who were artists to raise up the level of struggle for the arts sector.... what would it be called, it came into my head in a flash, the Black Arts' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 290).

The Black Arts Movement

The Black Arts Movement (BAM), established in the 1960s, is complex and, although Baraka is often labeled as ‘the father’ of the movement¹⁶, a brief history of black Americans’ involvement with theatre during the decades which came before will help to better explain its birth. The 1930s ‘brought a series of glorious attempts to build a permanent Negro theatre,’ particularly in Harlem¹⁷, but these attempts were mostly overshadowed or put to rest by the Nation’s crippling economic depression and the threat of war¹⁸ (Mitchell 100). Given Harlem’s history, Baraka’s move there makes sense considering Harlem’s reputation as a cultural and artistic beacon for black Americans: ‘The Harlem Renaissance [1910-1927] was a watershed in American cultural history, and drama and performance were at the forefront of it’ (Krasner 1). Loften Mitchell argues:

Out of the debris of despair and disillusionment emerged a fighting spirit, and a part of that spirit was an instrument known as the Harlem theatre movement—an instrument that made it possible for Negro actors to work together, to bring ensemble playing to the modern star-studded, misguided theatre! This ensemble playing, this group identification and expression, this collective action would later transfer itself into the black nationalism that scared hell out of American’s powers[...] (110)

And, as the 1930s came to a close, this spirit, which ultimately influenced Black Nationalist thought, carried on. Though, in accordance with the climate of the times, theatre during the 1940s was still a victim of segregation: ‘Black performers touring the military bases in America and overseas were generally segregated in performance’ and ‘[in] 1948, the Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) withdrew all performers from the National Theatre, the only major commercial house in Washington, DC, demanding the management drop its 112-year-old policy of excluding Negroes from the audience’ (Hill and Hatch 341). Essentially, Marcus Heiman, the New York presidential head running the National Theatre, postponed integration because other organizations throughout the Washington area remained segregated; as a result, the strike lasted eighteen months (Hill and Hatch 341). Moreover, although President Franklin Delano Roosevelt initiated the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935, providing \$27 million to the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), which incorporated ‘Negro’ units, ‘Whites occupied the administrative and supervisory positions because,

¹⁶ The description of the author at the back of *The Essence of Reparations: Afro-American Self-determination & Revolutionary Democratic Struggle in the United States of America*, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2003, states, ‘Baraka is probably best known as the father of the Black Arts Movement’ (44).

¹⁷ For more on Harlem and the Harlem Renaissance, see Samuel A. Hay’s *African American Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; David Krasner’s *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; and Anthony D. Hill’s *Pages from the Harlem Renaissance*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

¹⁸ After Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, ‘America prepared to take its stand in the coming holocaust’ (Mitchell 110).

since segregation in the theatre had been so nearly total, few Blacks had been trained to teach the theatre crafts' (Hill and Hatch 315-316). Still, some dramas incorporated racially mixed casts¹⁹ and several black artists, influenced by the Harlem art theatres of the 1920s²⁰ and 1930s, set out to establish their own theatres. For example, Abram Hill's Negro Playwrights Company (NPC), which was founded on 5 May 1940 and included Langston Hughes²¹, 'rented and reopened the Lincoln Theatre in Harlem' to provide a space to perform; unfortunately, the groups association with the political left, mixed with America's growing anti-Communist feelings, caused the organization to collapse (Hill and Hatch 349). NPC's end caused Hill to assemble another group to form the American Negro Theater (ANT)²² in 1940 (Mitchell 113). 'Their constitution drew upon [W.E.B.] Du Bois' dictum that theatre should be *by, about, for, and near* African Americans, and stated in its preamble that Blacks brought a special gift and style to the American stage'²³ (Hill and Hatch 350). In addition, in 1947, former ANT members formed the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (CNA) with the intention 'to secure employment in mainstream theatre for minority artists' (Hill and Hatch 360). In 1949, the CNA opened their own theatre in Harlem, which remained open for four years (Hill and Hatch 360). By the 1950s, a few white theatres, such as the Greenwich Mews Theatre²⁴ located in Greenwich Village, began to fully integrate casts (Hill and Hatch 364). Nevertheless, while the 1940s offered Blacks opportunities in the theatre, and an initial push towards integration occurred during the 1950s, 'It would be another decade before LeRoi Jones [Baraka] would raise the battle cry of racial and political unity in the theatre, and then, not for a progressive left, but for a segregated black artistry' (Hill and Hatch 364).

In his comprehensive book, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, Smethurst points to the importance of this history as it relates to the BAM: 'There were, of course, major black political leaders who were also major cultural figures before the 1960s—one thinks particularly of W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and Paul Robeson'²⁵ (14). In many ways these black American artists and leaders from the 1930s to the 1950s, along with the organizations they created, paved the way for the artistic activism and movements of the 1960s.

¹⁹ For example, Paul Robeson, the legendary actor and activist, was the first black man to play Othello on Broadway, with a mixed-race cast, in 1943 (Mitchell 117-118).

²⁰ 'The Art Theatre Movement (sometimes called the Little Theatre Movement) placed art in opposition to commercialism,' engaged with Southern black folk plays, but 'originated not among the folk but with urban intellectuals – W.E.B. Du Bois (Ph.D. Harvard), Alain LeRoy Locke (Ph.D. Harvard), Jessie Redmon Fauset (Phi Beta Kappa, Cornell), [and] James Weldon Johnson (Honorary Litt.D. Talladega)' (Hill and Hatch 216).

²¹ A playwright and activist, Langston Hughes established theatre groups in Chicago and Los Angeles. His play *Mulatto*, which appeared on Broadway in 1934, appears with Baraka's *The Slave in Three Negro Plays*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969.

²² Some performers associated with ANT include Ruby Dee, Hilda Simms, Sidney Poitier, and Harry Belafonte (Hay 172).

²³ 'The American Negro Theatre survived for eleven years and holds an honored place in theatre history,' though 'the plays of the latter years were all by whites and few of them were originals' (Hill and Hatch 357).

²⁴ The Greenwich Mews began integrating casts in 1952 (Hill and Hatch 364).

²⁵ Despite his fame as an actor, Robeson refused to disavow communism and, as a result, the State Department withdrew his U.S. passport' (Hill and Hatch 348).

Of course, as I've shown, political activists such as Marcus Garvey and movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, prominent before 1930, also served as major influences to the Black Arts Movement. Nevertheless, as Mitchell suggests, these artists of the 1930s through 1950s and their organizations inspired and fueled the Black Nationalist artists that emerged in the early to mid-sixties. In his chapter on the Black Arts Movement, Mike Sell suggests that the BAM's origins began with 'the small, distinctively local communities of poets and intellectuals' whose 'sympathies fell to [...] (always and essentially) Malcolm X' (*Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 237). Sell provides examples of these small, rather radical organizations from New York (the Umbra Poets Workshop), Chicago (the Muntu Dance Company), and Los Angeles (the Watts Writers Workshop and Studio Watts), just to name a few (*Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 237-238). However, following these preliminary collaborations, after Malcolm's assassination, Baraka, consumed by distrust for American society, vehemently attacked the concept of integration and set out to end the system of white supremacy which, he considered, inhabited and controlled, not only the theatre, but, every facet of American life. In his essay 'Blackhope,' written in 1965, Baraka expresses his need for an army which would assist in the attack: 'In a time of chaos, in a time of trouble, we're asking for unity, black unity as defense against these mad white people who continue to run the world' (Baraka, *Home* 263). Rather ironically, though, Baraka's crusade in Harlem was initially funded by the U.S. government.

By the mid-1960s, Harlem, with a 94 percent black population, was suffering from juvenile delinquency (Hill and Hatch 384). In response, the U.S. Congress, initially along with President Kennedy, funded Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU), a system of proposed remedies founded by Dr. Kenneth Clark: 'HARYOU used community boards to provide job training, educational and social service programs, as well as money for arts and culture' (Hill and Hatch 384-385). It is also important to note, regarding legislation for the arts, 'In 1965 Congress created agencies to develop and promote a broadly conceived national policy of support for the arts and humanities. For the first time since the New Deal of the Roosevelt era, federal money was awarded directly to artistic talents, this time dispensed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)' (Hill and Hatch 375). However, after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Dr. Clark resigned from HARYOU over disagreements with a senior politician in Harlem, Adam Clayton Powell (Hill and Hatch 386). Powell was the first black American to be elected to Congress in New York, and represented Harlem while serving in The House of Representatives from 1945 to 1971. Incidentally, he is interviewed in 'The Hate That Hate Produced,' the first television broadcast to feature Malcolm X. It was HARYOU that initially provided the financial aid for Baraka's Black Arts Theatre, which he called the Black Arts Repertory Theatre School (BARTS)²⁶. Although Larry Neal

²⁶ In his essay, 'The Black Arts Movement,' first published in 1968, Larry Neal refers to Baraka's school as 'the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre School' (32).

records that the BARTS opened in the spring of 1964²⁷, the theatre/school was officially established on 30 April 1965 (Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 238). Along with ‘Charles Patterson, William Patterson, Clarence Reed, Johnny Moore, and a number of other Black artists,’ Baraka’s BARTS ‘presented plays, concerts, and poetry readings to the people of the community’ (Neal 32). The plays featured, including Baraka’s *Experimental Death Unit # 1*, *A Black Mass*, *Jello*, and *Dutchman*, set out to wake up the black American population of Harlem to the dire conditions caused by an oppressive white society (Neal 32). In ‘The Revolutionary Theatre’ (1964), Baraka proposes that theatre ‘should force change; it should be change,’ and his work with the BARTS attempted to reflect this belief (Baraka, *Home* 236). In other words, ‘The Revolutionary Theatre’ becomes Baraka’s manifesto in practice with the BARTS. Not surprisingly, however, the U.S government found Baraka’s Black Nationalist stance and separatist policies troubling:

[S]uch an outlook, carried to its logical extreme, would forbid white audiences for black theatre—and, in fact, this very policy was endorsed. [...] The rationale was that the presence of whites would be potentially inhibitive to the enjoyment of black audiences, and in any case whites should not be permitted to occupy the seats needed for black people for whom the performance was intended and, allegedly, exclusively relevant. (Reed 54)

This echoes back to Malcolm’s days with the NOI, when whites were not permitted to attend their mass rallies. When compared to a statement from his 1962 address, ‘The Myth of a “Negro Literature”,’ it becomes clear that, through the BARTS, Baraka was attempting to make good on his earlier proposals: ‘this is the only way for the Negro artist to provide his version of America—from that no-man’s-land outside the mainstream. A no-man’s-land, a black country, completely invisible to white America, but so essentially part of it as to stain its whole being an ominous gray’ (Baraka, *Home* 134). By excluding whites from their events, the system of segregation established by the BARTS mirrored the practices of traditional white theatre, and, indeed, the society at large. It would seem that the decision to perform exclusively for Blacks would have exposed the oppressive conditions established by whites; but, if this did occur, it only made white society hostile towards the newly established theatre/school. Baraka admits, ‘[...] it was about this time that word of the “racist” Black Arts program began to surface in the media—“teaching racism with government funds”!’ (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 310). And, the negative press was just the beginning of the end: ‘BART/S lost its federal funding within a year of its founding when a federal investigation into alleged “mismanagement” of antipoverty funds was initiated’ (Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 240). Larry Neal points out, ‘The [white] Establishment, fearing Black creativity, did exactly what it was expected to do—it attacked the theatre and all of its values’ (32).

²⁷ ‘In the spring of 1964, LeRoi Jones[...] opened the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre School’ (Neal 32).

Certainly, the U.S. government targeted the BARTS. After all, even Martin Luther King, Jr., winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, became a so-called enemy of the people for speaking out against the war in Vietnam; J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI from 1935 until his death in 1972, led an 'extraordinary campaign' to remove King as a civil rights leader (Wofford 204-205). Nonetheless, Neal also admits, '[...] later, because of internal problems, the theatre was forced to close' (32). Sell recounts, and Baraka confirms in his autobiography, that the BARTS failed from a 'lack of organizational experience as well as by the in-fighting egged on by the Patterson brothers' (*Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 240). Charles and William Patterson 'threatened HARYOU's administrator Julian Euell with violence if he did not reinstate BART's funds' and Charles Patterson 'shot Larry Neal, the arts and culture editor of *Liberator* magazine, wounding him in the leg' (Hill and Hatch 390). As a result of the BARTS demise, Baraka took off for his hometown of Newark, New Jersey; but, for the sense of empowerment it gave the people of Harlem during its relatively short period of existence, the BARTS made a lasting impression and ultimately influenced a movement: '[...] as a result of white America's backlash against Jones/Baraka, Black artists across America and Africa began to set up Black cultural institutions, using his manifesto, "The Revolutionary Theatre"' (King Jr., *The Impact of Race* 130).

Unsurprisingly, given the U.S. government's reaction to the BARTS, the backlash Baraka received for speaking out and breaking from the white establishment, as well as his project's closure, seemed to help others with similar ambitions. Woodie King, Jr. became involved with The Black Theatre Movement in Detroit in 1961-62, and, with Cliff Frazier, started Theatre Genesis in New York in 1963-64 (King Jr., *The Impact of Race* 11-12). In his book, *The Impact of Race: Theatre and Culture*, he declares, '[Baraka] helped, indirectly, a great many Blacks across the country. The white establishment was so afraid of Baraka they'd do anything. They'd just give money away. Anybody who said they didn't like Baraka got a grant' (12). However, beyond providing others an opportunity for funding, despite the controversies surrounding its collapse, the BARTS offered 'a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre,' and proved to be a blue-print for others to follow (Neal 33). 'What BART/S ultimately represented for the [Black Arts] movement was a commitment to organizational experiment' (Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* 240). Across the United States Black artistic organizations and artists, including 'poets, dramatists, fiction writers, visual artists, musicians, dancers, and critics,' began identifying with a newly formed concept of Black Arts (Smethurst 100). Smethurst points out that, while New York City 'is frequently cited as the birthplace of the Black Arts movement,' organizations and artists associated with the movement also spread to the Midwest and the West Coast (100-101). By 1966, thanks to the BARTS, those interested in theatre, and, indeed, these other forms of artistic expression, had a revolutionary model. And, the onset of the Black Arts movement coincided nicely with the budding Black Power movement. The nationalistic views of both movements, and

the fact that they were established at relatively the same time, meant that, together, they could each simultaneously define and shape the other. Neal explains, 'A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. The Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics. The two movements postulate that there are in fact and spirit two Americas—one black, one white' (Neal 29). In 'The Black Arts Movement,' Neal explains what is meant by 'Black aesthetic': 'The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world' (30). Moreover, despite certain discrepancies, both movements inspired action. Smethurst argues this tellingly:

[W]hile noting the relative decentralization, and occasionally the disunity, of the Black Power and Black Arts movements, the common thread between nearly all the groups was a belief that African Americans were a people, a nation, entitled to (needing, really) self-determination of its own destiny. While notions of what that self-determination might consist (and of what forms it might take) varied, these groups shared the sense that without such power, African Americans as a people and as individuals would remain oppressed and exploited second-class (or non-) citizens in the United States. While the right to self-determination had often been a mark of both black nationalism and much of the Left (since at least the late 1920s), making the actual seizing and exercise of self-determination the central feature of political and cultural activity differentiated Black Power from any major African American political movement since the heyday of Garveyism. (Smethurst 15)

With regard to his manifesto, Baraka was, ultimately, successful in influencing a movement which set out to expose and attack, and he had found his army: 'The Black Arts movement reflected that black people themselves had first moved to a political unity, despite their differences, that they were questioning the United States and its white racist monopoly capitalism' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 298).

To sum up, although the BARTS was ultimately shut down, the theatre/school represented an attempt to exemplify the teachings of Malcolm X and a Black Nationalist ideology, and, in doing so, ignited and influenced other organizations interested in exploring black revolutionary playwrights and plays: 'There was[...] a positive overall effect of the Black Arts concept that still remains. We showed that we had heard and understood Malcolm and that we were trying to create an art that would be a weapon in the Black Liberation Movement' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 311). However, as I have shown in this chapter, to simply state that Baraka began his political project in Harlem is to ignore the conditions which brought about his departure from Greenwich in the first place. An exploration of Baraka's dramatic work and how it links to his

political evolution will not only help develop a better understanding of his individual situation, but will also shed light on the broader social situations and conditions regarding race relations within the United States. Throughout his life, Baraka used his revolutionary drama as a mouthpiece for expressing the ensuing political/social unrest of the times, and *Dutchman* spurred that action:

What 'fame' *Dutchman* brought me and raised up in me was this absolutely authentic and heartfelt desire to speak what should be spoken for all of us. I knew the bullshit of my own life, its twists and flip-outs, yet I felt, now, some heavy *responsibility*. If these bastards were going to raise me up, for any reason, then they would pay for it! I would pay these motherfuckers back in kind, because even if I wasn't strong enough to *act*, I would become strong enough to SPEAK what had to be said, for all of us, for black people, yes, particularly for black people, because they were the root and origin of my conviction, but for anyone anywhere who wanted justice. (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 278)

As Baraka acknowledges, because of its mass critical attention, *Dutchman* was just the beginning: *Dutchman* simply 'prepares grounds and sets the pattern for subsequent revolutionary dramas' (Effiong 86). And, as I will show, an in-depth study of Baraka's drama is relevant and crucial to better understand political theatre as it relates to a unique American experience.

Chapter 2

Justifiable Homicide: From *Dutchman* to a Revolutionary Theatre

'[...] don't even raise your voice, unless you're going to kill them.'

(Baraka, *Raise Race Rays Raze* 4)

The above epigraph perfectly illustrates Baraka's burgeoning mindset; as explained in the previous chapter, under the influence of Malcolm X, Baraka began to see his words as weapons which could be used to attack the dominating white power structure of the United States in the 1960s. And, by 1965²⁸, after his move to Harlem from Greenwich Village, Baraka's writings became overwhelmingly preoccupied by a 'kill or be killed' mentality: 'We must see that work gets done. Now. We will die with (or at the hands of) white people, otherwise' (Baraka, *Raise Race Rays Raze* 19). Having already provided a background in Chapter One, this chapter offers a detailed study of *Dutchman* (1964), Baraka's first theatrical success. Here, I introduce a discussion of the representations of killing and murder in Baraka's revolutionary plays. In addition, I examine *The Slave* (1964) and *Slave Ship* (1967), which present a revolutionary model whereby Black Power is sought, and, in the case of *Slave Ship*, achieved through the killing of whites. As Harry J. Elam, Jr. asserts, for Baraka, 'The Theater became a weapon in the struggle to achieve racialized revolutionary ends' (3). To contextualize Baraka's depictions of killing and murder in this era, I begin by outlining a sociological framework which examines the legislation of these terms in the United States at the time that these plays were written.

Defining Murder and Killing under U.S. Legal Codes

In his book, *When Killing is a Crime*, Tony Waters explains:

We talk about murder, read about murder, and use murder as an example in political discourse; weekly television shows and films focus on murder at least as much as any other crime. This happens even though (as criminologists point out) murder is an uncommon crime. Stealing, assault, fraud, illegal use of drugs, and many other acts are far more common. In essence, as far as rule-breaking goes, murder is infrequent and unusual. Nevertheless, because it is so prominent in the cultural imagination, a disproportionate amount of energy goes into deciding how rules against murder are created and enforced.

(1)

For my purposes, the legislation governing murder and killing in the United States are important to understand because Baraka, at least in his Black revolutionary writings of the 1960s, presents a

²⁸ In his book, *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez & Amiri Baraka*, Harry J. Elam, Jr. observes that Baraka's Black Revolutionary Theater (BRT) movement began in 1965 (2).

dichotomy of two distinct patterns of killing: 1) As a legitimate means of Black self-defense in claiming power over whites, or 2) as the unlawful white American crime of murder against Blacks. In a 1966 essay titled 'Poetry and Karma,' Baraka borrows the words of Malcolm X²⁹ to profess, 'we [Black people] are consciously determined to evolve, by any means necessary, in a way that Darwin could make only vague reference to' (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 24). His allusions to Darwin and Malcolm here suggest a rightful domination and survival over whites. And, in 'The Need for a Cultural Base to Civil Rites & Bpower Mooments [sic],'³⁰ written in 1967, Baraka describes the other form of killing as he saw it: 'To be an american, one must be a murderer. A white murderer of colored people'³¹ (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 39).

In the 1960s, as today, murder, or homicide³², as defined by US legal codes, was 'the unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought' (Homes and Holmes 2). However, Waters points out, 'such a definition presumes much; in particular, it assumes a legal code that denotes some killings as lawful and others as not' (2). Indeed,

Not all killing of humans is murder under legal codes emphasizing premeditated malice. For instance, at extremes, killing in war on behalf of a state, particularly for a victor state, is not murder. State executions are also not murder, because they are not "unlawful." To use a sociological term, state executions are "legitimate." However, between this legitimated individualized killing by the state (execution) and the more general killing of an anonymous soldier (war), there is in fact a great deal of ambiguity. (Waters 2)

For example, this ambiguity exists in the laws concerning the killing of slaves. Orlando Patterson notes, 'Because slavery is always a relationship that rests ultimately on force, it is hardly surprising that in every slave society the master has the power to inflict corporal punishment' (190). And, in *The American Slave Code in Theory and in Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by its Statutes, Judicial Decisions & Illustrative Facts*, published in 1853, William Goodell concludes, with regard to the killing of American slaves, 'The structure of the laws, and the condition of the slaves, render adequate protection impossible' (161). He continues, 'If a man is not protected from cruel and unreasonable battery at the pleasure of his assailant, how can he be protected from the liability to be killed by such battery? And if the law permits the optional battery of a man, what power can it retain to punish him for the natural effects of such battery?' (161). Just over one-hundred years

²⁹ At the founding rally for the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OOAU) in New York on 28 June 1964, Malcolm X pronounced, 'We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary' (*By Any Means Necessary* 56).

³⁰ 'Rites' and 'Mooments' as presented in this title and essay are Baraka's chosen forms of spelling in this instance.

³¹ Again, it is Baraka's conscious intent to not capitalize 'american' in this instance.

³² Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes clarify: 'Homicide and murder are synonyms. [...] and are used interchangeably by people within the criminal justice enterprise' (2).

later, in the 'Civil Rites' essay from 1967 mentioned above, Baraka did not recognize much difference in the contemporary treatment of blacks: 'The civilrighter is usually an american, otherwise he would know, if he is colored, that that concept is meaningless fantasy. Slaves have no civil rights' (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 39). Of course, Baraka's claims were provoked by a racist US government which often overlooked killings in the name of white supremacy: 'By a conservative count, between 1882 and 1968 there were 4,730 recorded lynchings in the United States, and 73 percent of the victims were African American' (Waters 47). The 2005 conviction of Edgar Ray Killen serves as a famous example of a vigilante hate crime which went unpunished for far too long. Killen, the leader of the local Mississippi Ku Klux Klan, was tried, along with others, for the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers—one of whom was Black³³. Killen was set free due to a deadlocked 'hung jury' in 1967 (Waters 131). It took thirty-nine years before Mississippi courts would try again and finally achieve a conviction in 2005³⁴: 'Until then, it was believed that no jury in Mississippi would convict a man who had been an important community leader, and in the world of 1964 Mississippi, above the law' (Waters 47).

Certainly, Baraka's revolutionary rhetoric is illuminated when placed alongside the racist, hypocritical enforcement of the law: 'Minorities who have experienced systematic discrimination from the police and courts are more likely to take demands for righteousness into their own hands than are individuals who share ethnic solidarity with the police and courts' (Waters 51). Yet, Baraka's call-to-arms, in light of the white US power structure, understandably caused much controversy. In an article for the *New York Times*, dated 29 December 1965, Paul A. Fino, a Republican Representative of the Bronx in New York, comments on funding for Baraka's BARTS: '[...] the funds had been used to produce plays that advocated Negro revolution and the murder of white persons' ('Shriver Prodded by Fino' 15). Interestingly, though Fino's criticism here is an attempt to expose Baraka as a racist undeserving of State funds, beginning with *Dutchman*, a majority of Baraka's plays from the 1960s do indeed advocate Black rebellion and the killing of whites. For Baraka, representations of the killing of whites were justified responses to a corrupt U.S. government. Even after losing the BARTS, Baraka continued to promote this revolutionary rhetoric. In his 1966 essay 'Newark Courthouse—'66 Wreck (Nigger Rec Room),' he notes, 'I notice one thing in talking to [white] policemen. When they are angry, talk to them very quietly, very very quietly, calmly (even if you're ready to kill them) it makes them even angrier' (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 9). Baraka's inference here, that one might kill a police officer, was actually a crime which

³³ This story, of the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964, is told in the film *Mississippi Burning* (Orion Pictures: Alan Parker, 1988), based on the book by Kirk Mitchell. And the film *Neshoba* (First Run Features: Micki Dickoff and Tony Pagano, 2008) documents the small town of Neshoba, Mississippi forty years after the murders.

³⁴ For an in-depth sociological study on how past societal norms are susceptible to moral outrage, see Emile Durkheim's (1858-1917) theories on the evolution of morality, law and society (Durkheim, Emile. *On Morality and Society*. Ed. Robert N. Bellah. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.).

was punishable by death in most US states. As time passed, the federal government began to reconsider an individual state's right to decide capital sentencing procedures (Levinson 154). As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Furman v. Georgia* in 1972, 'the Supreme Court approved new death penalty laws that, in addition to other significant innovations, were confined to a much narrower range of capital crimes' (Levinson 155). Nevertheless, in 1976, the Supreme Court declared that killing a police officer was officially a capital crime and punishable by death. By 1965, only nine states had done away with capital crimes (Levinson 154). Of course, legal definitions of murder and punishment in the US have shifted over time (Waters 15). In 1794, a Pennsylvania state legislation 'was important not only for its reduction of the scope of capital crimes, but also for its separation of murder—for the first time—into different degrees' (Levinson 153). According to Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes, in *Murder in America*, 'First-degree murder has two major components: premeditation and deliberation. [...] Murder in the second degree contains an element of malice beforehand, but no premeditation or deliberation' (2-3). Manslaughter, which, incidentally, is the crime that Edgar Ray Killen was eventually convicted of in 2005, is defined as 'the unlawful taking of a life without malice' (Holmes and Holmes 3). There are also justifiable and excusable homicides, in which murder is permitted in self-defense or under circumstances acceptable by the law (Holmes and Holmes 3). It is this degree of justifiable murder, or form of killing, which Baraka adopts and utilizes for his Black Revolutionary Theatre. For Baraka's drama is, in part, written in self-defense of what he saw as 'the killing competition of television-radio' (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 12). In his essay 'Work Notes—'66,' Baraka explains, 'Television is purer white, the black shots fully oriented, and less than 1 % of any warm blackness coming through. You might see Smokey or James Brown a couple of times. But mostly there is a steady deadly whiteness beaming forth' (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 12). In other words, Baraka's Revolutionary Theatre promoted and practiced Black self-determination and directly attacked the mainstream media controlled by a conservative, white America. Baraka's drama, in which the killing of whites is offered as justifiable in the name of war, unapologetically wages a battle against racism: 'He [...] set out to denounce and threaten the oppressor, rather than to entertain or reach a compromise' (Effiong 69). In his 1964 manifesto, Baraka proclaims, 'The Revolutionary Theatre must teach [whites] their deaths. It must crack their faces open to the mad cries of the poor' (*Home* 236). Baraka's Black Revolutionary Theatre unquestionably depicts the killing of whites as a means to revolution; and, it is appropriate to begin with *Dutchman*, to trace Baraka's growing radical agenda and examine his representations of killing on the American stage.

Dutchman

Dutchman is often 'rightfully considered the opening salvo of the BAM as *dramatic movement*' (Sell, 'The Drama of the Black Arts Movement' 265). However, in his eulogy to James

Baldwin, presented in 1987, Baraka admits, 'as far as I'm concerned, it was *Blues For Mr. Charlie* that announced the Black Arts Movement' (*Eulogies* 127). Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, which premiered on 23 April 1964 at Broadway's ANTA Theatre (just one month after *Dutchman* premiered at the Cherry Lane Theatre), chronicles events leading up to and the trial of a white man's murder of a young black man in a small Southern town in the United States. The play is loosely based on the gruesome lynching of fourteen year old Emmett Till on 29 August 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. Though the play essentially presents the aftermath of a brutal killing, it also depicts the two opposing Civil Rights strategies represented by King's passive resistance and Malcolm's Black Nationalist militancy in the forms of the passive Negro minister, Meridian Henry, and his confrontational, revolutionary son, Richard Henry. In the play, Richard is murdered for taking an aggressive stance against the racist South, while his father is left to question his passive views in light of the acquittal of his son's murderer. Baraka argues, 'Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie* and my own *Dutchman* (both 1964) raise up the militance and self-defense clamor of the movement as it came fully into the Malcolm era: Jimmy by constructing a debate between King (Meridian) and Richard (Malcolm), and I by having Clay openly advocate armed resistance' (*A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion* 19). Both plays, however, portray a rather predictable occurrence in relation to the US racial climate of the time, in which a black person is brutally murdered by a white racist. In this regard, neither of these plays adheres to Baraka's manifesto, in which he declares, 'America will hate the Revolutionary Theatre because it will be out to destroy them and whatever they believe is real' (*Home* 240). Of course, like *Dutchman*, Baldwin's play received its own backlash. In his *New York Times* review for *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, Taubman writes, 'James Baldwin has written a play with fires of fury in its belly, tears of anguish in its eyes and a roar of protest in its throat' ('Theater: "*Blues for Mr. Charlie*" 24). Still, while both productions garnered controversy for portraying Black militancy, Baraka admits, 'they are both (regardless of their "power") too concerned with white people' (*A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion* 19). In his notes on *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, written in 1964, for example, Baldwin discusses his fear regarding an inability 'to draw a valid portrait of the murderer': 'In life, obviously, such people baffle and terrify me and, with one part of my mind at least, I hate them and would be willing to kill them. Yet, with another part of my mind, I am aware that no man is a villain in his own eyes' (*Blues for Mr. Charlie* xiv). Although Baldwin references a desire to kill in the name of freedom, his play fails to illustrate such a revolutionary act, and tells a story 'in which even a killer receives his share of compassion' (Afterword, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*). *Dutchman* also falls short of depicting a justifiable homicide at the hands of the oppressed. As with Baldwin's play, *Dutchman* preaches the killing of whites as a justifiable means of revolution, but ultimately presents the coldblooded murder of a Black male character by a white female. Therefore, I would like to suggest that these plays did not actually initiate the Black Arts, but, rather, represent important

precursors to this movement. Moreover, the suggestion for self-defense is present, but both plays stop short of having their Black protagonists retaliate through the killing of whites; the murders in *Dutchman* and *Blues for Mr. Charlie* are of Blacks by whites. It is actually Baraka's subsequent plays which evolve to establish the Black Arts Movement and a Revolutionary Theatre which preached an overt Black Nationalist agenda in order to achieve Black autonomy through any means necessary. *Dutchman* does, however, hint at what is to come and stands as a springboard for Baraka's later dramatic representations of retaliation.

Earlier I suggested that *Dutchman* remains a topic for debate, as the most written about of all of Baraka's plays. And yet, because the language and characters of the play clearly depict the racial tensions present in America during the 1960s, I find a majority of these debates problematic. Andrzej Ceynowa writes:

If the interest in *Dutchman* were limited to racial matters only, especially Black-white relations, the play could be expected to have little appeal to audiences for whom such problems are nonexistent. In 1967, however, the play was successfully presented by an all-white cast in Warsaw, Poland, at Teatr [sic] Kameralny. If I may speculate about what held the audiences in the racially-uniform society, I would say that, free from being preconditioned to see a racial problem, the Polish theatergoers saw *Dutchman* as a play about honesty towards oneself and the wages of betraying one's people in the hour of confrontation with a suppressive, alien power. (18)

Though the Communist state of Poland had very few black immigrants, it seems to me that a production of *Dutchman* with an all-white cast would still be interested in 'racial matters' (Ceynowa 18). The very fact that only whites were cast is undeniably racial, or even racist. By guessing and vaguely labeling this particular production as successful on the basis of incomplete information, Ceynowa fails to recognize that attempting to stage an all-white production of this play actually defeats the purpose. What I find most curious, though, is Ceynowa's explanation of how a supposed 'racially-uniform' society might have engaged with *Dutchman*. He admits, even after removing any notion of black and white, that the play still illustrates a state of wariness, mistrust, fear, and/or submissiveness on the part of one group or person in their dealings with another. Twist it anyway you like, the theme here still represents the racial climate in the U.S. during the 1960s: 'this is one of the weirdest things about the American experience, that it can oppress a man, almost suck his life away, and then make him so ashamed that he was among the oppressed, rather than the oppressors, that he will never offer any protest' (Baraka, *Home* 113). Ceynowa's particular wording confirms the idea that 'for all of the tantalizing possibilities Baraka raises[...] this play is overwhelmingly interested in staging the tragedy of a particular iteration of black and white gender dynamics' (Rebhorn 810). It can also be said that Baraka's early plays are

drawn from his own experience. For example, the strain of Black-white racial relations, specifically interracial relationships, is central in *Dutchman*, which hints towards the break Baraka would eventually make, both from his first wife and the Village in general. While it is not my aim here to simply excavate a play for moments which coincide with an author's 'real' life, I think anyone who lends his or her time to study both Baraka's drama and life history will find significant similarities and considerable connections. Therefore, rather than merely trace inconsequential parallel moments of the author's life within his work, this chapter continues to pursue an understanding of Baraka's political and artistic growth. The statements *Dutchman* make, both in relation to Baraka's own personal experience and in opposition to the 'oppressive'³⁵ U.S. government of the 1960s, will be brought into focus.

When analyzing *Dutchman*, it makes sense to start at the very beginning, with the title; it is, after all, often mentioned by others: 'The play's title[...] would lead one to believe that the action might be illuminated by examining it in terms of the various renderings of the legend of "the Flying Dutchman"' (Nelson 53). This is, in fact, the mission of Hugh Nelson's essay, 'LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*: A Brief Ride on a Doomed Ship.' The European legend, speculated to have been 'composed by the British to expose Dutch morals as evil and God-forsaken,' is a cautionary tale about a captain doomed to sail the seas forever on his ghost ship as a result of his sins (Meder 122). The parallels and conclusions Nelson draws between the legend and Baraka's play are quite informative:

The legend first appears in literature in Sir Walter Scott's *Rokeby* where the source of the curse which dooms ship and crew to endless voyage is given as a horrible murder committed on board.[...]

The 'Dutchman' image[...] draws attention to certain specific qualities of the subway. Like the doomed ship, it seems to operate either senselessly or according to some diabolical plan. It goes nowhere, never emerges from its darkness; reaching one terminus, it reverses itself and speeds back towards the other with brief pauses at identical stations [...] Thus, the subway[...] becomes a doomed ship under the control of an irremediable curse. (Nelson 53, 54)

Scott adapted the legend for his epic poem written in 1813; but, 'At the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, ghost ships had already featured in English literature. In 1826 Edward Fitzball wrote a play called *The Flying Dutchman*, and in 1837 Frederick Marryat published a novel called *The Phantom Ship*' (Meder 122). In terms of Baraka's influences, Sherley Anne Williams agrees, 'The myth or legend implicit in the title "Dutchman" is that of the

³⁵ See especially Baraka's books, *Home: Social Essays* and *Raise Race Rays Raze: Essays Since 1965*, for his evolving take on the oppressive American system of the 1960s.

ghost ship, the *Flying Dutchman*, which roamed the seas and added unwary ships to its phantom entourage' (135). I would not deny, then, that Baraka's play is influenced by the myth of 'the Flying Dutchman,' and its setting, in a New York subway, fits this allegory. In fact, Baraka begins his play, '*In the flying underbelly of the city. Steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth*' (4).

Nevertheless, in Baraka's play, Lula is the oppressive force, and it is her actions towards Clay, along with the suggestion that she will repeatedly kill again, which more accurately aligns itself with the curse of 'the Flying Dutchman': 'Lula's action at the end of the play, after she has killed Clay and, with the help of the other occupants of the subway coach, thrown his body overboard, tends to confirm the supposition that Clay's death is no instance of mere feminine caprice or a random act' (S. Williams 136). After murdering Clay:

LULA busies herself straightening her things. Getting everything in order. She takes out a notebook and makes a quick scribbling note . Drops it in her bag. The train apparently stops and all the others get off, leaving her alone in the coach.

*Very soon a young Negro of about twenty comes into the coach, with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats back of LULA. When he is seated she turns and gives him a long slow look. He looks up from his books and drops the book on his lap. (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 37)*

Williams explains, 'The implication seems plain that the young Black man will be pushed into playing Clay and Lula will perform her ritual murder again. Lula is thus subtly aligned with the supernatural, the ghostly, the powers of death and destruction' (136). Certainly, she enters the subway car and the play eating an apple, and later tempts Clay with this universally accepted biblical symbol of evil and the loss of innocence (*Dutchman* 5, 11). Alongside this biblical allusion, Baraka draws upon the many myths and legends regarding seductresses; images of the Greek Sirens from Homer's *Odyssey* come to mind. Essentially, Lula stems from a long tradition of the femme fatale; indeed, her name resembles the name of Frank Wedekind's protagonist from *Earth Spirit* (1895), Lulu. In his introductory notes to his translation of Wedekind's *The First Lulu*, Eric Bentley notes, 'When the first three acts of the *Lulu* play became (with one new act) the play *Earth Spirit*, the theatre had received a work [...] culminated in husband-murder. This fact alone goes far towards explaining how [...] Lulu could be considered just one of a swarm of demon ladies—man-killers' (28). Even if the similarity of these two names is simply a coincidence, which seems unlikely given Baraka's many allusions in the play, *Dutchman's* Lula can still claim her place as another of literature's dangerous femme fatales. There is a distinct problem here, however. If Lula's repetitive acts of seduction and murder, reminiscent of Homer and Wedekind, are meant to

connect back to the title via the legend of the cursed captain, by creating so many links to white literary traditions, Baraka potentially eclipses his powerful Black influences and leaves himself open to criticism for assimilating within the mainstream media he sought to subvert. Baraka draws attention to such criticism by using a statement from *The Village Voice*, written by Michael Smith, as an epigraph to an essay from *Home*: 'Jones seems to have been taken in, to believe that white society actually reflects the nature of white men' (Baraka, *Home* 204). I would like to reiterate, though, that while the play is clearly influenced by other material, its main stakes are defined by the author's growing political agenda with regard to a Black American revolutionary theatre. In this sense, whereas *Dutchman* has undeniable ties to a literary white inheritance, carefully crafted associations to American slave history serve as a dominant influence over the play and its title. According to Julian Rice, 'It is to the unconsciously racist society that the title *Dutchman* probably refers' (43).

Williams makes clear, 'The historical dimension to the title is equally significant, for it was a Dutchman, a Dutch man-of-war, which brought the first Black slaves to North America' (136). In 1619, the Dutch, carrying twenty or so Africans taken from a Spanish ship, sailed into the American Virginia Colony of Jamestown, exchanged the Africans for food and initiated the 'terrible transformation to racial slavery' ('Arrival of first Africans to Virginia Colony: 1619'). Howard Pyle illustrated 'the 1619 arrival of Virginia's first blacks' in 1917; 'In this image, the Dutch sailors, who have captured the blacks from a Spanish ship, are negotiating a trade with the Jamestown settlers for food' ('Landing of Negroes at Jamestown from a Dutch Man-of-War, 1619: 1917'). Williams continues, 'America's economy is no longer based on chattel slavery yet the issues of how Black people are to live and prosper continues to be a problem, a festering irritant under the nation's skin' (136). As I have detailed, when he began to break from his relatively comfortable life in the Village, Baraka saw 1960s contemporary black Americans still as slaves, confined by the chains of a white oppressive system, and his title, *Dutchman*, draws parallels in this regard. In contrast to the white literary myths and legends, *Dutchman* also recalls a historical moment which brought Africans to America and began a harrowing system of oppression for Blacks. In *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Ron Eyerman notes, 'The trauma of forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly experienced by [Baraka], but came to be central to [the] attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance' (1). Put another way, by linking the black slavery of the past to the abhorrent conditions of race relations in the 1960s, Baraka was able to conjure a collective memory to make a move towards encouraging Black unity. This concept is probably best realized in Baraka's later plays, *The Slave* and *Slave Ship*, to be discussed later. But, *Dutchman* remains Baraka's first dramatic text which overtly connects the Black American slavery of the past with the symbolic slavery still present after the so-called abolition. Lula asks Clay,

‘What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn’t go to Harvard’ (Baraka, *Dutchman* 18). Here, besides exposing her own extreme racism, Lula criticizes Clay for assimilating and relinquishing his ownership over a unique Black identity; ironically, this complete lack of ownership over identity was the same fate suffered by American slaves. Frederick Douglass famously chronicles this battle for a sense of self in his first slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, published in 1845. Douglass recounts his life as a slave and concludes that slavery, while certainly representing physical bondage, equally creates an imposed bondage of the mind. In his 1964 essay ‘Ieroi Jones talking,’ Baraka seems to have a similar understanding: ‘Most Negroes, for instance, are not responsible for, nor are they represented by, the consistent insipidity and vapidness, and again, the denials of reality, flashed at us constantly [...]. Those messages are from the owners’ minds—Negroes are not owners’ (Jones, *Home* 209). In *Dutchman*, then, Baraka attempts to spread his own message and uses white literary traditions—those messages from the owners—to recall the history of slavery and the oppressive conditions it set forth. While the title is clearly open to multiple interpretations, the play is undoubtedly making a statement in response to the US racial climate, specifically regarding the relationship between a Black man and a white woman in the 1960s. Baraka has explained that:

I had gotten the title from *The Flying Dutchman*, but abstracted it, because *Flying Dutchman* had been used and it didn’t quite serve my purposes, whatever they were. It took place in a subway and was essentially a confrontation between a slightly nutty (and wholly dangerous) white female bohemian and a young naïve black intellectual. (*The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* 275)

Clearly, though, the 1964 premiere of *Dutchman* held a mirror up to society, which proved too much for some: Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* wrote of this first production, ‘Everything about LeRoi Jones’s “Dutchman” is designed to shock—its basic idea, its language and its murderous rage’ (‘The Theater: “Dutchman”’ 46). This murderous rage comes in the form of Lula’s murder of Clay, of course, but is also embedded in Clay’s outburst near the end of the play, in which he expels his repressed rage. In this way, *Dutchman* perfectly presents Baraka’s dichotomy of killing offered earlier: the legitimate black rage and threat of retaliation in response to the discrimination Clay faces, and the unlawful white criminal act of coldblooded murder committed by Lula. Interestingly, though, Clay is not able to follow through with his assertions, and, at the start of the play, he also occupies the position of a white American murderer. Baraka explains, ‘The colored people, negroes, who are Americans, and there are plenty, are only colored on their skin. They are white murderers of colored people. Themselves were the first to be murdered by them; in order to qualify’ (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 39). Put another way, Blacks who

choose to assimilate within the dominant white American culture deliberately eradicate their true Black identity and consciousness. It is this deliberate act which Baraka refers to when labeling Blacks as murderers. Essentially, these Black assimilationists, who Baraka derogatorily refers to as 'negro' or 'American,' align themselves with the enemy by both accepting and pushing for a conservative white agenda. In so doing, they allow whites to infect and kill their Black identity and, in turn, continue to spread the disease throughout the Black community. This explanation sheds light on Lula's curious accusation of Clay at the end of Scene I. She says to him, 'You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 21). In the beginning, Clay, in his suit and tie, who in college thought he was Baudelaire, is attempting to assimilate with white culture and it is this 'cultural assimilation that makes him vulnerable to Lula's evil intentions, for he is preoccupied with the belief that he is just "one of the crowd"' (Watts 71). By initially presenting Clay as a symbolic corpse who has sacrificed himself as an attempt to connect with white society, Baraka strategically builds tension and highlights the play's interest in representing forms of murder and killing. In essence, early on, Clay has symbolically murdered his sense of self as a Black man by conforming to white society.

As the tension slowly rises during Scene I, Lula demands control of the conversations and continues to deliberately provoke Clay. At one point, Lula says to him, 'I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 19). Interestingly, Clay suddenly becomes conscious of his Black identity as Lula references the color of his skin with this racial slur: '*CLAY is stunned but after initial reaction, he quickly tries to appreciate the humor*' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 19). Nevertheless, though Clay is 'stunned' into this self-awareness, he stays calm and continues to let Lula lead the encounter. At this point, Clay, like Baraka in his early essay 'Cuba Libre,' in which Baraka admits to avoiding political activism, cannot see an alternative. This inability or fear to act is the exact frame of thought which Baraka's ensuing Revolutionary Theatre sought to challenge. And, while *Dutchman* contains clever white literary allusions and borrows from common myths (such as the legend of the Flying Dutchman), to mask the very real racial tensions depicted, as Ceynowa claims as possible, is an alarming misrepresentation. Despite the speculative assumptions regarding a 'successful' all-white Polish production, the main conflict in *Dutchman* remains racial: A clash of Black and white. To take the political language and story at face value, then, is certainly chilling, and, according to its author, appropriate. If we respond to the characters as Baraka described them shortly after the play's premiere, then we get a haunting picture of the US during the 1960s:

I will say this, if the girl (or the boy) in that play has to "represent" anything, I mean if she must be symbolic in the way demented academicians use the term, she does not exist at all. She is not meant to be a symbol—nor is Clay—but a real person, a real thing, in a real

world. She does not represent any thing—she is one. And perhaps that thing is America, or at least its spirit. You remember America, don't you, where they have unsolved murders happening before your eyes on television. (Baraka, *Home* 213)

Here, though the statement contains a clear contradiction, suggesting Lula is at once not a symbol and symbolic of America, Baraka draws attention to his preoccupation with the hypocrisy of the American legal system of the 1960s, which would often overlook the murder of blacks by leaving these cases unsolved. The implication that Lula is a 'real person' suggests the play, in part, serves as social commentary. The suggestion that Lula will strike again at the very end of the play proposes that Clay is not her first or only victim and that the murders she commits will also go unsolved. But, Clay does not react at this stage in the play because he knows his response will separate him from the society he lives in even more: 'To understand that you are black in a society where black is an extreme liability is one thing, but to understand that it is the society that is lacking and is impossibly deformed because of this lack, *and not yourself*, isolates you even more from that society' (Baraka, *Blues People* 185). The distinction I want to make here, and the important point to note, is that, although this play is based on other myths, Baraka is attempting to create a new theatre of protest based on his developing ideas regarding race relations, retaliation, and murder in America.

Scene II culminates in Clay's ultimate break from the white society and mindset. Clay takes an extreme stance and attacks the system when finally pushed too far. Again, it is significant that Lula awakens Clay to his assimilationist mentality. She mocks, 'That's all you know [...] so full of white man's words. Christ. God. Get up and scream at these people. Like scream meaningless shit in these hopeless faces' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 31). This time, Clay reacts. After berating him with insults, Lula finally says, 'You're afraid of white people. And your father was. Uncle Tom Big Lip!' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 33). Clay then lashes out in a long tirade:

I could murder you now. Such a tiny ugly throat. I could squeeze it flat, and watch you turn blue, on a humble. For dull kicks. And all these weak-faced ofays squatting around here, staring over their papers at me. Murder them too. Even if they expected it. That man there [...] I could rip that *Times* right out of his hand, as skinny and middle-classed as I am, I could rip that paper out of his hand and just as easily rip out his throat. It takes no great effort. For what? To kill you soft idiots? You don't understand anything but luxury. [...] I'll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats. I mean wantonly. (Baraka, *Dutchman* 33-34)

Taubman proclaimed, 'If this is the way the Negroes really feel about the white world around them, there's more rancor buried in the breasts of colored conformists than anyone can imagine. If this is the way even one Negro feels, there is ample cause for guilt as well as alarm, and for a hastening of change' ('The Theater: "Dutchman"' 46). It is easy now to see this review as more shocking than Clay's outburst, given the apparent naiveté of its author. Within the extreme Black struggle of the 1960s, how else should one have felt in the face of illegal forced segregation; overlooked or ignored lynchings; brutal and bloody beatings at the hands of corrupt law enforcement while peacefully protesting for Civil Rights; sanctioned white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, who would often murder Blacks to keep them from registering to vote; and an overall oppressive and repressive white racist bigotry? But Taubman's statements remain fairly common in and around the time that *Dutchman* was written. Similar sentiments were also presented in England: In his review of the 1967 London opening of *Dutchman* at the Hampstead Theatre Club, directed by Charles Jarrett and presented as a double bill with *Neighbours* by James Saunders, Ronald Bryden suggests, '*Dutchman*, by LeRoi Jones, is a posturing, inflammatory, deliberately dishonest work, destructive for the malicious excitement of destruction, in a way that suggests authorship by a stoked-up juvenile delinquent' (25). Still, statements like these validate Clay's/Baraka's outrage, for, in light of simply listening to an actor speak Clay's lines, Taubman recognizes both cause for alarm and the need for change, while Bryden finally admits, 'Yet such is the talent of [*Dutchman's*] writing that, after it, it's difficult even to remember what the first play [*Neighbours*] had to say' (25). Unfortunately for Clay, though, despite his realization that, 'Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 35), he backs down and seals his fate by once again falling victim to his own indifference:

Ahhh. Shit. But who needs it? I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquests. My people's madness. Hah! That's a laugh. My people. They don't need me to claim them. They got legs and arms of their own. Personal insanities. Mirrors. They don't need all those words. They don't need any defense. (Baraka, *Dutchman* 35-36)

The ending, in which Clay is ultimately stabbed and killed by Lula, is often considered a consequence of Clay's outburst. Sherley Williams postulates, 'The plot line in itself has several implications, the most important being that the survival of the Black man in America, or Western world, for that matter, is predicated upon his ability to keep his thoughts and his true identity hidden' (135). But, Clay's murder should not be read as a consequence of his feelings; rather, it is Clay's inaction which ultimately gets him killed. His failure to act on his impulse—'I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would understand me' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 35)—and preemptively defend himself against Lula's ensuing attack, in which she plunges a small knife into

Clay's chest, leaves him as another Black victim, to be disregarded by the US legal system of the 1960s. Of course, in 1960s America, a Black man would almost certainly be put to death for killing a white woman, even in self-defense. Nonetheless, in the world of the play, Clay gets it wrong, and his miscalculation and reluctance to kill leaves him vulnerable; a system of defense is exactly what is needed to combat Lula as a representation of, in the words of Baraka, America's spirit. Clay's valid Black rage and threats to kill in response to the bigotry he faces serve as examples of Baraka's concept of justifiable homicide: The killing can only be stopped by killing. Through *Dutchman*, Baraka redefined words as action; and, with Clay, he gives birth to the concept that theatrical representations of killing (in the name struggle/defense) should symbolize revolution. In contrast, Lula engages in, and symbolizes, the other side of killing as Baraka saw it—a racist act of brutal murder. With what he accomplishes in his lengthy rant, then, and the message this rant sends to a broad integrationist theatergoing audience—'All the hip white boys [...] sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would've played not one note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 35)—Clay is a forerunner on behalf of what Baraka calls for in his 1964 essay 'The Revolutionary Theatre':

The force we want is of twenty million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons. We want actual explosions and actual brutality: AN EPIC IS CRUMBLING and we must give it the space and hugeness of its actual demise. The Revolutionary Theatre, which is now peopled with victims, will soon begin to be peopled with new kinds of heroes[...] (Baraka, *Home* 240-241)

The hint which Clay offers, that it is possible to break from the system and engage in necessary retaliation, paves the way for Baraka's revolutionary dramas still to come. And, around the time of *Dutchman*'s first production, with essays like 'The Revolutionary Theatre,' Baraka also prepared for his break from the white society he had been involved with in the Village for about seven years. Although he did not officially change his name until 1967, Baraka was already predicting the symbolic death of the bourgeois bohemian Le(Roi) Jones. In his poem, 'A contract (for the destruction and rebuilding of Paterson,' published in 1964 in his second collection of poems, aptly titled *The Dead Lecturer*, Baraka prophesizes, 'Roi, you will die soon' (12). But, like his character, Clay, Baraka would also have to face consequences for trying to break out:

Not so weirdly, when I had done *Dutchman* downtown I had got an Obie Award, but uptown it was called by some newspapers "racist drama." From the "fair-haired black boy" of Off-Broadway, as Langston Hughes called me with his tongue stuck way up in his cheek, I got to be a full-up racist. So strange that the victims, once they began to scream and shout at their oppressors, can now be termed the oppressors. We accuse whites of racism, so—

Presto! Change-o!—"black racism" is the real problem. (Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* 309)

In other words, Baraka faced his harshest criticism after leaving the Village for Harlem. Echoing Baraka's anecdote, Sell offers, 'when produced on Harlem street corners the next year [1965] as part of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School's cultural program, this Obie Award-winning play was deemed racist and just cause for the revocation of funds' ('The Drama of the Black Arts Movement' 265). While lambasting the Federal antipoverty program which initially funded Baraka's BARTS project, Fino exclaims, "'The action of your office is at best shocking and at worst unspeakable'" ('Shriver Prodded by Fino' 15). Sargent Shriver, the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, eventually agreed. In an article for the *New York Times*, titled 'Police Look Into Harlem Racists,' it is explained that Shriver admitted that the BARTS should have never received Federal funds: 'He said it "produced vile racist plays in language of the gutter unfit for the youngsters of the audience"' (Stern 18). Sell maintains, 'The most corrosively ironic aspect of this revocation was that it was called by foundation administrators who had given Baraka the money precisely because of the acclaim [*Dutchman*] had received at the Cherry Lane Theatre' ('The Drama of the Black Arts Movement' 265). And, the backlash Baraka and his work received reached far beyond New York, to wherever his plays were performed. In 1965, the Los Angeles production of *Dutchman* directed by Burgess Meredith was 'being pressured out of business locally by the police and newspapers' ("Harassment" Hurts LeRoi Jones Plays' 31). The *Los Angeles Times* and *The Hollywood Citizens-News* refused to publish ads for the play and the police shut down performances, claiming the producers had failed to apply for a permit ("Harassment" Hurts LeRoi Jones Plays' 31). Along these same lines, when Gene Persson, a financier of the LA production, set out to produce a film version of *Dutchman* in the mid 1960s, he too was met with an extreme lack of support. The New York Transit Authority refused him access to use a real subway car for the film as a result of Baraka's reputation: 'The 30-year-old would-be movie producer got the impression that someone in the agency had made up his mind that Jones was a sinister figure' (Lelyveld 7). In fact, 'Money had been a problem for Persson from the start; not only the Transit Authority shied away from LeRoi Jones' (Lelyveld 7). In the absence of such support, Persson took his production to Britain, and the film was shot in just six days at Twickenham studio, outside London (Lelyveld 7, 13). The finished film, released in 1967 and directed by Anthony Harvey, was submitted as a British entry at the 28th Venice Film Festival, which earned Shirley Knight the Volpi Cup prize for the best performance by an actress for her crazed portrayal of Lula ('Bunuel Film Wins Top Venice Award; Other Prizes Booed' 25). Despite the honor, however, and probably as a result of mixed feelings regarding Baraka and his play, the verdict was booed at the award presentations at the Lido Cinema Palace in Venice, Italy ('Bunuel Film Wins Top Venice Award;

Other Prizes Booed' 25). These repercussions for going against the grain and embracing blackness (in the form of the BARTS) resonate back to Clay in *Dutchman*. There are, however, other views:

While there is no denying that [Clay's] speech raises important issues, to treat it as the meaning of the play and to lay the weight of the play on it is to judge the whole by its part. There seems to be very little justification—in spite of the fact that Clay, like Baraka, is a poet—for treating Clay's voice as that of the playwright, without framing the speech within the structure of the play. (Kumar 278)

Of course, to completely overlook any connection between the author and his male character here dilutes the potent race issues of that time. To deny any sort of link between the play and Baraka's own growth as an activist is unwarranted. In his 2003 essay on Baraka's *Dutchman*, Matthew Reborn notes, 'That the play is a masterpiece of subversive ideology and a genuine political statement is beyond question even if one went no further than a cursory examination of the text' (796). The point is clear, but is, in fact, questionable. As I have shown, I fear a superficial inspection of the play, without any study of its author or conception, diminishes its political strength as it relates to the racial tensions of its time. It is, in fact, very revealing to trace the rising political voice and views in *Dutchman* in relation to Baraka's own budding activism. Clay's outburst certainly erupts as Baraka's own explosion in the reviews of the time, and Baraka's later total break from the 'white world' which he surrounded himself in also parallels Clay's sudden rupture.

With *Dutchman*, then, Baraka not only found an outlet for his own rage, but also became a voice and influence, either directly or indirectly, on an oppressed society that was ready for change. While Reborn, like most, certainly presents a clear understanding of Baraka's history, it is curious that the critic begins with the move to Harlem in 1965, when the subject of his criticism, *Dutchman*, was written at least one year earlier while Baraka was still in Greenwich Village. He writes, 'Baraka began his political and aesthetic project when he left Greenwich Village and his wife Hettie Cohen to move to Harlem' (Reborn 797). While this is ostensibly true, as I have suggested, the significance of when *Dutchman* was written and what happened to Baraka as a result of its production should not be glossed over. Nilgun Anadolu-Okur writes, '*Dutchman* needs to be analyzed, at least in part, as the culmination of [Baraka's] growing awareness of America on a personal level' (112). By presenting Lula's brutal, calculated murder of Clay as inevitable, due to Clay's failure to kill her first in justifiable defense, Baraka illustrates a palpable warning to black Americans. Furthermore, Clay's declaration that Blacks will eventually revolt—'They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own' (Baraka, *Dutchman* 36)—becomes Baraka's rallying call to an altered Black mindset influenced by the Black Nationalism of Malcolm X: 'The play dramatically captured the cultural moment of a radical shift in Black identity and politics, and in interracial relations, in the U.S.' (Thompson 84). Baraka's goal becomes to 'scream and cry,

murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be' (*Home* 239). The decision to write *Dutchman*, though, brings forward the idea that Baraka had found a way to practice political activism through drama by representing a scenario where a Black victim of oppression gives vent to his rage to kill. In his review of the London premier of *Dutchman*, Derek Malcolm writes, 'Mr. Jones, an American Negro, gives the young man some splendidly bitter rhetoric which Calvin Lockhart spits out in a way which would do credit to Malcolm X. Those with white skins who like to be insulted out of their indifference should enjoy themselves immensely' ('Review: Double Bill at the Hampstead Theatre Club' 7). Although Clay ultimately fails to act, Walker Vessels, of Baraka's *The Slave*, emerges as a black revolutionary actively engaged in war with white Americans in the name of freedom.

The Slave

The Slave: A Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts, directed/presented by Leo Garen, and co-presented by Stan Swerdlow, was first performed at the St. Mark's Playhouse in New York City on 16 December 1964³⁶ (incidentally, the same year *Dutchman* was first staged). The play depicts a heated domestic conflict amidst an all-out race war. Among gun-fire and explosive bombs, the leader of a violent revolution for Black liberation, Walker Vessels, confronts his white ex-wife, Grace Easley, and her new white husband, Professor Bradford Easley, in their home. As the play moves forward, the feud between Walker and the Easleys escalates as the liquor fueled revolutionary leader explains his intentions to take his two biracial daughters from their mother. In the end, Walker kills Brad Easley, and watches as an explosion causes a beam to collapse on and finally kill Grace. As she dies, she pleads with Walker to check on their children; but, curiously, as the play comes to an end, Walker repeatedly exclaims that their two girls are dead as he flees the house.

Interestingly, *The Slave* and *Dutchman* are frequently published together, most obviously as a result of being written and performed in the same year. Of course, the two do share common elements, making it easy for academics to draw thematic connections:

³⁶ This first production was staged as a double bill with Baraka's *The Toilet*, which centers on a group of black students planning and plotting a fight between their dominate black friend and a white boy in a high school public toilet. Essentially, the play depicts an interracial homosexual attraction within a homophobic, racist society. Recently, much has been made out of Baraka's early plays dealing with homosexuality, such as *The Eighth Ditch*, *The Baptism*, and *The Toilet*. Since my work focuses on the representations of killing in Baraka's plays, for more on this, see Jose Esteban Munoz's 'Cruising the Toilet: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity' in *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 23.2-3 (2007): 353-376 and Darieck Scott's chapter, 'The Occupied Territory: Homosexuality and History in Amiri Baraka's Black Arts' from his book *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

The young black man whose life is prematurely cut short at the hands of a white woman in *Dutchman* pursues his reincarnation in a different play as Walker, the leader of the revolutionary forces in *The Slave*. The black man is determined to strike back and get even. Henceforth, *Dutchman* and *The Slave* can be looked at as parts of the same play whose plot centers around becoming a man, specifically a black man. (Anadolu-Okur 107)

Whereas Anadolu-Okur sees this as a play about ‘becoming a man,’ I see it being about a man’s desperate, and often failed, attempts to free himself from the teachings/values of an oppressive white society. In this way, Walker and Clay do share a common bond, for both characters ultimately attempt to separate from white society. Although, while Walker places himself in the house of his ex-wife, he essentially begins the play struggling to escape, while Clay only awakens to the reality of his condition towards the end of *Dutchman*. What makes *The Slave* worth discussing here, therefore, is the method with which Walker ultimately endeavors to break the chains of his oppressors: justifiable homicide—a method Clay fails to act upon.

For some, however, *The Slave* falls short of *Dutchman*’s achievements. According to Werner Sollors, author of *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism,”* ‘*The Slave* is a less convincing, more conventional play than *Dutchman*’ (Sollors 134). He explains:

Indeed, in its over-explanation of an obsessively autobiographical nightmare, *The Slave* has counterproductive heaviness that comes as a disappointment after the structure of *Dutchman*. The sentimental motif of screaming babies in a Black-white race war in America, and the portrayal of the self-absorbed protagonist not only as a poet and military leader, but also as a drunkard, divorced from his white wife, are elements of the play which obstruct access to its message. (134)

Here, by describing *The Slave* as an ‘autobiographical nightmare,’ Sollors references the associations which can be drawn between the author’s own personal life and the plot of his play. Indeed, Baraka’s own white ex-wife, Hettie Jones, refers to the play in a similar manner: ‘One day he would write about [the] separation between us, a play I always called Roi’s nightmare’ (Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* 138). When discussing this play, however, it is a mistake to dismiss the autobiographical elements here as simply obsessive. For the play’s message, far from being obstructed by these details, is directly linked to Baraka’s own struggle to free himself from an overwhelmingly white bohemian Greenwich Village in light of his growing Black Nationalist agenda. Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with Baraka about the play and he confirmed this connection. On 5 October 2011, I attended a modern production of *The Slave* produced for the Philly Urban Theatre Festival, performed at The Adrienne Theater in Philadelphia. Directed by John Doyle, I found the production both relevant and powerful, but, in knowing the play and Baraka’s

history, was still struck by the similarities the author shares with his protagonist: both are intellectual poets once married to white women, both share an overt revolutionary agenda, and both have two biracial daughters by their ex-wives. In his essay 'Black Literature and LeRoi Jones,' Cecil M. Brown discusses Baraka's relationship to Walker and explains their connection as a Black literary tradition:

In *The Slave*, Jones has carried the thematic tradition as far as anyone could hope to carry it. If we say that in this tradition, the author, as presented in the work, is the most important character, the next step is for the author to present his personal life as the subject of his art. The white writer may have to fabricate, but the Black writer only has to reveal himself, reveal his "personal" self. LeRoi Jones' best and most memorable character is LeRoi Jones himself. [...] The relationship between Jones and Walker is the natural, logical extension of the thematic tradition. (33)

Shortly after viewing the play in Philadelphia, I attended a lecture by Baraka held at The Guild Theatre in Sacramento, California on 12 November 2011, and, so, I asked him how he felt about the play and its relevance today. While I understand the problems associated with trusting an artist's memory when it comes to past writings, it is difficult to discount his answer:

Everything is a product of time, place and condition. When I wrote that play, I was living in Greenwich Village [...] and I had just left. And that was a play that actually was explaining in my mind in some kind of metaphorical way what had just happened. I had to get out of that situation [...] The whole question of the Black Arts—how can I be fighting in this situation if I am not excusing myself? [...] That last scene of that play [...] fleeing a burning house. That's what I thought; "you're fleeing a burning building." (Baraka and Jones)

This interpretation challenges the work of those critics, like Sollors, who have failed to find significance within *The Slave* as a theatrical achievement in its own right (insofar as it represents another important precursor to Baraka's revolutionary theatre still to come). Indeed, in 1966, *The Slave* was named an American prize-winner for the first World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal ('Festival in Senegal Honors Armstrong' 12). As with *Dutchman*, the connections which can be drawn between the author's personal experiences and this particular play only serve to underscore Baraka's blossoming activism through theatre. While he emphasizes a sort of escape through his metaphor of fleeing a burning building, however, as he contemplated leaving Greenwich for Harlem, he created *The Slave* to expose himself, and others once engaged in blind assimilation, as modern day slaves: 'The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE!' (Baraka, *Home* 236). Baraka admits, 'The play *The Slave*, which shows a black would-be revolutionary who splits from his

white wife on the eve of a race war [...] was so close to our real lives, so full of that living image' (*The Autobiography* 288).

Unquestionably, the balance of power between a white woman and a black man, which Baraka was seemingly dealing with in his own life with Hettie, is also brought into focus with *The Slave*; and, to be sure, at the time the play was written, his relationship with his first wife was crumbling: 'The trouble was that now there was some kind of slow drift by me away from her. For the past period the liaisons I had with other women had grown less frequent, but now, from no open or conscious plan I put forward, the women I began to see were black' (280). Again, what's significant here is how Baraka's individual experiences, in this instance, feed his drama, which, in turn, reflect the social conditions of the time:

The late 1950s and early 1960s [...] were a time when interracial relationships shifted in the U.S. cultural imagination from being radical and progressive to being reactionary and regressive. It was a time when black-white relations could have created identities of *difference* (rather than assimilation or appropriations) but failed, and instead re-segregation became inevitable. (Thompson 84)

For better or worse, for Baraka and many, many others, complete separation from the white majority, and the oppressive conditions they enforced, seemed a viable solution towards Black liberation. In *The Slave*, it is this concept of separation which Walker feels conflicted by; on one hand, he has left his white bohemian past to lead a Black revolution, while, on the other hand, he feels compelled to return to the home of his ex-wife.

In fact, the title of the play stems from this confliction within Walker. In an interview from 1966, Baraka makes clear:

That black man, Walker Vessels, is still a slave in the sense that he's supposed to be leading this army, yet he's spending all his time talking to this white man [Brad Easley]. That is why I called it *The Slave*: he had no business being there in the first place; he was supposed to be with his own people. (Smith and Thorn 14)

The subtitle, then, *A Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts*, serves to emphasize the play as a moral lesson—that Blacks must unite to combat and escape the modern day slavery enforced by whites, as a system of domination, still present in the 1960s. Interestingly, a draft of *The Slave*, with marked revisions, found in the Amiri Baraka Collection at the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library, is titled, '*THE SLAVE (A Science Fiction Fable)*' (Amiri Baraka Collection). As a revision, while still readable, the words 'Science Fiction' are crossed out and 'in 2 acts' are handwritten in their place (Amiri Baraka Collection). The original subtitle, *A Science Fiction Fable*,

draws attention to the plot of the play as a fictional, but nevertheless, plausible future event. Actor Al Freeman, Jr., who played Clay both on stage and in the film version of *Dutchman* (1967), as well as Walker in the first production of *The Slave*, emphasizes this moral lesson by dropping the main title (*The Slave*) in his film version, *A Fable* (1971). Once again, Freeman played Walker while also directing the motion picture. Prior to his death, I had the esteemed pleasure of speaking with Freeman, Professor at Howard University in the Department of Theatre Arts, via telephone, to inquire into the possibility of screening this film. Unfortunately, according to Freeman, as of today, there are no known existing prints of the film, leaving this work as a lost treasure. Incidentally, no archive, including The Motion Picture Reading Room at the Library of Congress, can track down a print.

In the prologue of the play, before the main action begins, Walker enters the stage ‘*as an old field slave*’ (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 43). The prologue serves to present Walker as an old man, seemingly long after the main action of the play comes to a close at the end of Act Two; and, despite his previous position as the leader of a Black army, the old man remains a slave because he fails to see the benefits of Black unity as a key component to Black liberation. As he enters, he declares, ‘We live where we are, and seek nothing but ourselves. We are liars, and we are murderers’ (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 43). Walker admits to having concern only for himself, and foreshadows the disregard he holds towards his Black comrades exposed during the main action of the play—‘all of my officers are ignorant motherfuckers who have never read any book in their lives’ (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 67). In addition, by calling himself a liar and a murderer, he exposes his refusal to recognize his true Black consciousness, and acknowledges his role in killing, both metaphorically and literally, the souls of other black folk—‘you’ve killed so many of your own people too. It’s a wonder they haven’t killed you’ (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 67). These lines reflect Baraka’s theory of Blacks as white murderers (as discussed earlier), who assimilate and set out to ‘murder’ the Black community by spreading a conservative white agenda. Essentially, as the prologue comes to a close, and Act One begins, Walker continues to function as a tool to present Baraka’s dichotomy of killing: Black justifiable homicide (Walker’s revolution) and/or illegitimate white murder (Essentially, Walker as a white man in blackface).

As the Easleys first discover Walker in their home, Brad cynically questions him as to why he is leading his ‘noble black brothers’ to kill (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 49). In response, Walker fires back, ‘I mean really, just fuck you. Don’t, goddamnit, don’t tell me about any goddamn killing of anything’ (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 49). Here, Walker defends his (and his army’s) actions and implies a superior understanding of the need to kill in justifiable self-defense. Early in the play, Walker, having been a slave to the white oppressive system, establishes the killing of whites as a necessary and warranted means to liberation—something Bradford Easley

could not possibly understand in his position of privilege as a white, middle-class University Professor. This notion, that white Americans live in ignorance to what Blacks truly know or feel, is best illuminated in Baraka's discussion of American slavery from *Blues People* (published in 1963, just one year prior to *The Slave's* first production):

The idea of ever becoming "Americans" in the complete social sense of that word would never have been understood by Negro slaves. Even after the Emancipation, such a concept would have seemed like an unamusing fantasy to most Negroes since many times the very term *America* must have meant for them "a place they don't want you." America, for Negroes, was always divided into black and white, master and slave, and as such, could not simply be called "America." And so there have been, since slavery, two Americas: A white America and a black America, both responsible to and for the other. One oppressed, the other the oppressor. But an even more profound difference between these two Americas has been their awareness of each other, or the degree to which the one America is aware of the other. The white America has never had more than a cursory knowledge of black America (even during the days of the Negro Renaissance, as I have pointed out, the knowledge of black America obtained by white America, for all the talk to the contrary, was never more than superficial). But the black American has always *had to* know what was on the white man's mind, even if as a slave, he had no full knowledge of what America really was. The Negro's adaptation to American life has been based since the Emancipation on his growing knowledge of America and his increasing acquaintance with the workings of the white man's mind. (Baraka, *Blues People* 137)

At first, Walker embraces his advanced knowledge—recognizing the need for war as a member of the oppressed—and reiterates the above concept, that most whites are unable to grasp the thoughts and actions of Black America, for his wife. He tells Grace, 'there's probably nothing I can say to make you understand me' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 49). However, as the play moves forward, it becomes clear that, though he continuously tries to escape (and despite his attempts to lead a revolution), Walker remains influenced by (and a victim of) the teachings/values of an oppressive white society.

Though he stays armed to kill, with gun in hand, after his initial defense of his actions as leader of the Black revolution, Walker seems consumed by a desire for recognition and approval from both Grace and Brad. Moreover, as he struggles to gain respect, he is forced to remain on the defensive as he attempts to deflect the verbal attacks thrown at him by the Easleys. The same reaction is present in *Dutchman*, where Clay is pressed by Lula to react: 'The pressure on the black man to "lose his cool" continually builds, in the play as well as in the contemporary world. It is

significant that [Baraka] wrote the play just before the major urban riots of the 1960s in which black people did indeed collectively lose their cool' (Rice 55-56). According to Kimberly Benston:

Like Clay, Walker is presented as a character not yet fully developed. He is a man who must be brought to see the disparate and conflicting forces within his own tormented mind. Although he holds the gun during the long night in the Easleys' home, it is the white couple who are on the attack during the fierce verbal battle. (*Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* 177)

Unfortunately for Walker, by returning to the home of his ex-wife, he has placed himself in a vulnerable situation. Brad digs in to Walker: 'Well, once a bad poet always a bad poet . . . even in the disguise of a racist murderer!' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 49). Here, Brad clearly criticizes Walker's chosen course of action—to kill in the name of revolution—but the strategic choice of the word murderer along with the insult directed at his poetry cut deep. In a draft of *The Slave*, with marked revisions, found in the Amiri Baraka Collection at the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library, the original line reads, 'even in the disguise of a racist killer' (Amiri Baraka Collection). Not surprisingly, given Baraka's philosophy regarding Black assimilationists as white murderers, 'killer' is crossed out and replaced with a handwritten 'murderer' on the draft itself (Amiri Baraka Collection). The revision is necessary in order to convey Brad's control over Walker. While seemingly subtle, the adjustment in meaning here is significant. As discussed, in the beginning of Act One, Walker defends his position as a killer in the name of Black freedom, but, by labeling him a murderer, Brad characterizes Walker's actions as debase, unlawful crimes. In addition, the change (from killer to murderer) links Brad's line here to Walker's identification as a murderer in the prologue—perhaps, Walker has internalized and adopted Brad's label (as an assimilationist). Whatever the case, according to the stage directions, Walker is affected by the line: '*Not quite humbled. [...] [Walker] Bends head, then he brings it up quickly*' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 50). The implication here is clear; while Walker is not entirely moved to deference towards his assumed enemy, his sense of self and pride do begin to break.

Following this exchange, Walker attempts to regain his position of power, but fails by choosing to call upon the white, European literary cannon. Shaken by Brad's insults, Walker prepares to recite a few lines from what he claims is his newest piece of poetry: 'Straddling each dolphin's back/And steadied by a fin,/Those innocents relive their death,/Their wounds open again' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 50). After revealing these words as lines from a poem by William Butler Yeats, Walker challenges Brad to name the poem, in hopes of intellectually defeating the Professor. Regrettably, for Walker, Brad names the piece, 'News for the Delphic Oracle,' and even identifies the recited lines as a section from '[t]he second part' of the poem (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 51). Again, our protagonist stands defeated; the stage directions for Walker state,

simply, 'Hurt,' as he admits to Brad, 'Yeah. That's right' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 51). At this stage, by assuming the voice of a white European poet, Walker, in terms of his progress as a Black revolutionary leader, seems to be moving backwards. By extension, when Grace labels Walker as 'A second-rate Bigger Thomas,' the killer of an upper-class white woman from Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Walker deflects the association and, instead, self-identifies as Othello. 'In the 1960s [...] with the dawning of the Black Power movement after the most bloody stage of the civil rights struggle, and the shocking upsurge of violent crime in the cities, especially among young black males, Wright's novel increasingly seemed strikingly accurate and, indeed, prophetic' (Rampersad xxii). Interestingly, after having started his novel, a real-life case, involving the murder of a white woman allegedly at the hands of Blacks, was brought to Wright's attention:

In May 1938 [...] Robert Nixon, a young black man, along with an accomplice, was arrested and charged with the murder of a white woman beaten to death with a brick in her apartment in the course of a robbery. Securing virtually all the newspaper clippings about the Nixon case, Wright used many of its details in his novel. (Rampersad xviii)

Similarly, as with *Dutchman*, Baraka pulls from both his own life and Black life in the 1960s to create characters for his drama. Again, Walker ignores his own Black heritage by rejecting Wright while embracing Shakespeare. Specifically, his longing to be accepted by the middle-class Professor aligns Walker with Baraka's view regarding Black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, in and around the 1920s-30s:

The "New Negroes" produced a middle-class, middle-brow art because despite their desired stance as intellectuals and artists, they were simply defending their right, the right of Negroes, to be intellectuals, in a society which patently denied them such capacities. And if the generation of the forties began to understand that no such 'defense' or explanation was necessary, the young Negro intellectuals of the fifties and sixties realize—many of them perhaps only emotionally—that a society whose only strength lies in its ability to destroy itself and the rest of the world has small claim toward defining or appreciating intelligence or beauty. (*Blues People* 232)

Rather than embrace an individual Black consciousness, Walker is stuck in the Easley's home attempting to defend his right as an intellectual—a futile act which would cease to be an issue in the presence of his Black revolutionary army. Yet, in the house of his ex-wife, Walker's fervor for (and claim to) Black Nationalist Power is weakened. He admits, 'Oh shit, I learned so many words for what I've wanted to say. They all come down on me at once. But almost none of them are mine' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 53). In this instance, Walker feels stripped of his own voice and caged by the teachings and vocabulary of the ruling white majority. While his soldiers

wage war outside the home, in what they consider to be acts of justifiable self-defense against oppression, Walker continues to lose his battles, both with the Easleys and the confictions within his own mind.

The tension within the home continues to rise as Grace brands Walker as a 'nigger murderer' and Walker reveals his plan to take his two daughters away with him. As Grace argues to keep her children, Walker continues to break down and reveals his ultimate flaw: 'I, Walker Vessels, single-handedly, and with no other adviser except my own ego, promoted a bloody situation where white and black people are killing each other [...] I would rather argue politics, or literature, or boxing, or anything, with you, dear Easley, with you . . .' (Baraka, *Dutchman and the Slave* 67). Despite his initial defense of his actions as the leader of a violent revolution, here, Walker finally admits that the war and killing he is responsible for starting was prompted by a selfish ego, rather than as a group effort to achieve Black liberation. To add to this confession, rather than return to continue fighting in the struggle which he began, Walker also declares his preference to engage in intellectual discussions with Brad. Interestingly, during his break from Greenwich and the white middle-class he found himself surrounded by there, Baraka has expressed a similar conflicted admiration for those individuals he ultimately decided he should leave behind: 'I still thought very highly of innumerable white intellectuals and artists' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 285). Baraka and Walker's admiration for these white intellectuals is to be read as genuine and would have been supported by the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. Still, by declaring Brad a preferred companion, Walker goes against his implicit ideology: the Black Nationalism Walker has adopted to lead a revolution promoted Black self-sufficiency and segregation from whites. In the world of the play, the path to freedom lies outside the walls of this house. But, Walker remains, seemingly because he has yet to retrieve his children.

To take a case in point, as Act One nears its end, Walker offers potential reasoning for hanging about the house. In this instance, he references what he sees as justifiable homicide as a means to protect his children:

I thought maybe I might be able to sneak in just as you and my ex-wife were making love, or just as you were lining the girls up against the wall to beat them or make them repeat after you, "Your daddy is a racist murderer." And then I thought I could murder both of you on the spot, and be completely justified. (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 69)

Here, Walker embraces the necessary elimination of the oppressor and, shortly thereafter, recalls his revolutionary call to arms: 'I was preaching hate the white man . . . get the white man off our backs ... if necessary, kill the white man for our rights' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 69). This particular line sums up Baraka's concept of justifiable homicide as a path to liberation and serves

to present a further parallel between Walker and his author. To put it bluntly, as he grew towards a full-fledged Black Nationalism, a call for the death and destruction of whites became Baraka's anthem. Around the time *The Slave* was written, Baraka expressed his national mantra at a performance held at the Village Gate in Greenwich: 'A woman asked me in all earnestness, couldn't any whites help? I said, "You can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world's people with your death"' (*The Autobiography* 285). Furthermore, in the play, Walker's revolutionary rhetoric leads to actual killing on the streets. But, the violent actions taking place outside are never seen on stage; only gunfire and explosions can be heard as the Easleys continue their conversation with the instigator of this war. And, while Walker claims 'right is in the act,' the real revolution is eclipsed by his inability to break away (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 75).

In Act Two, Walker is visibly shaken by the long exchange of words and full of self-pity. As he sits in anguish, continuing to disregard the retrieval of his children, Brad forces Walker into action with a surprise attack. In the scuffle, Walker finally practices what he has preached, and kills Brad in self-defense:

EASLEY throws himself on him. The chair falls backward and the two men roll on the floor. EASLEY trying to choke WALKER. WALKER trying to get the gun out of his pocket. [...] Suddenly, WALKER shoves one hand in EASLEY's face, shooting him without taking the gun from his pocket. (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 80)

As a predecessor to Baraka's later representations of killing on stage, this act remains significant; Walker, a revolutionary Black militant, despite his contradictions and hypocrisies, actually kills a white man in justifiable self-defense. In actuality, this is no mere plot point; effectively, from the start, Baraka used the theatre as a vehicle to push his political message. Baraka has said, with the Black liberation movement and the teachings of Malcolm X, 'Self defense was beginning to be impressed on peoples' minds' (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*). By presenting this new mode of thought on stage, in opposition to King's insistence on nonviolence, no matter the attack, Baraka broke new ground with regard to American theatre. Just outside the comforts of marches, sit-ins and Civil Right's songs, stood an emerging militant Black Art fueled by the fire of Malcolm X and led by the pen of LeRoi Jones (soon to become Amiri Baraka).

Regardless of its impact, however, Walker's act of justifiable homicide is obscured by the cryptic ending to this play. After Brad's death, Grace and Walker fight as he entertains the thought of killing her too. Ultimately, Walker cannot bring himself to kill his ex-wife, but, in the end, a major explosion to the house fatally wounds her. As she asks after her children, Walker gives the impression that he knows they are already dead. He proclaims, 'They're dead, Grace' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 88). He repeats these lines as he proceeds to stumble out through the

door. As he exits, the stage directions point out, 'He is now the old man at the beginning of the play. There are more explosions. Another one very close to the house. A sudden aggravated silence, and then there is a child heard crying and screaming as loud as it can. More explosions' (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 88). There seem to be two possible explanations to this ending: 1) Either Walker has killed the children before the action of the play begins and has known them to be dead all along (in this case, the child heard screaming at the end would serve to symbolize their deaths), or 2) Walker chooses to leave his children behind, prophesying their eventual deaths as casualties of war. Despite his act of self-defense, both scenarios suggest that Walker is a broken man and still a slave. If he had, in fact, already killed the children, then he really had no excuse to stay in the house to begin with. Whereas, if he chooses to leave the children behind, it as if he has already chosen defeat and accepts himself as a permanent slave to an oppressive American system.

Finally, *The Slave* fails to fully present Baraka's concept of revolutionary theatre, in that the play is knowingly too concerned with the inner workings of one man's mind (recall the cry of Baraka's manifesto: 'The force we want is of twenty million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons' (Baraka, *Home* 240-241)). Of course, for presenting a hypothetical race war as a means to end racial oppression, the play should be regarded as a significant forerunner to Baraka's radical/ground-breaking Black Arts. Indeed, in his review of *The Slave*'s first production for the *New York Times*, Taubman acknowledges the play's potency:

There is no mistaking the fact, however, that Vessels is the violent, uncompromising voice of the Negro in furious rebellion, and that this rebellion is what the play is all about.[...] But the explosions and the cries of the wounded and dying become something more than theatrical effects. They sum up a vision of what might happen if the patience of the neglected and scorned gave out. ('Theater: An Angry Man' 51)

In the end, though, as conflicted as he is throughout the play, and despite Taubman's evaluation, Walker stands alone as the 'old field slave,' ultimately failing to grasp the urgency and importance of remaining united with Blacks to further the struggle for Black liberation (Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* 43). Though the play certainly depicts acts of justifiable homicide and self-defense, by focusing exclusively on Walker and the Easleys, *The Slave* falls short of presenting these killings as examples of successful Black unity to promote bona fide revolution.

In contrast, as an integral part of the Black Arts Movement, Baraka's revolutionary theatre presented the killing of whites as a justified means to reclaiming a distinct Black heritage and culture. Motivated by an ever growing pull towards a Black Nationalist ideology, greatly influenced by Malcolm X, Baraka seems to have written *Dutchman* and *The Slave* to present the possibility of

separating from white society to encourage Black self-determination. However, both of these early forerunners place a heavy emphasis on integration and assimilation. In his revolutionary theatre, 'Baraka's characters have no interest whatsoever in securing a place in white America as they know it' ('The Black Arts Era'). And, though a large majority of Baraka's subsequent plays, post-*The Slave*, depict representations of justifiable homicide as a mode to Black liberation³⁷, *Slave Ship* epitomizes his concept of revolutionary theatre and expands upon Walker's individual act of justifiable homicide.

Slave Ship

While Baraka was enjoying a new found success in the Village, in no small part due to the theatrical waves made by *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, his growing shift towards Black Nationalism, as discussed in Chapter One, landed him in Harlem. Though, with the collapse of the relatively short-lived BARTS, Baraka decided to leave Harlem for his hometown of Newark, New Jersey. Taking the essential concepts of the BARTS with him, the organization of a Black Arts Festival in Newark, held in 1966, helped Baraka to establish his new theatre/school Spirit House along with a theatrical troupe, the Spirit House Movers and Players (Woodard 66-67). Much like the BARTS, only funded by the community, Spirit House served as a repertory theatre as well as a school, offering classes and performances in music, and theatre, just to name a few (Hudson 25). It was Spirit House and the Spirit House Movers and Players which first performed *Slave Ship* in Newark, New Jersey in March of 1967 (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 147). This particular production was directed by Baraka himself, but it was the New York performances, directed by Gilbert Moses, and first presented at Theatre-in-the-Church at Washington Square in November, 1969 which exposed a more widespread theatre going audience to the Black Arts message of Amiri Baraka's revolutionary theatre (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 148).

According to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 'Black Arts drama, at its best, is the idea of black mass liberation' ('The Black Arts Era'). This statement certainly applies to *Slave Ship*, for the play's singular focus revolves around the depiction and promotion of Black unity as the key to revolution. As a series of vignettes, *Slave Ship* weaves representations of the transportation of slaves from Africa to America throughout the historical retelling of an attempted slave rebellion and the killings of an 'Uncle Tom' assimilationist preacher and white God by a Black mass. While *Dutchman* and *The Slave* center on the individual and, at least in part, reflect Baraka's own struggle with a conflicted self-identity,—a transition which would take a bohemian Beat poet

³⁷ Though this study will continue to consider representations of killing portrayed throughout Baraka's ongoing career as a playwright (beyond his days as a militant Black Nationalist), several of his plays written during the 1960s depict some form of killing. As a start, see Baraka's *Four Black Revolutionary Plays: Experimental Death Unit 1, A Black Mass, Madheart, Great Goodness of Life*. New York: Marion Boyars, 1998. All four plays included in this collection portray representations of killing for the stage.

from Greenwich Village to Harlem and Black Nationalism—*Slave Ship* utilizes a historical framework to explicitly call for and predict the death of white power in America. Baraka has explained, ‘One thing I think that artists have to do to help blow this society up is understand the history of this society, very clearly, and lay that out in a revolutionary way’ (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*). This distinction, between his earlier plays and this historical concept (represented in the form of *Slave Ship*), is important as it clarifies a shift from works concerned with the individual to material centered on mass collaboration and unity. In addition, it should be made clear that as Baraka cemented himself as a firm, militant Black Nationalist, his rhetoric and message heightened. In an essay from 1968, titled ‘Raise #3 Presidents,’ Baraka proclaims, ‘We must each of us give all our time, energies, & resources toward raising our people as masters of a modern Black Nation, or we will always be chumped off & ridiculed & killed off & poisoned by these white motherfuckers!’ (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 88). He urges, ‘We must be Black Nationalists or we are in support of white nationalists. We must be revolutionary black nationalists passionately involved in the quest for Black Power, otherwise we are supporters of White Power’ (*Raise Race Rays Raze* 88). Here again, the concept of self-defense (read justified retaliation) is implied in Baraka’s rhetoric, as he suggests Nationalism as a means of protection. In essence, this fervor for united militancy and Nationalism is what fueled Baraka to write *Slave Ship*. Again, Baraka saw the theatre as a primary means to stir the people, and in the documentary, *Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*, Baraka discusses his motivation to reach back through history in order to accomplish this goal:

I remember feeling that if we want to be really militant what we should do is try to get ourselves actually back into the state of mind that our people must have been in when they [whites] first brought them [Blacks] here. I didn’t think you could be more militant than that, you know, because it seems to me if somebody had just taken you from your home, then you were probably all fire. (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*)

The history which shapes *Slave Ship*, then, is less interested in educating, and more involved with eliciting emotions to provoke audiences as they witness the terrors of slavery play out on stage.

Ultimately, no play before *Slave Ship* was ever able to quite invoke Blacks towards this type of intense reconnection regarding the slavery which had stained America’s past. Even if Black audiences had a comprehensive knowledge of the history of slavery, with *Slave Ship* they were actually made to feel the grip of shackles and lashes of the whip. Of course, preceding plays attempted to tackle the subject of slavery³⁸ and, one, in particular, was lauded the very same year

³⁸ For a detailed study of the representations of slavery on the American stage, from 1787-1861, see Nathans, Heather S. *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861: Lifting the Veil of Black*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Dutchman and *The Slave* were first performed. Robert Lowell's *Benito Cereno* was first produced at The American Place Theatre in 1964 as part of Lowell's trilogy *The Old Glory*³⁹, which won 'five Obie Awards for the 1964-65 season, including Best Play' (Lowell, *The Old Glory: Three Plays* 223). *Benito Cereno*, rated as the masterpiece of Lowell's trilogy, is adapted from Herman Melville's novella of the same name, and tackles the tale of a Black slave revolt aboard a Spanish ship. Basically, an American ship, led by Captain Amasa Delano, encounters the Spanish vessel and, at first, is deceived into believing that its captain, Benito Cereno, has taken ill. As the play nears its close, however, Delano and his crew realize that Cereno is actually the victim of a mutiny. It is revealed that the slaves aboard Cereno's ship have taken revolutionary action in the hopes that their captive would sale them back to Africa. This back to Africa sentiment reflects Marcus Garvey's teachings, which later influenced the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X's strong Nationalist stance, as detailed in Chapter One. It is this stance which Baraka adopted and translated for the stage. In the end, Babu, the leader of the slave uprising, challenges Delano and declares, 'Yankee Master understand me. The future is with us' (Lowell, *The Old Glory: Three Plays* 214). In response, Delano raises his pistol, and, right before shooting and killing Babu, affirms, 'This is your future' (Lowell, *The Old Glory: Three Plays* 214). Throughout the play, Lowell focuses on the Black-white relationships, making this dynamic a dominant part of the theme. Though, while the play brought about an awareness often neglected in the American theatre—not only in how Blacks deal with whites, but also regarding the history of slavery and slave rebellion—Delano's last line, despite Babu's declaration, would have reminded Blacks of the utter hopelessness they faced in 1960s America, and predicted their everlasting doomed future. Interestingly, Melville's novella depicts a much darker ending, in which Babu's body is dragged by a mule and burned to ashes while his severed head remains fixed on a pole to be gazed upon by whites. Certainly, in calling for a relatively large number of slaves, the play provided a rare opportunity for black actors in 1964, but its message, linked with the gruesome novella and its presentation of a thwarted Black revolution at the hands of a white American, clearly lacks the power and influence *Slave Ship* offered its Black theatre going audience (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*).

Specifically, *Slave Ship* opens with a vivid portrayal of the horrors and history of The Middle Passage. Almost immediately, audiences are invited to experience slavery through particularly realistic representations of the torture and bondage of the innocent. As the play opens, in darkness, only sounds of chains, whips, doors and the screams of slaves can be heard. Baraka explains:

³⁹ See Lowell, Robert. *The Old Glory: Three Plays: Endecott and the Red Cross; My Kinsman, Major Molinoux; and Benito Cereno*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

[W]e tried to conceive of actually creating the slave ship the way it would be; you know, what would that be like? Being down there, underneath the deck and being there? The stage directions have things like, you know, we should create smells and the whole sounds. For a long time the theatre should be black and all we hear is the sound of people screaming. (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*)

Since the play is specifically interested in Black American slavery, *Slave Ship* speaks to a Black audience in particular by attempting to realistically recreate the experiences of slave travel. For this reason, his attention to detail within the script is undoubtedly noteworthy. For example, as a prop, Baraka calls for 'Smell effects: incense ... dirt/filth smells/bodies' (*The Motion of History and Other Plays* 147). In addition, included at the back of the script, and normally as a section of the playbill handed to audience members, is a 'Glossary of Yoruba Terms' which are spoken by the slaves on the ship (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 149). Baraka seems to have chosen the Yoruba language to better capture the realistic notion that slaves were often captured and brought to America in tribal groups. The glossary allows readers, and most audiences, to better engage with the dialogue/message of these characters. Even when simply reading the script, one can recognize the attempt to present a true and accurate account of what slaves had to go through on their journey to America, as well as Baraka's efforts to help Black audiences connect with this experience. In fact, an actor's annotated note from a script dated 31 January 1966 reflects this reader recognition. On the first page, to the left and just under the title, one handwritten word is underlined for emphasis: 'Truly' (Amiri Baraka Collection of Playscripts). Most likely, the comment stands in praise of the play as a historical pageant and also seemingly acknowledges Baraka's sincere effort to educe the emotions of his readers/audience. In performance, then, these features, highlighted within the script, surely help draw out an early emotional response. And, to aid in this endeavor, for the Theatre-in-the-Church production from 1969, the set adhered to Baraka's wish to realistically recreate the ship. In his review of this production for the *Education Theatre Journal*, Foster Hirsch details:

The use of the stage space is as extraordinary as the acting. The whole theater has been converted into a slave ship. The audience sits on benches surrounding the stage, which is double-levelled [sic]. The top level slightly above the heads of the audience, is used for the deck of the ship and for the slave market; the bottom level, divided into four cell-like cubicles, represents the ship's hold. The whole structure rocks to convey the motion of the ship. The actors also use small stages in the corners of the theatre, and the area in which the audience sits: no section of the theater is out of bounds. All of the walls are covered with wood panelling [sic] to resemble the wood of the ship itself. (103)

In his description, Hirsch makes clear the realistic set presented in this early production, but also draws attention to a stage which lent itself to audience participation. This becomes an important aspect of the play, for, as a quintessential example of Baraka's Black revolutionary theatre, *Slave Ship* should eventually cause an audiences' invoked emotions to boil over; in so doing, the audience is incited to act.

Not everyone was impressed with Baraka's dramatic endeavor meant to extract an emotional response, however. In his review of the '69 production, Walter Kerr scathes:

Mr. Jones is a writer. But "Slave Ship" is not written. "Slave Ship" is an obvious improvisation, possibly from a scenario that can scarcely have covered more than three typewritten pages, in which, for an hour and 40 minutes without intermission, 15 actors utter assorted moans, groans, gasps and screeches while the busy director punctuates the sustained wail with as many cracked whips and slapped trap doors as possible. (Kerr D1)

Kerr is positively right in naming Jones (Baraka) as a writer, but seems on more dubious ground when he claims that the play was obviously improvised. Originally published in an issue of *Negro Digest* dated April 1967, the script for *Slave Ship* actually presents detailed descriptions and dialogue, nicely laying out everything a potential audience should witness. For example, despite Kerr's criticism that, 'It is 25 minutes before the first intelligible line is spoken (a man cries out that his black god has deserted him), another 15 before the next,' Baraka intentionally demands the theatre remain in darkness for a long time as the sounds of slavery ring forth (Kerr D1). In this way, Baraka strives to unnerve his audience; to put it another way, the play and stage directions set up and describe a scenario in which what unfolds on stage is told from the slaves' perspective. As the audiences—and, more specifically, Black audiences—observe the audible action, and engage with the agonizing sounds and foul smells in darkness, they are simultaneously brought in as a part of this action.

According to the script, the first lights '*flash on white men in sailor suits grinning their vices*' (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 135). In darkness, the audience is one with the slaves, but as light is introduced to the stage, all bear witness to the perpetrators of these heard atrocities. As the whites erupt with laughter, it is revealed that a female slave has killed herself and child in a desperate attempt to escape bondage. Here, the horrors continue to escalate as the slaves grieve the dead. Suddenly, amid the white laughter, a male slave rejects suicide as a means to freedom and proposes the path to liberation: 'I kill you, devils. I break these chains' (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 137). The link between these two statements foreshadows the message of the play and reintroduces Baraka's concept of killing as a path to Black liberation. Around the time this play was written, Baraka noted, 'We are slaves now because

we do not yet want to be free badly enough to take freedom' (Baraka, *Raise Race Rays Raze* 88). Here, Baraka makes a strong connection between the past and the present. In the rhetoric of Baraka during this period of his life, the slavery enforced on Blacks, both in the past, and in the racist 1960s, could only be undone by force. So too, the slave within the play reflects this notion; by killing the white captors aboard the ship, the slaves would metaphorically break the chains of bondage, ensuring their freedom. However, if only one individual slave attempted to kill in the name of freedom, he or she would surely be put to death by the white mass. At this stage, the slave stands alone and, therefore, cannot act. But, in these lines, notably spoken by a slave, Baraka plants the seed for the necessary unification of Blacks in order to combat and defeat the white U.S. power structure, which continued to 'enslave' Blacks through subjugation and oppression in the '60s.

Directly after this scene plays out, the drama suddenly shifts to the plantation to present Baraka's interpretation of the Nat Turner rebellion. Turner was an American slave put to death for leading a slave rebellion in Virginia in 1831⁴⁰. It makes sense that Baraka would choose to adapt this true account, for Turner's rebellion stands as a real life example of Baraka's call for justifiable homicide as a way to Black liberation (as represented in his revolutionary drama). In *Slave Ship*, though, Baraka rewrites Turner's rebellion as having been thwarted by a traitor: '*Lights on suddenly, show a shuffling "Negro"*' (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 137). This slave, recorded in the cast list as 'Old Tom Slave,' represents the assimilationist, Black docility of Uncle Tom from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*⁴¹ (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 131). As interpreted by Black Nationalists of the '60s, through Uncle Tom's submissiveness and obedience towards whites, Stowe's novel, and subsequent theatrical renditions, presented a proslavery/pro-colonialist stance. As a result, 'Uncle Tom' became a common derogatory phrase for any Black American appearing subservient to (or willing to assimilate within) white society. In *Slave Ship*, the Old Tom Slave mirrors Baraka's image of Black assimilationists as whites in blackface, who murder black consciousness by affirming white as right. With this in mind, it seems as though Baraka chose to alter Turner's story to once again lambaste Black assimilationists through a theatrical representation. Interestingly, scenes of Old Tom proclaiming his joviality towards his white slave master—'I'se happy as a brand new monkey ass, yassa, boss, yassa, Massa'—are interspersed with cries of slaves from the ship (Baraka, *The Motion*

⁴⁰ For more on Turner, see Turner, Nat. *The Confessions of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrections in Southampton, Va. As fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray, in the prison where he was confined, and acknowledged by him to be such when read before the Court of Southampton; with the certificate, under seal of the Court convened at Jerusalem, Nov. 5, 1831, for his trial. Also an authentic account of the insurrection, with lists of the whites who were murdered, and of the Negroes brought before the Court of Southampton, and there sentenced, &c.* (1831). *Slave Narratives*. Ed. W.L. Andrews & H.L. Gates, Jr. New York: The Library of America, 2002. 243-266.

⁴¹ See Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

of *History and Other Plays* 137). The play is relentless, in that the eerie howls from the ship bombard the action, even as a new story unfolds. Accordingly, Black audiences are continuously provoked and encouraged to identify with the tortured slaves. But, as quickly as these cries fade to a discussion of the planned rebellion ('SLAVE 1. Reverend Turner, sir, what we gon' do when the massa come? SLAVE 2. Cut his godless throat'), Old Tom sells his fellow slaves out to the slave master for a pork chop (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 139). Not surprisingly, the Black rebellion is quickly overthrown as gunshots reverberate and a white voice pronounces, 'I kill you, niggahs. You black savages' (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 140). At this stage, Baraka primes his Black audience to simultaneously expect and desire retaliation. Now, the traitor, who Baraka would have considered a 'white murderer' (as previously mentioned), along with the white voice, must be killed; as the slave from earlier foretold, the path to freedom is through justifiable homicide.

Finally, as the play comes to a close, another drastic shift occurs. Old Tom now appears as a modern day preacher, as a possible satirical commentary on the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. In fervently following the teachings of Malcolm X, at this stage of his life, Baraka still denounced the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a viable means to Black civil rights. Still bowing to white power, the preacher speaks nonsense, confirming Baraka's stance against King's integrationist philosophy: 'Mas'uh . . . Mister Tasty-slop . . . We Kneegrows are ready to integrate . . . the blippy rump of stomach bat has corrinked a lip to push the thimble. Yass. Yass. Yass' (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 142). At last, having somehow survived all of the pain and suffering presented throughout the play, this modern-day integrationist gibberish, spoken by the Old Tom traitor turned Black assimilationist preacher, drives the slaves to unity and action. All at once, the slaves join together and begin to sing '*When We Gonna Rise*,' drowning out laughter from the white voice (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 143). At this point in the play, thanks to Baraka's strategic placement of interspersed scenes depicting the tragic horror of slavery, a Black audience's emotional attachment to the themes of the play can drive them to participate in the action. With regard to the '69 production, in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Samuel Friedland, an Instructor of English in 1969 at New York City Community College Brooklyn, New York, writes:

I watched my students watching the production of LeRoi Jones's "Slave Ship" the other night and I realized how many ways Walter Kerr and other critics had missed the boat. Toward the end of the play, during the "When we gonna rise ..." refrain, many of my young black students were on their feet, swaying and clapping to the beat, totally involved [...] my white students were staggered, stunned, and even hurt—but all, *all*, were inspired by art in a way which no amount of classroom intellectualization could have provided' (D15).

Friedland's letter makes clear the power of Baraka's play and draws attention to its success as political theatre (as an instigator for change and revolution). And, as the play nears its end, the unified revolution intensifies. The cohesive group turns their attention to the Old Tom traitor/modern preacher: *'All group merge on him and kill him daid⁴². Then they turn in the direction of where the voice is coming from. Dancing, Singing, right on toward the now pleading [white] voice'* (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 145). At first, the white voice mocks the slaves in hysterical laughter; but, as the group persists, the voice rambles in true fear, and rightfully so: *'Please. I'm good. I'm kind. I'll give you anything you want. I'm white Jesus savior right god pay you money nigger me is good god be please . . . please don't . . .'* (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 145). Despite, or in spite of the voice's pleas, in response to their endured anguish, the slaves rise up in a justified rage and kill the white voice: *'And then the terrible humming, turning to the OMMMMMMMMMMMMmmmmmmmmmmmm sound, broken now, by the finally awful scream of the killed white voice'* (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 145). As the voice cries out in death, the lights fade to black, then abruptly come up to reveal the actors engaged in dance. According to Philip Uko Effiong, *'There is an inversion of power here as the [...] slaves are regenerated by their deaths'* (109). And, according to the stage directions, the audience is to be encouraged to join in the celebration before one final shocking action brings the play to its close:

Enter audience; get members of audience to dance. To same music Rise Up. Turns into an actual party. When the party reaches some loose improvisation, et cetera, audience relaxed, somebody throws the preacher's head into center of floor, that is, after dancing starts for real. Then black. (Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays* 145)

It is worth noting that a draft of *Slave Ship* dated 31 January 1966 including handwritten revisions, found at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as part of the New York Public Library, identifies the throwing of the head as a handwritten addition: As a scribbled addendum to the typed last line, *'Turns into party,'* Baraka has handwritten, *'Somebody throws the "preachers head" into center of the floor after dancing starts for real'* (Amiri Baraka Collection of Playscripts). It is as if Baraka is reimagining the end of Melville's *Benito Cereno*, and it remains interesting to imagine the script without this necessary exclamation mark which provides the poignant final punctuation to the play. For, while the dance symbolizes the hope and prospect of Black liberation through unity, the startling interruption of the severed head serves as a metaphor to remind audiences that, in contrast to Melville's and Lowell's hopeless predictions for Blacks, and King's peaceful marches for *'Freedom Now,'* militant forceful action, following an extreme Black

⁴² Baraka calls upon a traditional Black vernacular in substituting *'daid'* for dead (*The Motion of History and Other Plays* 145).

Nationalist agenda, was the answer to obtaining Black power in America. Of course, some might object to Baraka's commitment to this philosophy. Although I concede that, for the most part, Baraka used his pen to battle the oppression he felt, his position as a militant activist was cemented in the summer of 1967 during the Newark riots (just months after the first production of *Slave Ship*). According to Theodore R. Hudson:

During the height of the confusion and violence, LeRoi Jones, accountant Charles McCrary, and actor Barry Wynn [both served as members of the Spirit House Movers and Players], riding in Jones' Volkswagon [sic] bus, were stopped and arrested by police officers at South Seventh Street and South Orange Avenue in Newark's west side. The charges were unlawfully carrying firearms—two revolvers and a box of ammunition—and resisting arrest. (27)

Baraka stood trial before an all-white jury and was found guilty of these charges⁴³. He was sentenced to the New Jersey State Prison to serve a term not less than 2 years and 6 months and ordered to pay \$1000; however, Jones appealed the decision and, in time, the conviction was overturned during a retrial (Hudson 29, 31). Regardless of Baraka's own move towards militant action, however, the play still serves as a ground breaking achievement in theatre for its unique invocations. In essence, *Slave Ship* was able to unify and influence a Black audience to stand up on stage in literal action as a representation of the possibilities for a collective Black activism outside the theatre.

An Established Revolutionary Model

To summarize, while certainly influenced by prominent supporters and innovators of political theatre, as I have suggested, with his establishment of a Black revolutionary theatre, Baraka's political drama broke new ground, especially and specifically when it came to provoking Black American audiences through representations of killing on stage. To take a case in point, Harry Elam, Jr. notes:

In a manner similar to Antonin Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty, Baraka bombards his audience with violent, cruel images. Rather than purging spectators of the propensity to act—the expected response to violent images that Artaud articulated in *Theatre and Its Double*—Baraka intends for this final moment of *Slave Ship* to induce the spectators' participation and compel their activism' (Elam, Jr. 93).

⁴³ For a transcript of Baraka's sentencing (a fascinating document in which Baraka, with venomous wit, attacks the judge for essentially condemning the young poet/playwright for a poem he had written) see Hudson, Theodore R. *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1973 (30-31).

In addition, Henry C. Lacey draws connections between Baraka and Brecht, but also references Baraka's unique interest in drawing out his audiences' emotions to tempt direct action:

It is interesting to compare Baraka's dramatic theory to that of Bertolt Brecht, the 20th Century's most renowned advocate of a political theatre. [...] Brecht felt that too much emotional involvement of the part of the viewers sapped them of the energies needed to bring about change in the real world. [...] However, Baraka strains for complete emotional involvement on the part of his audience'⁴⁴ (Lacey 86).

When asked by Kimberly Benston, in an interview from 1977, if he felt influenced by Brecht, Baraka answered, 'Yes, well I'm very interested in Brecht. I've been reading some of Brecht's critical works. I saw Brecht's plays years ago and just last year I saw *The Threepenny Opera* and a few of his other plays' ('Amiri Baraka: An Interview' 116). Still, the previous statements support my arguments and maintain that, with *Slave Ship*, Baraka tapped into a new form of political theatre, which experimented with innovative ways to present the justified killing of whites to engage/motivate audiences into direct political action. And, as the play, in all its controversy, began to be performed abroad, the interactions between the performers and their audience really seemed to take on a life of their own. Allegedly, the performers were also fueled to spontaneous action depending on their audience. In 1970, the production transferred overseas and was performed for Premio Roma '70, an international art festival held in Rome, Italy (Amiri Baraka Collection of Playscripts). In a letter found in the Schomburg Center archive, addressed to Garret Morris and Bill Duke (both actors in the Rome production), dated 9 May 1970, sent from the Artistic Director of the festival, Gerardo Guerrieri, the actors are scolded for their supposed unexpected conduct on stage:

I didn't appreciate the hostile gestures that you added to the play SLAVESHIP last night. These gestures (pointing to all the audience saying in the meanwhile "beasts!"; the index pointed by all the actors in a threatening way to the audience at the end, apparently to stifle and chill the applause) were not in the original performance as conceived by the author and the director, and they change in a substantial way, that I don't know if Mr. Leroi Jones would appreciate, the meaning of the show. (Amiri Baraka Collection of Playscripts)

I disagree with the thought that these actions could change the meaning of the play. And, while Guerrieri claims that Jones (Baraka) might not appreciate these conditions, I would tend to think that, at this time in his life, Baraka could only support actions which served to further awaken an audience to what he saw as the realities of America's condition. In fact, in 1969, when asked by

David Frost to explain what he was trying to get across by writing *Slave Ship*, Baraka asserted, 'I wanted to explain naturally to sensitive people, to sensitive black people, exactly what the realities of the slave ship were—and how America in a lot of senses is a continuation of the slave ship. I wanted to explain that America has not changed' ('David Frost Interviews LeRoi Jones' 62).

Furthermore, even as *Slave Ship* depicts a history of slavery to expose how little America had changed (from the beginning of slavery in America to the 1960s), the play also has a vested interest in inciting its Black audience to create and fight for that change. Baraka insists, 'The theatre has to serve to help transform society' (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*). In contrast to *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, therefore, *Slave Ship* exemplifies Baraka's Black revolutionary theatre by calling for the unity and struggle of Blacks to achieve revolutionary black liberation. Benston affirms:

By claiming African roots in their totality, the black community controls its destiny as Clay, the middle-class greyboy, could not. Now, Baraka's black heroes, not the witch-devil Lula, dance in triumph. The tragedy-burdened slave ship of *Dutchman* has become the dance-filled celebration of *Slave Ship*. (*Baraka; The Renegade and the Mask* 254)

For all of its achievements, however, the play still received a hefty backlash from the white community. In a review of the '69 production in New York, Clive Barnes writes, 'It is a black militant play. It is a racist play. It purports to counsel black revolution. It is a "get whitey" play. Its attitudes are ugly and prejudiced, and its airily total condemnation of the white American is as sick as a Ku Klux Klanner at a rally' (Barnes 46). Although I disagree with much that Barnes has to say, I appreciate his conclusion, as it makes reference to the play's potential power to incite revolution: 'The shooting that this play clearly advocates has luckily not yet started. If it ever does then we will all have decisions to make far more important than the consideration of a play' (Barnes 46). To rely on the negative responses from potentially guilt ridden and/or scared white Americans of the time, however, tends to miss the point of *Slave Ship* all together. Indeed, when asked about Barnes by Frost, Baraka fired back, 'It's unfortunate Clive Barnes is the only drama critic you can make reference to; maybe he feels that way because he feels a need to be gotten [...] If [Clive Barnes] has apprehensions about the reality of his own life—and his own guilt—that's his problem [Clive Barnes brackets in original]' (Frost 62). In a review by Clayton Riley titled 'A Black View of *Slave Ship*: Art is What Moves You,' a Black perspective better represents the impact of this play: 'Jones and Moses [director] and the players in "Slave Ship" do not need to be called gifted or impressive or, those adjectives failing, excellent. They all are, more significantly, unavoidable. A force. A dynamic. Which is not a threat. Just bees that way, Boss' (Riley D3). Here, in all likelihood, Riley, like Baraka, calls upon a traditional Black, southern vernacular to both identify with and speak to a Black audience.

Still, as time moved forward and the '60s became a thing of the past, Baraka found himself questioning his once ardent Black Nationalist stance. By 1974, he actually denounced reactionary nationalism as racist and publically announced his turn towards Marxism. During this time, Baraka reevaluated one of his most powerful representations and explicit examples of the justifiable homicide of whites by blacks on stage:

But, *Slave Ship* was basically like a vignette, and I think what marred it was, essentially, not understanding slavery. Although, I think the people that got killed in *Slave Ship* were the people that needed to get killed—the traitor and the slave master. I would still say they need to get killed now. I think what I'm saying is I didn't understand slavery, like what created slavery, like the development of capitalism. You know, why the capitalists need slaves, you understand? And, who were the actual overseers? How they actually pervert the poor whites. (*Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement*)

As he began to reevaluate his politics, then, his theatrical representations of killing were redirected; within this period of his life as an activist/playwright, starting in 1974, rather than focus on the killing/justifiable homicide of whites, while he continued to fight for the unity and struggle of Blacks, he categorically targeted a new enemy in his plays: Capitalism.

Chapter 3

Killing Capitalism: Amiri Baraka and Marxist Drama

All of the sixties everybody has sold the white boy wolf tickets, and now he believes that we mean to kill him; we have convinced him for ten years that we want to kill him and now he believes it. Now that he believes it and is getting ready to receive your terrible onslaught, with what are you going to attack him? You understand that? Where is our army?

(Baraka, *African Congress* 98)

Baraka's continued search for such an army, meant to combat the oppression of Blacks in all forms, as well as his ideas regarding who (or what) should be held responsible for such oppression, drastically change throughout the 1970s and 1980s. By the middle '70s, Baraka began a new fight to establish a legitimate Marxist-Leninist political party as an army to unite the struggle of Black liberation with the struggles of the working class and other oppressed nationalities. However, this ideological shift towards an anti-establishment communist activism, commonly referred to as his Third World Marxist Period⁴⁵, did not occur overnight. As I have shown, Baraka's growth and evolving revolutionary agenda throughout the 1960s comes about as a response to an omnipresent, oppressive white power structure, appropriately vilified and attacked throughout the rhetoric of Baraka's messiah, Malcolm X. Understandably, this developing avant-garde fervor did not simply plateau or die out as the so-called decade for change came to a close. Baraka stayed as militantly active and politically charged as ever within the dawn of a new decade and, with short plays such as *Junkies Are Full of (SHHH...)* and *Bloodrites*⁴⁶, continued to attack mainstream Black drama and present his Nationalist politics (along with further representations of the justifiable homicide of whites) on the American stage. By the middle '70s, though, Baraka began to see the destruction of capitalism, rather than the annihilation of whites, as the revolutionary path to Black liberation, and started calling for the unity and struggle of all oppressed people (including the white American working-class):

We attacked all whites because we felt it was they who were responsible for our torment and the torment of our people, saying proudly it is based on observable phenomena; we are empiricists; this is not a theory. And that was the main problem, that it was based on

⁴⁵ See *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*. Ed. William J. Harris. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991. This sampling of Baraka's works is presented chronologically, with labels defining each 'PERIOD' of his artistic life: 'THE BEAT PERIOD (1957-1962),' 'THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD (1963-1965),' 'THE BLACK NATIONALIST PERIOD (1965-1974),' and 'THE THIRD WORLD MARXIST PERIOD (1974-)' (vi-x).

⁴⁶ Both plays, *Junkies Are Full of (SHHH...)* and *Bloodrites*, were published together. See *Black Drama Anthology*. Eds. Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York: New American Library, Inc., 1971.

narrow experience, without benefit of the summed-up experience of the working class in the struggle for power all over the world. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 46)

By denouncing a Nationalist agenda he had helped establish, which preached separatism and that all Blacks must struggle alone, Baraka caused much controversy and his own isolation within the Black Power and Black Liberation movements. Not surprisingly, because his commitment to activism could often be traced throughout his dramatic work, this backlash bled into critical responses of his Marxist plays—a stigma which continues to hang over his post '60s work today. In response to the resulting egregious gap in criticism, and to suggest that his drama (post-1960s) can indeed 'move' an audience, this next chapter continues to evaluate Baraka's development as a revolutionary playwright throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

First, to contextualize my discussion, I begin by offering background on Baraka's politics at the start of the 1970s, with an emphasis on his activism in Newark and position as Chairman for the Congress of African people, while continuing to trace his theatrical representations of killing in contrast to another Black American play, *No Place to Be Somebody*. More specifically, though, while referencing *A Recent Killing*,—a critically neglected but, nevertheless, important dramatic precursor to Baraka's Marxist drama—I seek to highlight his move towards Third World Marxism and the Revolutionary Communist League M-L-M (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) in the mid '70s and trace his developing political agenda in relation to his art and family throughout the '80s. In many ways, after firmly denouncing a reactionary nationalism, Baraka's public embrace of Marxism in 1974 isolated him from the Black theatre and movements he had helped establish. I argue that despite this fact, close studies of *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production* (1979) and *Song* (1989), both of which have suffered marginalization in the dramatic canon, further underscore Baraka's prominence as a revolutionary playwright. As representative bookends to this ten year span, both plays depict unique symbols of capitalism as both a killer and a force which needs to be killed. Essentially, just as his Black Revolutionary plays of the 1960s present the killing of whites as a justifiable means of achieving liberation, these later plays signify Baraka's attempts to provoke audiences by metaphorically representing the 'killing' of capitalism, as a viable political solution, on the American stage.

Moving towards Marxism

By 1970⁴⁷, Baraka had moved from artist to fully-fledged activist within his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, often serving as the Spiritual Leader (Imamu⁴⁸ Amiri Baraka) for Black

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion and study of Baraka's political activism during this era, especially within his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, see Woodard, Komozi. *A Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. In addition, Komozi Woodard's Amiri Baraka papers, which also trace such activism in great detail, can be found in the Archives

Nationalist organizations such as the United Brothers, the Committee For A Unified NewArk (CFUN), and the Congress of African People (Woodard 89). And, as the new decade began, within CFUN, Baraka employed his experience with theatre and the arts to help head the campaign to have Kenneth A. Gibson elected as the first Black Mayor of Newark: 'Imamu Baraka wanted to experiment with some of the lessons from the Black Arts Movement in this mobilization and, in one sense, he handled the campaign as a director might a play to its climax' (Woodard 144). By inviting artists and performers, such as James Baldwin, to visit and perform within his Newark repertory theatre, Spirit House, Baraka raised money and awareness for the campaign (Woodard 144); in fact, Baraka's leadership and contributions are often credited as major factors in Gibson's landmark victory—you might say the win was as much Baraka's as it was Gibson's. In his book, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*, Komozi Woodard even notes that Gibson's Italian opponent, Hugh Joseph Addonizio, 'went so far that he made the mistake of campaigning against Imamu Baraka rather than Kenneth Gibson, projecting CFUN's black nationalism as a key issue in the campaign' (152). Clearly, as the 1960s ended, Baraka put his early theatrical manifesto, promoting a community of Black Revolutionary Theatre to obtain political power, into practice, and took, what seemed at the time⁴⁹, a major step towards achieving real Black Power in Newark.

Shortly after the election—and, no doubt, motivated by his success in Newark—in September of 1970, Baraka served as Program Chairman for the first meeting of the Congress of African Peoples in Atlanta, Georgia⁵⁰ (Baraka, *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* vii). The meeting consisted of eleven workshops, spanning different facets of Black American life, including creativity and the arts⁵¹ (Baraka, *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* 189-218). In a speech made towards the end of their meeting, Baraka summarizes what he believed to be a collective goal of the Congress:

What we came out of the Political Workshop with was first of all the idea that what we wanted is a political party. A political party that would service the needs of Black people

Division at the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History at the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library.

⁴⁸ Imamu means Spiritual Leader in Swahili.

⁴⁹ Later, Baraka labeled Gibson as double-crosser and heavily criticized his lack of leadership for the Black community (Woodard 232).

⁵⁰ Baraka describes this first meeting of the Congress of African Peoples as following in the tradition of 'the Black Power conferences, held in 1966 (Washington, D.C.), '67 (Newark, N.J.), '68 (Philadelphia, Pa.) [...] as well as an international meeting in Bermuda in 1969' (Baraka, *African Congress* vii).

⁵¹ *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* describes these workshops in detail. For example, the section labeled 'Creativity' outlines the Congress' resolutions to continue building a Black Theatre; this section—which could have just as easily come from one of Baraka's political essays—concludes, 'Revolutionary art must be collective, functional, and committing, i.e., from whole people to a whole people, it must speak to and inspire Black people, it must commit you to revolution (change) (Baraka, *African Congress* 216).

wherever they are. A political party that could deal internationally everywhere Black people were. What we are talking about is a national, international, nationalist, Pan-Africanist political party. A political party which will be the model for the nation becoming. (Baraka, *African Congress* 92)

Here, Baraka confirms his strong Black Nationalist ideology, reaffirming the themes of Black Unity artistically put forward in *Slave Ship*. Influenced by Maulana Karenga, founder of the African based cultural philosophy, Kawaida⁵², Baraka continued to promote the practice and study of a collective Black/Pan-African culture and heritage throughout the early 1970s⁵³. In *Maulana Karenga: An Intellectual Portrait*, Molefi Kete Asante confirms, 'Kawaida was also the guiding philosophy of the Congress of African People under Baraka's leadership' (107). As Chairman of the 1970 Congress, Baraka pushed for an all Black political party to combat the enemy and cultivate a culturally aware Black Nationalist consciousness. At this stage in his political development, white America remained the target—'Most Black people are involved with white mythology.[...] They either trying to tell you about Marx and Lenin, one group of white boys, or George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, another group of white boys. They are all hooked up with white life' (Baraka, *African Congress* 98). Within a few short years, of course, Baraka's views regarding Marx and Lenin would drastically change, while his commitment to utilize theatre as a tool to advance political revolution would remain intact.

In the early '70s, beyond using theatre to support an election, Baraka continued to incite revolution by staging short, dramatic, political plays, commonly referred to as his 'Agitprop Plays'⁵⁴ (Watts 273). These works broadcast Baraka's overt and explicit Black Nationalist agenda, and were staged within theatres, such as Baraka's own Spirit House, or, more simply, on the streets⁵⁵, to quickly push such a message to the masses. Benston notes, 'these plays [...] reflect Baraka's search for a dramatic experience capable of reaching large numbers of black people as directly as

⁵² For more on Karenga and Kawaida, see Asante, Molefi K. *Maulana Karenga: An Intellectual Portrait*. Cambridge: Polity, 2009. 'Karenga understands his own philosophical process as one that combines the elements of reason and tradition through facilitating and working out ideas and responses by reshaping inherited traditions in the light of reasons and practical lessons' (Asante 108).

⁵³ While Baraka remained heavily influenced by Karenga and Kawaida during the early '70s, 'Karenga was arrested and convicted on trumped-up charges of assault, and was not released until 1975 [after Baraka's conversion to Third World Marxism]' (Asante 107).

⁵⁴ To stay chronologically focused, on Baraka's political growth and continued representations of killing in his dramatic work, this study highlights *Junkies Are Full of (Shhh)* and *Bloodrites*, but avoids a comprehensive study of all of Baraka's so-called Agitprop plays. For more regarding these short, dramatic works, see Benston, Kimberly W. *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. 217-242., and Watts, Jerry Gafio. *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. 273-290.

⁵⁵ See Elam, Harry J., Jr. *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez & Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. 'Performances often occurred in the context of black protest rallies or events. At these gatherings Baraka would deliver a speech, after which the Spirit House Movers would stage one or more plays' (Elam 102).

possible. Hence, like most successful agit-prop, these plays are highly contrived and their appearance of simplicity is often gained with much effort' (*Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* 217). While this concept of theatre as direct propaganda was by no means new,—see the Soviet Union's model of experimental forms of theatre from the 1920s through the 1930s⁵⁶—once again, Baraka sought radical methods to provoke Black revolution through theatre. Indeed, in 'Black "Revolutionary" Poets Should Also Be Playwrights,' published in *Black World* from April of 1972,—which can be read as a sort of addendum to his 1964 manifesto, 'The Revolutionary Theatre'—Baraka invites other Black writers to engage in the Agitprop format: 'What is needed is for many of the Black poets, those with the most true revolutionary fervor, to strike out & begin organizing small drama groups [...] and begin to write, or better, to record improvised dramas, plays, skits, dramatic teaching forms, songs, dances, about the worldwide black revolutionary struggle' (5). Specifically, as a Nationalist, Baraka pressed for innovative forms to promote communal and cultural awareness among Blacks, and, as usual, lead by example. Just as *Slave Ship* depicted a successful Black uprising in contrast to other theatrical representations of failed revolution (presented in Lowell's award winning *Benito Cereno* discussed in Chapter 2, for example), Baraka's 'Agitprop Plays' of the 1970s, despite receiving a lack of substantial critical attention⁵⁷, can be read (and/or seen) as political responses to the 1970 Pulitzer prize-winning play, *No Place to Be Somebody*.

Written by Charles Gordone, the first Black dramatist to win the Pulitzer Prize, *No Place to Be Somebody* tells the story of Johnny Williams, a Black, militant bartender who attempts to blackmail local white Italian crime bosses to achieve autonomy over his own money-making schemes. Essentially a tragedy⁵⁸, Johnny fails, and is eventually shot by a young, aspiring Black playwright named Gabe Gabriel. The play ends as Gabe, dressed as a woman in mourning, takes the stage to weep for 'the death of a people dying' (Gordone 115). Not surprisingly, Baraka was less than impressed⁵⁹. In an essay titled 'Not Just Survival Revolution (Some Historical Notes on Afro-American Drama),' Baraka rages:

One such playwright even put out that to struggle against our domination and oppression was a white thing [...] and ended his prize-winning drama in drag after having murdered the militant black gangster, moaning that now that we had killed our resistance to

⁵⁶ Lynn Mally offers a detailed study of the history of Soviet Agitprop and its influence on both European and American theatre in the essay 'Exporting Soviet Culture: the Case of Agitprop Theater' found in *Slavic Review*. 62.2 (2003): 324-342.

⁵⁷ Though Watts provides a summary for many of Baraka's Agitprop Plays (accompanied, of course, by little to no significant analysis), he reductively concludes, 'Because Baraka was not subjected to rigorous critical analyses by those critics sympathetic to his political agenda, he was rarely challenged to realize his considerable talents' (289).

⁵⁸ The full title is darkly ironic: *No Place to Be Somebody: A Black Black Comedy in Three Acts*.

⁵⁹ Not least, no doubts, because of Baraka's own struggles to have Gibson defeat the existing Italian Mayor of Newark, Addonizio.

oppression, a new life would begin for us. He was given the Pulitzer Prize for this debacle. It is proof that whenever we really begin to talk about liberation the ruling class will reintroduce minstrelsy and pay well for it. (*Daggers and Javelins* 51)

While Baraka's criticisms towards such a decorated play⁶⁰ may seem harsh⁶¹, Gordone categorically opposes Baraka's theatrical agenda through both the words and actions of his fictional Black playwright, Gabe. For instance, early in the play, Gabe admits:

Lemme confess, sometimes I git to feelin'—like I get so vicious, I wanna go out an' commit mass murder. But don't misunderstand me. Because I call myself a black playwright, don't git the impression I'm hung up on crap like persecution an' hatred. `Cause I ain't! I'm gonna leave that violence jazz to them cats who are better at it than me. I ain't been out of the house in over two months. Not because I been that busy, I just been too damned scared. I been imaginin' all kind'a things happenin' out there. An' they're waitin' just for me. All manner of treachery an' harm. But don't think because of it my play is about Negro self-pity. Or even that ol' "You owe me whitey party line." `Cause it ain't.[...] Anyway, like I say, I'm gonna leave that social protest jive to them cats who are better equipped than me. (Gordone 21)

Though Gabe confesses a desire to kill, his own fear keeps him from action (until, of course, the end, when he finally turns violent towards the wrong man, Johnny). It is probably no stretch, then, to consider that Baraka saw such cowardice—especially in lines such as 'I'm gonna leave that violence jazz to them cats who are better at it than me' or 'I'm gonna leave that social protest jive to them cats who are better equipped than me'—as Gordone's own crippling fear of using his theatre as a means of social change (at least, in the way Baraka proposed). If Gabe's declaration was indeed Gordone's own invite for more radical writers to present such revolutionary drama, then, Baraka, as always, was up for the challenge.

Junkies Are Full of (SHHH...) and *Bloodrites*, published together in 1971, both considered agitprop, follow the path of *Slave Ship* by presenting the killing of whites as a means to liberation. Significant, but contrasting parallels can be drawn between *Junkies* and *No Place to Be Somebody*.

⁶⁰ In *Theorizing Black Theatre: Art Versus Protest in Critical Writings, 1898-1965*, Henry D. Miller links Gordone's *No Place to Be Somebody* with Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, as 'award-winning plays, generally thought to be evidence of "talent of a high order" among black dramatists' (221). This is of course is true, but they were also commercially palatable in a way that Baraka's plays were not.

⁶¹ In another essay, titled 'Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle,' Baraka once again attacks Gordone: In the early seventies, to try to turn the tide of the BAM around, the bourgeoisie pushed projects like the Negro Ensemble Company and even gave its big prizes, theretofore reserved strictly for white folks, to its select because of its content; that way the bourgeoisie could say, "Hey y'all, later for that black stuff, here's what we want." And saying thus, gave a Pulitzer Prize in drama to Flash Gordone, who has trouble even writing a recognizable play much less one of any merit. (*Daggers and Javelins* 332)

As if written as a direct response to Gordone's play, *Junkies* also depicts Black militants struggling for autonomy and power over Italians; however, in *Junkies*, the militants prevail. Baraka's short, dramatic piece follows two Black men, Damu and Chuma, as they force a sold-out, assimilationist, Black drug addict named Bigtime to lead them to the Italian crime bosses responsible for distributing drugs to Black residents of Newark. Left with little choice, Bigtime gives in, and Damu and Chuma infiltrate and kill the white Italian drug lords before also killing Bigtime by forcing him to overdose. As the play comes to its end, lights go up on the lifeless bodies of the Italian kingpin, wearing a sign labeled 'Master,' and Bigtime, wearing a sign labeled 'slave' (Baraka, *Junkies* 23). Given the noticeable parallels, along with Baraka's unforgiving responses regarding Gordone and his play, I see this final image as Baraka's own attempt to rewrite the message presented at the end of *No Place to Be Somebody*. With *Junkies*, both the assimilationist (presented as Gabe in *No Place[...]*) and the oppressors (white Italians) are killed so that the Black community can gain autonomy and self-determination.

Much like its companion, *Bloodrites* presents an alternative to the mainstream drama Baraka fought to abort. This play mimics the ritualistic ending of *Slave Ship*, and ultimately depicts the killing of white 'devils' by a Black man and Black woman engaged in African tribal movement and dance. According to Harry Elam, Jr., 'Symbolic elements within social protest dramas often "functioned ritualistically" to reaffirm cultural consciousness and collective action, and the form of these dramas could then work to reinforce content and to generate audience participation in the theatrical event' (*Taking it to the Streets* 47). Certainly, the promotion of action and audience participation remain key concepts in Baraka's dramatic work; though, Baraka's intention is to move his audience far beyond (and always outside of) the theatre itself. In an essay entitled 'Ritual Confrontation Drama of the '60s & '70s,' Baraka makes clear, 'But even in more abstract works like *Bloodrites*, I always tried to connect repeated symbolic action to literal reality. My motive was always to make reality more understandable!' (*Razor* 4). While still projecting a Nationalist ideology, Baraka continued to push against what he saw as mainstream to both present and promote radical revolution. Despite his utter aversion to plays like *No Place to Be Somebody*, theatre, of course, remained his vehicle of choice—'Plays reach our people better than literature or books' (Baraka, 'Black "Revolutionary" Poets[...]' 5).

It is, perhaps, Baraka's dogmatic battles against this concept of the American mainstream which eventually lead to his (often over criticized) conversion to Marxist-Leninist communist thought. When looked at closely, the seeds of such an ideological shift are scattered throughout his earlier Nationalist writings. For example, in the same essay from 1972 mentioned above, 'Black "Revolutionary" Poets Should Also Be Playwrights,' Baraka warns Black artists about falling victim to conventional capitalist corruption: 'Don't try to become rich off revolution, otherwise you

become an example of what the revolution needs to kill!' (5). Notice the clear shift in Baraka's rhetoric here; the key to true revolution is to fight convention, and those that need killing are no longer simply white, but willing recipients of an uneven distribution of wealth. Another frequently disregarded clue to Baraka's eventual public embrace of communism (and denunciation of reactionary Nationalism) is his decision to stage his full-length, semi-autobiographical dramatic play, *A Recent Killing*, drawn directly from his past, at the height of his own self-proclaimed Black Nationalism. Though ostensibly written in the 1960s⁶², but eventually produced for Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre during the 1972-73 season, *A Recent Killing* presents a Black soldier's resistance to the imperialistic United States Air Force occupying the small Caribbean Island of San Loca⁶³. Towards the end of the play, Len, the young soldier, is apprehended and jailed by military police for defiantly fleeing an ensuing battle with natives of the island. One only needs to read the second half of Baraka's chapter 'Error Farce,' included in his autobiography, to trace the real-life connections—'I wrote something about this in a play, *A Recent Killing*' (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 152). In effect, Baraka's willingness to revisit and dramatize autobiographical aspects of his service within the Air Force hint at reemerging communist sympathies; lest we forget, as mentioned in Chapter 1, while serving in Puerto Rico, Baraka was labeled as a Communist by the United States Air Force, and, as a result, received his walking papers in the form of an 'undesirable' discharge. Though Baraka scholar Anadolu-Okur discusses *A Recent Killing* in the company of *Slave Ship*⁶⁴, I see the play, with its blatant attack on American imperialism, more as an important precursor to Baraka's Marxist Drama, especially and specifically as he inched closer towards publicly announcing his political shift to the left.

Essentially, this chronology, along with knowledge of Baraka's commitment to advance political activism through drama, further reveals the playwright's non-linear, ever evolving

⁶² According to a 1968 article written for the *New York Times*, Baraka's *A Recent Killing* had 'been making the managerial rounds since 1965' (Zolotow 20).

⁶³ Though it remains unpublished in print, the play is accessible through an online database entitled *Black Drama: African, African American, and Diaspora 1850 to Present*, courtesy of the Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives held in the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University (<<http://solomon.bldr.alexanderstreet.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philo/naviagate.pl?bldr.22>>). While commonly ignored by critics, for exploring both racial tensions and resentment within the United States military, it is this author's assertion that *A Recent Killing* belongs in anthologies alongside Charles Fuller's Pulitzer prize-winning play, *A Soldier's Play* (1981).

⁶⁴ See Anadolu-Okur, Nilgun. *Contemporary African American Theater: Afrocentricity in the Works of Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, and Charles Fuller*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997:

During the seventies, alongside *Slave Ship* many plays which stepped outside the conventional dramaturgical standards paraded on the stages amidst threatening criticisms of the mainstream establishment. Baraka's *A Recent Killing*, Charles Gordone's *No Place to Be Somebody*, Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, Charles Fuller's *Zooman and the Sign*, and Bill Gunn's *Last Picture Show* are only a few of these plays. (42-43)

While Baraka would undoubtedly disagree with the addition of Gordone in this list, I also see *A Recent Killing* as another important representation of Baraka's struggle against the mainstream. As I have shown, however, with *A Recent Killing*, Baraka alludes to a new enemy responsible for this mainstream establishment; an American Capitalist Imperialism.

principles concerning Black liberation and revolution. In what remains perhaps his most telling essay regarding his shift to socialism, 'Why I Changed my Ideology: Black Nationalism and Socialist Revolution,' first published in 1975, Baraka explains : 'We changed our views from cultural nationalists because we have always viewed ourselves as revolutionaries, Black people struggling for national liberation. We have not ever thought we needed to be fixed at any point or intractable on any view, except the view to the liberation of Black people in North America' (32). Baraka's Congress of African People had called for a political, Black Nationalist army to achieve such a goal; but, on the New Federal stage, *A Recent Killing* proposed another way forward. At the play's ultimate climax, T. T. Jackson, another young, Black soldier, and Laff, a white, Jewish soldier, launch a jailbreak in an effort to rescue Len. Tragically, both soldiers are shot and killed by a Sergeant during their attempt, leaving Len to combat the ensuing military retaliation with just a pistol and typewriter (a fitting final image coming from Baraka, as his revolutionary rhetoric draws similar parallels between weapons and writing). While Len ultimately stands alone, a new, emerging solution (at least for Baraka at this stage of his political development) comes through loud and clear: Jackson and Laff—one Black, one white—unite in armed struggle to achieve Len's liberation.

Of course, Baraka's desire for a political party to battle oppression had not diminished; but, as he continued to travel with the Congress of African People, he simply began to see the benefits of recruiting a much larger army:

As many of us who were cultural nationalists to one extent or another, came closer and closer to the real African liberation movement, as we witnessed our brothers and sisters in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Azania, fighting against imperialism, it became clearer to us that African liberation was primarily against imperialism, and that imperialism itself was the enemy. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 107)

The themes of *A Recent Killing* (regarding the spread of colonial and imperial power) were all too real. According to Derrick E. White, author of *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s*, shortly after *A Recent Killing* premiered at the New Federal Theatre, Baraka finally revealed that he had seen enough to reevaluate his political stance: 'In the months after returning to the United States from 6-PAC [the Sixth Pan-African Conference held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in June of 1974], Amiri Baraka publicly made the switch from Black Nationalism to Marxism, transforming the Congress of African People into a Marxist organization'⁶⁵ (White 138). Again, within this strategic ideological shift—which names capitalism as the culprit

⁶⁵ In his 1975 essay, Baraka confirms, 'The Congress of African people is a revolutionary communist organization. It is also a Black organization, which makes it a revolutionary nationalist organization' ('Why I Changed my Ideology' 33).

for oppression⁶⁶—lies the notion that, rather than remain separate, Blacks join forces with all victims of American tyranny, including the white working-class: ‘We have not refused to use cars, lights, guns, televisions, watches, because white people had something to do with them. We do not curse Bell every time we use the telephone, we curse the capitalists that control this utility and make private profit from exorbitant rates’ (Baraka, ‘Why I Changed my Ideology’ 39). As fervently as he fought for Nationalism, Baraka now called for a new body politic. In fact, in time, Baraka began to support, promote, and represent a new organization, the Revolutionary Communist League M-L-M (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), and stepped away as chairman of the Congress of African People (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 63).

In many ways, Baraka was just following the path of a man he had always labeled as the true father of Black liberation. It is important to recognize that, at its core, Baraka’s newest political mission, finally exposed in the mid ‘70s, still stemmed from Malcolm X and the Black Liberation movements he helped establish. Essentially, though other biographies and literature tend to disagree, Baraka’s shift was anything but sudden; I argue that his conversion to Third World Marxism was a gradual response to the past:

The Black Power-Afrikan consciousness phase of our development was absolutely necessary, and revolutionary nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and solidarity with the Afrikan revolution are the most important tendencies to come out of the Sixties. And though we still struggle against racism and national oppression, we understand that it was capitalism that caused national oppression and racism in the first place. (Baraka, ‘Why I Changed my Ideology’ 37).

In an essay from the ‘70s titled ‘Black Liberation Today,’ Baraka makes clear: ‘Malcolm knew that black liberation was a political struggle, not a religious struggle. He knew it was an anti-imperialist struggle, not a struggle for black capitalism. Malcolm knew it was an international struggle, and he sounded the call for the struggle of the Third World people versus imperialism’ (*Daggers and Javelins* 105). A consummate follower of Malcolm X, Baraka remained loyal as one of ‘Malcolm’s Children,’ but began to reevaluate/find holes in the art and politics of the past decade: ‘The Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s was a reflection of the Black Liberation Movement of the sixties, a further intensification of the struggle against black national oppression but full of a great many contradictions and contrasting aspects’⁶⁷ (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 44). Malcolm X had seen

⁶⁶ See Baraka’s *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984. This comprehensive text provides a wide collection of essays which both present and clarify Baraka’s ideological shift: ‘[W]ithout the destruction of monopoly capitalism, which is the cause and continuer of black exploitation and national oppression, there will be no black liberation’ (48).

⁶⁷ At the heart of his struggle, Baraka fought for power over the mainstream. As Lindsey Feitz points out, in ‘Creating a Multicultural Soul: Avon, Corporate Social Responsibility, and race in the 1970s,’ the movements

such contradictions play out within the Nation of Islam. And, after stepping away from the NOI and spending time abroad, Malcolm began to express potential in achieving liberation through a much broader and diverse united front. Baraka's conversion, at least as he expresses it, can be seen as a parallel journey. Malcolm's teachings (and assassination) had pulled Baraka out of Greenwich and the Beat movement; later, in the 70's, Baraka once again named his teacher as a major influence. By 1975, Baraka was calling upon citizens of the Third World to help combat the enemy—American Capitalism. Regarding his sought-after recruits, Baraka explains:

Third World countries are the developing countries, for the most part made up of the countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin American. "Developing" countries is the key to the definition. It is not an ethnic definition, although many people think that only the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America (the so-called colored peoples) are Third World. But these countries are mostly in the Third World because they are the colonies, the semicolonies, and countries most sharply exploited by imperialism. They are "developing" only by means of their struggle against imperialism. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 60).

However, in many ways, Baraka's struggle for a new, collective political army backfired, as the much referenced (and often unfairly corroborated) backlash to Baraka's public transformation cut him off from so many Black activists. Of course, members of the left had also, and already, criticized Baraka as a fascist during his height as an out-spoken Nationalist. In *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, Joseph E. Peniel points out, 'Baraka's full-scale adoption of Marxism by the end of the year upset the fragile unity among Black Power activists. Critics chalked up his conversion to a Communist conspiracy by white radicals intent on disrupting African American political independence' (293). Indeed, in his 1975 essay, Baraka confirms, 'In the National Black Assembly (NBA), a drive has been mounted by Black elected officials, with reactionary nationalists as their gun bearers, to oust me as Secretary-General because, they contend, no "avowed communist" should hold leadership in the National Black Assembly' ('Why I Changed my Ideology' 39). As to be expected, any condemnation of Baraka,

born out of the '60s, while successful in certain aspects, often worked against Baraka's ultimate goal of obtaining self-determination and power:

At the height of the Black power movement, anything seemed possible, even the transformation of a national corporation like Avon, the cosmetics company that had staked its door-to-door marketing campaign on exclusive notions of white, middle-class respectability.[...] Avon redressed its near-exclusive focus on white customers and salespeople by recruiting Black workers, managers, and saleswomen, investing in Black-owned banks, and contracting with Black-owned companies. The company would also come to alter its product line to reflect the needs of its Black customer.[...] [S]ome Black companies and leaders chose to work with Avon because they believed the beauty market could generate significant opportunities for Black workers and businesses. But their successes with Avon were double-edged. As Avon attracted Black customers, hired Black workers, and embraced a new multicultural aesthetic defined by the Black power movement, it also contributed to the decline of Black-owned beauty companies. Avon's involvement with the business of Black power thus reveals both the possibilities of this moment and its ambiguous results (117).

and/or his new political ideals, only served to fuel his fire, as he continued to redefine his mission. Once again, Baraka turned to the theatre to set his audience ablaze.

His epic, dramatic documentary, *The Motion of History*, written in late 1975-early 1976, remains the most talked about of his so-called Marxist plays. In fact, W. D. E. Andrews, author of 'The Marxist Theater of Amiri Baraka,' provides a nuanced, detailed analysis of the play. Taking off where *Slave Ship* left off, *The Motion of History* presents a series of vignettes, or short scenes, to retell the Black/white American experience in relation to Capitalism. Without doubt, these scenes, along with documentary projections of oppressive brutality from around the world⁶⁸, are meant to provoke the audience towards social revolution. Still, while the play remains Baraka's most prominent of this era, in *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*, Tejumola Olaniyan suggests, 'Many critics are irked by what they regard as the "propaganda," the absolutism, of Baraka's politics in this play' (90). To ignore the significance of Baraka's theatrical achievement here, or, at the very least dismiss it as strict 'propaganda,' seems a gross misstep, especially when tracing his ideological growth through drama. Andrews (and others, like Olaniyan) gets it right, then, by giving *The Motion of History* deserved attention in work regarding Baraka's drama of the time. To avoid repetition and continue to expose new analyses, however, the remainder of this chapter continues to investigate theatrical representations of murder and killing (as a means to incite revolution) in *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* and *Song*.

What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?

In his epigraph to *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979*, Baraka quotes the great Chinese author Lu Hsun⁶⁹ (more commonly written as Xun): 'Only those who can kill can preserve life; only those who know hatred can have love; only those who want to preserve life and have love can write literature' (16). The message rings clear. By 1979, Baraka's proclivity to link killing with literature had not faded, and his new play continued that tradition. Directed by Baraka, and (allegedly) first performed at the Yenan Theatre Workshop of the Anti-Imperialist Union in New York City in June of 1979⁷⁰, *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of*

⁶⁸ See Murray, Timothy. *Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video, and Art*. London: Routledge, 1997, for his detailed discussion of cinematic projection in Baraka's *The Motion of History*.

⁶⁹ See John Samuel Harpham's "'A Fierce Silence Falls": Lu Xun's Call To Arms' in *Criticism* 55.1 (2013) for more on Lu Xun's work.

⁷⁰ While this production is commonly referenced as the first, other evidence seems to conflict. In Baraka's own *Eulogies*, he explains, '[Miguel] Algarin opened the NuYoricain Poets Café on East Second Street of "Loisaida" (the Lower East Side, the funkier end of "The East Village"). It was a crossroad of Puerto Rican and other Latino, Black and third world poets and other writers [...] My own *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production* opened there' (Baraka, *Eulogies* 150). In addition, according to Ann Barry, editor for the *New York Times* in May of 1979, Baraka's *What Was the Relationship* was also staged at

Production? effectively lampoons American Industrialist Capitalism (Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* 273). In one act, Baraka's satire places factory workers in direct confrontation with a monopoly Capitalist and his henchman, a corrupt union leader. In the fictional factory of Colonel Motors (obviously satirizing other American conglomerates, such as General Motors) Donna and Reg stand united in resistance to the oppressive tactics of MM (Masked Man or Money's Master) and Tuffy, who represents MM's Capitalist regime. On the other hand, additional workers, Clark and Felipe, represent potential victims of this Capitalist system. This dichotomy allows Baraka to present Capitalism as a murderer which must be destroyed; as with Baraka's Black Revolutionary Play's of the '60s, it is kill or be killed.

As the play begins, MM, wearing a Lone Ranger mask and dressed as America's Uncle Sam, approaches the factory workers: '*The MASKED MAN walks slowly directly towards them. He clean, with a blue pinstriped, chalk and red strips, suit*' (Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* 274). As is typical with Baraka's writing, Baraka once again writes/presents his stage directions in a distinct Black Vernacular/Dialect, further distancing himself from the American mainstream (an institutionally racist system of oppression which continues to falsely dictate one standard of written English as correct⁷¹). MM's red, white, and blue suit obviously represents America, while the Lone Ranger image serves to symbolize Capitalism. Though many critics (and academics alike) often present these symbols as trite⁷², they fail to take into account Baraka's mission to interrogate these particular iconographies for a broad, American audience. When discussing the play in an interview with VÉVÉ Clark, Baraka admits:

It's a burlesque. There's a core of seriousness to it, however, for it is an attempt to analyze the pseudo mass culture heroes the bourgeoisie has created. I examine the ideological essence of these heroes. Who was the Lone Ranger? What was Tonto? What was their relationship? What does that mean to us? What does their story mean to the majority of working people in this country? (Clark 158)

Considering this line of inquiry, a brief exploration of the history of the Lone Ranger (as a fictional American icon), as well as Baraka's early relationship to such questions, can help illuminate the play. In *Bearing Witness to Crime and Social Justice*, published in 2000, Richard Quinney suggests, '[The Lone Ranger was] the creation of a commercialized image' (84). This image of the Ranger was first created in 1933 for WXYZ, a Detroit radio station, by 'station owner

the Ladies' Fort in New York, off-Broadway (2). Regardless of which came first, all early productions remain severely under documented.

⁷¹ For a contemporary discussion regarding supposed standards of English, see Vershawn Ashanti Young's essay, *Should Writer's Use They Own English?*, published in 2011 in *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call For Sustainable Dialogue and Change*.

⁷² See Watt's criticism of *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* in *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* for one such reductive view.

George W. Trendle, writer Fran Striker, and WXYZ drama director James Jewell' (Lawrence 82). According to John Shelton Lawrence, author of 'The Lone Ranger: Adult Legacies of a Juvenile Western,' published in 2005, 'His trajectory ascended out of radio, comics, pulp novels, advertising endorsements, licensed merchandise, and fan clubs in the sphere of serialized televisions and the B Western' (81). The fictional Ranger received his 'greatest commercial success from 1933 to 1957' (Lawrence 82). Though, with Hollywood productions of new Lone Ranger films, starring the likes of Johnny Depp, the Ranger's capacity to draw in commercial success has far from fizzled, legitimizing potential modern productions of Baraka's play. As a metaphor, the Ranger's story perpetuates the myth of a heroic/superior America, capable of offering anyone and everyone an attainable (American) dream⁷³: as the lone survivor of a band of Texas Rangers,—nursed back to health by Tonto, a loyal Native American who remains, consummately, by the Ranger's side—John Reid dons the mask and sets out to avenge his fellow Rangers and defeat evil in all forms while adhering to a strict (American) moral code. By devising a piece whereby he directly addresses the fictional Ranger, Quinney challenges such notions:

You thought the problem was uniquely Western, that outlaws were violating the "laws of the people." Lone Ranger, the outlaws were rebels (without a revolutionary consciousness) who were threatening the territory of the financiers, railroad men, and large landowners. The cavalry was your real enemy. You, unknowingly I think, were duped into believing that the lawmen were the good guys, when they were in reality murderers protecting the interests of the capitalists. (89)

Herein lies an answer to Baraka's question ('Who was the Lone Ranger?'), at least in terms of how symbolic images of the character are meant to be perceived throughout his 1979 play.

Interestingly, Baraka's first literary mention of the masked man appears much earlier in his career as a writer. In a rather introspective poem dealing with identity and emptiness titled 'Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today,' published in 1961 in *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, Baraka proclaims, 'THERE MUST BE A LONE RANGER!!! [Baraka's emphasis]' (17). At this stage in the poem, the speaker cries out, realizing a true lack of identity. In *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s*, Houen clarifies:

As the speaker recognizes, then the "black mask" he's been wearing in the poem isn't an African American one but that of the fictional television character The Lone Ranger (who came to be seen by Jones as representing everything execrable about US culture, as is clear from his later play *What Was the Relationship between [sic] the Lone Range and the Means*

⁷³ Baraka had long considered the American Dream a nightmare for the oppressed American. Quinney notes, 'Perhaps at one time in America the frontier mentality worked. But to live after World War II as if frontier individualism applied shows only the poverty of our imaginations' (86).

of Production? (1979)). Just as the brunt of the Lone Ranger's trials were frequently borne by Tonto, his faithful Native American "assistant", so the cultural sacrifice that the poem's speaker has made is imagined as being borne by the Jazz and Blues singer, Bessie Smith. (Houen 68)

As Houen makes clear, as early as 1961, Baraka had already associated the Lone Ranger, and his relationship to Tonto (representing the non-white 'other'), as oppressive. His poem ends:

My silver bullets all gone
My black mask trampled in the dust

& Tonto way off in the hills
Moaning like Bessie Smith. (*Preface to Twenty Volume Suicide Note* 18)

Within such a discussion, this poem should not be ignored⁷⁴; for, as I will illustrate later, this theme, which aligns Tonto with the oppressed, is heavily echoed throughout *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*⁷⁵.

From early on in the play, MM aligns himself with the moderate left Baraka vehemently opposed: 'Thank you Marcuse, CPUSA, Jesse Jackson, NAACP, all who urge righteous moderation!' (274). By associating what he considered to be a backwards United States Communist Party with Black leaders and organizations he labeled as bourgeois, Baraka erases previous notions of color as an indicator of who to attack:

We must also be very clear by now that skin color is no indicator of one's political line, and that black liberation, the self-determination of the Afro-American nation and the liberation of the black oppressed nationality, will only come through armed, violent revolution, but a revolution made in concert with the entire multinational working class. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 99).

It is this concept which shines through as the workers within the play struggle for power over the means of production. Baraka elaborates, 'Capitalism is an economic system, a mode of production characterized by private ownership of the means of production, the land, factories, mineral wealth, transportation, communication, waterways, etc. This means of production is owned privately by a single class in capitalist society, called the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie' (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 93). And, within the world of the play, the stakes for these workers to break from MM and

⁷⁴ And yet, most of the critics I've read that bother to mention *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*, often all too briefly, rarely connect the poem to the play. Houen was a rare, and welcome, exception.

⁷⁵ One of the reasons I chose to focus on this particular play is the lack of scholarship given to the work. Even when the *Lone Ranger* play gets mentioned, not much is dug up. Watts even questions what seems to me a clear cut message: 'It is not clear what the interplay between The Lone Ranger and Tonto has to do with the play's overall theme' (455). Such statements fueled me to pursue this research.

his system of monopoly Capitalism escalate to the extreme—that is, they face life (in revolution) or death (in yielding to Capitalism). Donna, the mentally strongest of all the workers, declares, ‘They gonna work us to death now they fired that buncha people last week’ (275). Her line presents both rising and foreshadowing action; the key question for a viewing audience becomes, will the workers take back the means of production—‘By the means of production, we mean the means of producing wealth for society’ (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 210)—and defeat MM?

Shortly after her prediction of imminent death if something is not done to stop MM, Donna asks the Masked Man, ‘Where’s Tonto?’ (278). Just as Baraka’s 1961 poem had, MM’s answer connects Tonto with the Black ‘other.’ He declares, ‘Tonto was a very advanced Indian. He could explain the reservations so thoroughly. We’ve got a few boys now who can run it about the African problem. Various up and coming chiefs. The blacks have a few trouble makers too ya know’ (278). In this sense, MM describes Tonto as an assimilationist, while Baraka presents Native Americans, Africans, and Black Americans as victims to MM’s tyrannical control over the means of production. I find this moment crucial to understanding Baraka’s development, at this stage, as a revolutionary playwright. Again, his socialist agenda never erased his commitment to revolutionary Black liberation—‘black power can only come through revolution, a revolution that destroys the basis for the oppression of the black nation which is United States imperialism, white racist capitalism’ (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 91). In essence, as shown, Baraka simply targeted a superior foe; and, in so doing, required bigger backup. In ‘Why I Changed my Ideology,’ he acknowledges, ‘But in struggling to liberate our people, we have come to understand that, especially in America, it is fantasy to think that we can struggle for our own liberation and be completely oblivious to all the other struggling and oppressed people in this land’ (36). His Marxist drama, then, depicts the unification of all oppressed peoples to achieve revolutionary ends.

On stage, the factory workers represent the ‘oppressed,’ and, as the story continues to unfold, both Reg and Donna unite to protect Clark, who all but succumbs to MM’s seductions. At one point, MM lures Clark ever closer to worshipping Capitalism by both referencing and declaring ownership over popular films: ‘Did you like Jaws 1 and 2, Omen 2, all Clint Eastwood films, Deathwish . . . great films. I helped make those great pictures. If you look carefully in almost all scenes my initials are spelled out in the speeches, on the furniture, slobber coming out of the dead people’s mouth. M-M’ (279). At this point, Reg steps in—‘What is this an in-plant gig to get our minds off our wage demands. Where’s the whiskey, and dope?’ (279). Here, Reg prompts an audience to recognize the issues plagued by Capitalism, while Baraka reminds his audience to be weary of the mainstream (while also defending his own anti-establishment art). To expand upon Baraka’s ideas regarding mainstream theatre, his essay, ‘Not Just Survival: Revolution (Some Historical Notes on Afro-American Drama),’ first delivered as a speech at a Howard University

Writers' Conference in April 1976, presents strong claims regarding American theatre's struggle to produce a pure, American drama: 'A real American drama does not exist until Eugene O'Neill⁷⁶, and importantly it was O'Neill who also first put forward something approximating black life in reality from the American stage. That is, it took until the twentieth century for United States drama to break out of the colonial relationship it had with England and Europe' (*Daggers and Javelins* 33). As described by Baraka, the distinction is quite simple:

It is the writer's task, if he is a revolutionary, to speak as clearly, simply, and directly in his art as he can. To uphold bourgeois art is to uphold the bourgeoisie.[...] We are surrounded on all sides by bourgeois ideology of what art is, what life is, etc. Thus our revolutionary creation is made as an act of struggle against the corrupt bourgeois ideology and practice that is powerful all around us. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 66)

While critics often discredit or ignore Baraka's evolving manifesto, the *Lone Ranger* play remains a sharp, satirical example of Baraka's refusal to adhere to the mainstream—a fact which solidifies his art and drama as revolutionary. Rather than focus on the satire, Watts claims, 'The play [*What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*] might have been more provocative had Baraka presented a more comprehensive discussion of the plight of American workers in regard to the globalization of the workforce and the international fluidity of capitalism' (455). Interestingly, Watts understands that this 'comprehensive' discussion plays out in Baraka's *The Motion of History*—'the play has less of a sledgehammer quality than the scenes depicting the contemporary workers in *The Motion of History*. The fact is, both plays employ different styles to incite audiences towards socialist revolution.

Others have failed to recognize the play as biting satire and mistake it for low comedy. By the middle of this one act play, Tuffy joins MM to further berate the workers. In fact, Tuffy enters with a wheelbarrow containing a dead body, and proceeds to dump the body on the factory floor. Despite Tuffy's efforts to frighten the workers into submission, Donna continues to assert herself and support a revolution. As if to intensify her early statement, mentioned above, she continues to raise tension as she questions, 'you murdering workers out in the open now??' (284). Next, Tuffy declares, 'This is undoubtedly the best system in the world,' and Donna replies, 'Capitalism and Racism you mean, women's oppression . . .' (284). Throughout his writing, Baraka is able to denounce those aspects of Nationalism which he regrets (such as male chauvinism), critique American Capitalism, and promote his own socialist solution on the American stage. From the '60s, Baraka continuously viewed the theatre as a venue to reach the masses. Though his essays echoed his drama, the dramatic form gave Baraka the opportunity to act out his arguments in

⁷⁶ As for O'Neill, see Chothia, Jean. *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979 for a thorough discussion of his work.

unique, stylized modes and symbols. To take a case in point, in an article written in the middle 70s titled 'Africa, Superpower Contention, and the Damage of World War,' Baraka lays out an argument which implicates both Russia and America as culpable agents in the plight of the working class:

With the contention between the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. escalating every day the bourgeoisie must spend more and more on war-making preparations, and the monies they would spend on social programs, more reforms, and illusions of progress and democracy are cut back. And the mounting motion of cutbacks, layoffs, and unemployment makes the United States multinational working class and other elements of the population more and more fed up with monopoly capitalism and national oppression, and subjectively more and more revolutionary-minded, and objectively more united with the revolutionary struggles of the peoples and nations of the Third World against imperialism. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 27).

Though clear, the language of the essay seems rather overwrought when compared with Donna's expression within the play: 'Russia is not a socialist country if that's why you mentioned it. It's the same shit going on there as here. Ghouls own the tools. And the people got nothing but a hard way to go' (285).

As the play's tension escalates, Baraka continues to impress his politics on the viewer/reader. Eventually driven to physical action, Reg draws a knife and directly threatens Tuffy. At this stage in the play, Baraka introduces the concept of armed revolution. In the essay "'Clout": What It Is?,' Baraka elaborates upon this notion of armed revolt:

And ultimately this impact that the working class must make on society is totally to transform it, so that instead of a small handful of vultures controlling society, the ownership of the land, mineral wealth, factories, machines, transportation, communication is seized by the workers themselves. And this can only be done by first building a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party, and then carrying through with an armed socialist revolution. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 76)

Both the play and the essay carry the same message; but, even as Reg pulls his knife, Tuffy continues to abuse the workers (Blacks, in particular): 'you cullid guys you cullid people MM brought you from where? [*Shrinks up in gesture of extreme disgust*] Africa! Geez, think of it, the freakin dark continent, savages and shit' (287). On one level, with this brief passage, Baraka continues to expose Capitalism as inextricably linked with Racism and other forms of oppression—Donna proclaims, 'Tuffy tends to be a racist, he always going around spreading those kind of bourgeois lies among us' (288). Indeed, in 'Not Just Survival: Revolution (Some Historical Notes on

Afro-American Drama),’ Baraka lectures, ‘The U.S.A. is a society, as indeed is the entire modern capitalist-imperialist industrial world, built on the African slave trade, on the subjugation of blacks and the continued exploitation and oppression of blacks (as well as the entire working class)’ (*Daggers and Javelins* 31). Though, within the play, Tuffy’s insult only serves to distract and demoralize Reg. Much like dumping the dead body (or just as MM mentions films to entice Clark), Tuffy once again attempts to unnerve and confuse Reg, this time by focusing his attention back to Africa: ‘While we must realize the historical and political significance of our relationship to Africa, we must abandon the idealism and confusion that does not allow us to see that our principal struggle is for the land we have lived on for almost four centuries’ (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 99). As the play nears its climax, the workers must continue to struggle against distraction and unite in revolution to defeat MM and his capitalist regime.

The revolt ignites as Donna exposes the dead body as Felipe, a fellow worker and victim, murdered by MM’s regime by ‘A bullet in the center of his head’ (296). In retaliation, Reg exclaims, ‘You killed Felipe motherfucker you deserve to die’ and leaps at Tuffy (296). Suddenly, armed policemen ‘run forward with guns drawn’ (296). With regard to Baraka’s desire to promote audiences to act, nothing within the play seems haphazard or misplaced. At this point, Baraka urges his audience to see police as just another force entangled in American Capitalism. In ‘Why I Changed my Ideology,’ Baraka elaborates, ‘Living in a third-rate community with third-rate schools with first-rate rats, you find you will be stopped or apprehended and even killed by capitalists’ private army, the police, who are also paid out of your chump-change salary (it’s called taxes)’ (35). In fact, within the world of the play, Reg is in danger of being killed by the police, until Donna stops him. She urges, ‘Reggie, cool it, this is just provocation’ (296). Though Donna is able to reveal MM’s plan to frustrate and distract the workers from revolutionary unity, MM continues to magnify his power.

As the play inches closer to its ending, abruptly, MM begins to reminisce about Tonto. He declares, ‘he reminded me that I was the *Lone Ranger*, that there was no help, that I was a lonely superpower’ (296). While MM seems solemn here, the word superpower reveals a dual meaning. First, as a representative symbol of American Capitalism, the word obviously reflects Baraka’s views regarding America’s imperialism. As Quinney puts it, in his hypothetical letter to the Ranger (which also employs the Lone Ranger as a metaphor for Capitalism), ‘On your great white horse you have pursued the enemy to the end of the earth. Lone Ranger-America, you won the West. Then you crossed the Pacific, where you tried to wipe out the dread Yellow Kid’ (87). Secondly, though, the word superpower also links with the Ranger as a real American hero, virtually invincible to the forces of evil he engages in battle. In his thorough description of the fictional Ranger, Lawrence reveals this characteristic and, then, cleverly links the two meanings:

The Ranger's precisely calibrated power ensures minimal injury. This view resonates with the cold war's theories of nuclear deterrence, where limitless power, calmly calculated, is celebrated as the ultimate defense because it presumably will never have to be used against the vast populations who are its targets. There seems to be a message that one escapes the ambiguity of violent power through even greater power and accuracy. (89)

With this in mind, MM's attempt to receive pity by declaring himself 'alone,' can be viewed as just another attempt at distraction. Directly after his declaration, however, the once dead Felipe rises again (as Tonto) to prophesize MM's destruction:

Do you know Indian history, kemo sabe. [sic] All this was ours, the Indians' . . . and you bathed us in our own blood to get it [...] And if I am not a house servant, if I am not a comprador or a traitor, then I am one of the millions who right now ride out there threatening you, whose arrows and bullets whiz ever closer to your frightened ass! And then even if I am in your field or factory I plot against you, I form nuclei of scientific revolutionaries to plan your downfall, your death or imprisonment, the destruction of yr⁷⁷ system. (297).

Once again, by associating Tonto as the 'other,' the play parallels Baraka's 1961 poem, 'Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today,' and further expresses the necessity for audiences to unite with the oppressed at home and abroad (especially and specifically with those workers living in the so-called Third World).

Much like *Slave Ship*, this play ends with a theatrical representation of chant and unity to defeat the enemy. Essentially, all of the tension within the play leads to back and forth dialogue which suggests the workers either kill or be killed. Finally, Donna breaks the volley: 'It won't do you no good, bloodsucker, to kill us . . . they'll always be more . . . you'll have to kill all the workers all the oppressed nationalities to get rid of the likes of us . . . and you can't do that' (300). And, Reg follows, 'Before it's over they'll kill you' (300). At this point, the workers' army arrives: 'The door bursts open and WORKERS surge into the factory chanting "Free Donna! Free Reggie! Free Clark! Avenge the Murder of Felipe!" The WORKERS come in, some with clubs, and sticks, some with pistols and rifles. They stand menacing MM, TUF and CO' (300). Once again, Baraka advocates armed revolution; but, just as the slaves banded together to defeat the enemy in *Slave Ship*, this time, no worker stands alone. As the workers line up to face MM's regime, Donna and Reg explain, 'we gotta party to go to . . . party of a new type' (301). This is Baraka's ultimate battle cry:

⁷⁷ The 'yr' here is intentional. Again, Baraka purposely presents much of his writings in a stylized vernacular/dialect to further fight the mainstream.

The central task of Marxist-Leninists inside this country is to build a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist communist party, based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung thought, an antirevisionist vanguard party, to lead the working class in the destruction of the United States bourgeois state apparatus, and the transformation of the means of production from privately owned and profit oriented to publicly owned, state property. (Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 28)

As Donna and Reg prepare to leave, Baraka sets the stage for a showdown: ‘the POLICE, MM and TUFFY line up on one side . . . the WORKERS, DONNA, REG and CLARK on the other’ (301). Right before the curtain, the workers cry out, ‘Strike! Strike! Strike! Strike!’ (300).

Echoing both Clifford Odets ending in *Waiting for Lefty*, and Langston Hughes’ final lines in *Scottsboro, Limited*, the double meaning inherent in Baraka’s final chant seems appropriately obvious to me. First, as a means of socialist protest, the workers mean to stop working until they gain power and earn back the means of production. Additionally, as the workers square off against MM’s small army, with clubs, sticks, and guns, the call to strike also presents a literal physical threat. Given this second interpretation, Reg’s proclamation regarding the workers resilience—‘Before it’s over they’ll kill you’—really resonates (300). Still, Watts seems to entirely miss the point. He complains, ‘Instead of confronting the new relationship between labor and capital, however, Baraka romanticizes the efficacy of the strike as if we were living in the 1930s’ (455). I argue, far from simply romanticizing the value of ceasing to work in protest, Baraka actually calls upon a rich literary heritage to present a theatrical representation of armed revolution as a means of provoking his theatre going audiences.

After studying all three plays, the connections between Hughes’ *Scottsboro, Limited*, written in the spring of 1931, Odets’ *Waiting for Lefty*, first performed in 1935, and Baraka’s *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* seem just as obvious as Baraka’s implied double meaning (not least because of Baraka’s own desire to produce and stage a production of *Scottsboro* in and around the time *the Lone Ranger* was performed). In an interview titled, ‘Restaging Langston Hughes’ *Scottsboro, Limited*,’ Baraka elucidates:

I found *Scottsboro, Limited* when I taught at Yale. I had the opportunity to go into the Beinecke Collection there and actually look through the Hughes papers.[...] I began to show copies of it to some folks. I sent it out and tried to get several people to do a production of *Scottsboro* .[...] I haven’t yet found anyone who is willing to put up the money’ (Clark 158).

Hughes’ short play, written in verse, details the true story of eight Black boys accused of rape in Alabama in 1931. The boys were put on trial for their lives. Basically, within the first three

quarters of Hughes' play (just as the workers in *the Lone Ranger* play are berated by MM and his regime) all eight boys are regularly rebuked by angry white authority figures. Nearer the end, Red Voices, representing Communists, speak in support of the boys and call upon workers to fight. What I find most striking is the clear homage Baraka has given Hughes. As *Scottsboro* comes to an end, staged Voices in the audience—provoked by the Red Voices—chant, 'Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight' (Hughes 21). Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* presents a series of vignettes depicting work and family life, all of which promote a clear socialist agenda, and ends with workers calling out, 'STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!!!' (Odets 52). As with *Dutchman*, Baraka clearly pulls from distinct literary influences to spread his theatrical message. The clear parallels between all three endings are hard to miss and, given their respective dates, imply that both Odets and Baraka were influenced by Hughes; the fact that these endings are so similar, with Baraka borrowing Odets' word choice and Hughes' structure of four one-syllable words followed by exclamations, lends even more credibility to the theory that Baraka's own ending carries a clear double meaning. Unfortunately, while *Scottsboro* serves as a major influence on political theatre, its Communist agenda was too radical for American stages and Hughes' play was rarely seen. According to the brief introduction/production note to the play, while *Scottsboro* was performed in Los Angeles on 8 May 1932, earlier productions were prevented by police. Categorized as clear agitprop, the play remains underperformed and, as a result, retains a severe lack of referenced formal performance (Hughes, *Scottsboro, Limited* 116). Baraka describes *Scottsboro, Limited* as 'really avant-garde, a kind of revolutionary play that was never done' (*Razor* 21). Interestingly enough, this is just one more thing the two plays share in common. *The Lone Ranger* play also proved too radical for artistic directors. According to Samuel A. Hay, in *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis*:

Baraka's theatre colleagues [...] did not support his 1979 revival of Hughes's *Scottsboro, Limited*. They also did not attend productions of Baraka's Marxist play *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production* (1979), which, admittedly, was mediocre. Baraka, however, rebounded, and he wrote *Song* (1989), one of the best plays in American theatre. (Hay 151)

Despite Hay's condemnation towards the *Lone Ranger* play—an obvious point of contention within this study—his remarks regarding *Song* remain noteworthy. In effect, ten years after directing *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*, Baraka's socialist ideology, and complete aversion to Capitalism, remained intact. With *Song*, though, Baraka once again slightly shifted his agenda, this time calling for the unity of family, rather than a collective political army, to battle a new symbol of Capitalism as killer.

Song

In an interview with Derrick I. M. Gilbert published in Gilbert's 1998 edited collection, *Catch the Fire!!!: a Cross-Generational Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry*, Baraka is asked to reflect upon what he considers to be the importance of writing about family. I find his answer central when pursuing an analysis of his one act play, *Song*, published in *New Plays for the Black Theatre* in 1989:

What you're really asking is; "What do I think about writing about ourselves?" And that's essential. I don't know how you can talk about anything else, you know, I mean at base—although there's all kinds of variations. But I think it's a basic kind of thing, and I think the question now is how you take this superstructure back. You know, since the sixties, they've lied to us about everybody and everything. (57)

Here, while continuing to reference his own Marxist ideology by questioning how to defeat an institutional/political superstructure, Baraka puts forward yet another new solution—to embrace family, and in so doing, oneself in art. By embracing these personal elements, Baraka suggests the writer can begin to erase the lies (sold and distributed by an American Capitalist society). Undeniably, this is what Baraka does in *Song*. According to Hay, 'Baraka's *Song* (1989), for example, calls for family unity (*Umoja*) and for responsive government (*Nia*)' (121). This shifting notion of how to combat the enemy makes sense when paired with two distinct aspects of Baraka's life up to this point: the flagrant backlash he received after converting to Third World Marxism (highlighted earlier), and his evolving feelings toward (and discussion) of his own family. Though Hay suggests, 'On the one hand, there was nothing particularly new about the themes in *Song*,' I feel Baraka's presentation of a family united as a weapon against the enemy is, in this instance, quite unique (122). Fascinatingly, Baraka might have also written *Song* as response to a prophecy he'd made several years earlier; in the early 80s, Baraka affirmed, 'For Black Theater, like the BLM, this is a critical and dangerous time. But no matter what these racists do—we are not intimidated. By the end of the '80s they will be wishing the '60s would return! For Black Theater, like Black people, adversity will only make us stronger and finally invincible' (*Razor* 8). Though very little is written about the text of *Song*, never mind archived productions⁷⁸, a thorough study of the play reveals its power through subtle dramatic nuances, as Baraka presents the necessary theatrical destruction of a Capitalist killer by a collective family unit.

As with my previous discussions of Baraka's dramatic work, before delving into a detailed analysis, it makes sense to contextualize the piece, this time, with regard to Baraka's family in and around the time the play was written. If anything, the title presents the play as a love '*Song*' to Baraka's wife, Amina Baraka, formerly Sylvia Robinson. While I do not wish to suggest the play is

⁷⁸ A rare, undated program, listed as a Cabaret Bill indicates that Cabaret Productions presented *Song* for The Bridge Club in Newark, New Jersey.

strictly autobiographical, when asked to comment on writing about family, as already revealed, Baraka saw the act as inextricably connected to expressing oneself—and all that entails. With this in mind, and since *Song* is undeniably about family, it makes sense to provide a very brief history of Amiri and Amina's past. Throughout the '60s and early '70s, according to Baraka, his relationship with Amina, for which he provides only peppered details scattered throughout his autobiography, was unstable to say the least. Though they finally married in 1967, the male chauvinist attitudes so prevalent within the Black Power and Black Nationalist movements often distanced the two militant activists.⁷⁹ For example, in a resource paper from 1970 titled 'The Black Family,' published in *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress*, Akiba ya Elimu asserts:

The Black family is a very important area of social organization [...] We understand that it is and has been tradition that the man is the head of the house. He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information wiser. (179)

Though Amina also spoke and presented similar information for the African Congress, these ideals understandably caused much tension. However, Baraka admits:

But the thing that most changed my life at the time was marriage. It was Sylvia [Amina] who showed me the craziness of my ways and struggled with me as hard as she could to get me to change. I didn't like it. For one thing, the very hotness of her temper drugged me. I thought I was supposed to be the only one with that kind of heat stored up. (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 378)

While it may have taken time, according to his writings, Baraka did change, as he began to reflect upon his male chauvinist ways. And, as the '70s faded into the '80s, more than ever, Baraka began to speak up for the rights of women. Significantly, both Amiri and Amina co-edited two books during the '80s: *An Anthology of African American Women: Confirmation* (1983) and *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (1987). In their first compilation, commonly referred to as *Confirmation*, Baraka rejects his old Pan-African beliefs and critiques the treatment of women in the home. Not surprisingly, he holds Capitalism responsible:

The family under capitalism takes on the same relationships as exist in the economy. So, in the family structure, the Man is the bourgeois, the owner-capitalist, the "boss" and the

⁷⁹ I had the great pleasure of seeing Amina Baraka, still an activist, speak at Central High School in Newark, New Jersey on 9 October 2009. She spoke with more fire and conviction than her husband; her rhetoric, cadence, and style were consummately professional. She raged that women were all too often left out of the Black Liberation Movement narratives, and spoke patiently when telling the stories of those left out or forgotten.

woman is the worker, the exploited. The social relations are shaped by the economic structure, with the woman-worker not even getting paid for keeping the actual capitalist's worker (male) fed and becalmed, and at the same time breeding new workers for the pitiless maw of monopoly. (Baraka and Baraka, *An Anthology of African American Women: Confirmation* 21-22)

It is with this new point of view that Baraka pens *Song*, and is able to see a family united as a weapon to combat Capitalism. In their second compilation, *The Music*, Baraka writes, lovingly, 'Amina's poetry is itself child of the music, as Jazz is Blues. Image, rhythm, improvising, creating, verb-formed content as that of the music, hers and ours, particularly the African-American, the Black woman, the working person and political revolutionary, wife and mother, the singer and poet's life' (13). It seems clear, *Song* belongs to Amina.

The play itself intertwines the personal with the symbolic. Specifically, it takes place in the spacious home of an old man (Professor Woogie⁸⁰). Clear parallels can be drawn between Baraka and Woogie; for example, they are both writers and professors. As the play opens, though, the old man sits alone, restless, as if waiting for something (or someone) to arrive. Shortly, a younger Postman (Boogie) arrives and begins to terrorize and torment the old man. The Postman calls himself a messenger and claims that he was sent by his employers to deliver a message. The two go back and forth, often trading insults, until the tension escalates, and the Postman explains that he has come to kill the old man. With the help of a few of literary creations (Signifying Monkey and Br'er Rabbit), stemming from African/Black literary traditions, the Professor defiantly and courageously resists the Postman's threats as idle protestations. However, as the play nears its close, the old man loses confidence and strength, and stands to be murdered by the Postman. In the end, the old man is saved by a surprise birthday visit from his wife, Mrs. Woogie, and their two sons, Blue Hot and Blue Cool. Within this play, a family united is able to collectively battle the symbol of American Capitalism. While on the surface, *Song* seems less forceful (than, say, *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*), the play does explore a personal family story to tackle the major themes of death, murder, killing, and Capitalism. To be sure, while certainly remaining unique, *Song*, as with so many of Baraka's plays, continues to present such theatrical representations of violence in order to move/provoke an audience.

As the play begins, and the Postman arrives, he starts to deliver cryptic messages regarding the mail to the old man. Early on, the old man does not seem to see the Postman as a threat, and

⁸⁰ The character name here signifies America's prevalent misrepresentation of Blacks through derogatory labeling, as well as Baraka's desire to reclaim such labels. In a 2006 essay entitled 'Souls Grown Deep,' Baraka notes, "'White America' explains 'Darky' and 'Shine' and 'Spear Chucker,' 'Woogie,' 'Inferior,' 'Jim Crow,' 'Boy' and 'Girl' and 'Uncle' and 'Auntie' [...] Or Black Magic, Black Ball, Black Sheep, Black Heart, Black Humor, Black Thursday, Black Mail, Black Hat, Kinky, Wild and Woolly, Niggardly, Denigrate, like they say, things can look very Black' (*Razor* 385).

bickers about not receiving any mail: 'I could get circulars and posters and coupons and give-aways. There's plenty mail I could get' (Baraka, *Song* 3). At this point, the old man carelessly surrenders to a family structure under a Capitalist culture, which promotes the use of coupons and give-aways in order to further grow a superficial need of product. The civil service Postman, in his postman hat, symbolizes this mainstream culture, and hovers around the old man like a vulture waiting to strike. Despite his early missteps, it does not take long for the old man to grow weary of the Postman's intentions. The old man declares, 'I pay your salary, you know. You can leave' (3). But, as the two exchange their heated words, the old man finally asks, 'Are you supposed to kill me or something? Are you some corny messenger of death?' (4). The answer, of course, is yes—'Yes, all that. I am a messenger. I bring the mail. (*To audience.*) You see, how symbolical and allegorical' (5). Herein lies the artfulness of Baraka's script. His symbols remain subtle while his characters express personal self-awareness. The message and the personal aspects of family are embedded by stealth, which might be why Hay praises the play so highly, in contrast to *the Lone Ranger*.

As the two continue to argue, the Postman declares, 'You're making me into a murderer, old man' (5). At this stage, the symbols and images become even clearer. The United States Postman, representing America and all it stands for, doubles as the Boogieman⁸¹, or death. In this way, Baraka once again presents a symbol of Capitalism as a killer who must be stopped. It is important to note, for Baraka, America of the late '80s had not changed much. In 'Black People & Jesse Jackson,' written between July 1988 and June 1989, Baraka details his personal account of Jesse Jackson's failure to secure the Democratic nomination to run as Michael Dukakis' Vice-President in 1988. As an activist both promoting and fighting for Jackson's nomination, Baraka criticizes:

The question of a black presidential candidate and even a black president is not so much at issue as the question of black democracy, self determination and equality in the United States. [...] Jesse's decision to go along with the Democratic party's description of him as a non-being means that the will and self determination of the African American people is still being suffocated under the weight of white supremacy. (*The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* 479-480)

Certainly, after living through the Republican Ronald Reagan⁸² as President, as well as the Democrats' seeming disregard to acknowledge Black leadership, Baraka was still calling for revolution. He even went so far as to quote Malcolm X when commenting on the assassination

⁸¹ Interestingly, on Coldcut's 2006 album *Sound Mirrors*, Baraka collaborated on a track titled 'Boogieman.' The song or track, itself, names several characters from the play, *Song*, and could serve as a sort of soundtrack for the drama.

⁸² Reagan, the ex-governor of California (1967-1975) was a public enemy of the Black Panther Party, and, as a result, remained an enemy of activists within the Black Liberation Movement.

attempt on Reagan's life: 'The rise of racist violence is a clear calling card of fascism. And even the attack on president Reagan must be seen as Malcolm X saw the assassination of Kennedy as merely "Chickens coming home to roost." In a climate of racism and violence, some of that hate might even spill over on its initiators' (*Razor* 8). And, in 1989, with Reagan's vice-president, George H.W. Bush, now serving as president, Baraka continued to lash out within his dramatic work. For example, the old man's questions continue to reveal Baraka's symbols at work. He asks the Postman, 'Are you from some wild agency that kills old people like in a horror story that would be on the *Times*' best seller list?' (5). Given Baraka's politics, as servant or messenger for the bourgeois Capitalists, the Postman's answer comes as no surprise: 'I'm gonna be straight with you, ol' man. You supposed to be dead and if you ain't already dead I'm supposed to take you out somewhere and kill you' (6).

At this stage, the play grows even darker, as the Postman gives both the audience and the old man the reason he must die: 'To be utterly clear, you are past usefulness to the users and we've abused you as long as we could with disinterest, and now you have become boring to my employers' (6). Here, finally, through the Postman's dialogue, Baraka uses the stage to once again expose how he truly feels about American Capitalism and those in power; the system itself will work you like a dog, break your bones, leave you starving and chewed up, but that is not enough. As Baraka expressed in *the Lone Ranger* play, American Capitalism will not rest until it has killed you. This, Baraka argues, is why Capitalism itself must be killed. Appropriately enough, as the audience begins to read Baraka's message loud and clear, so does the old man. He comments on the Postman's employers, exposing them as bourgeois: 'One thing I can say about them, they must be rich!' (6). Perhaps in response to the old man's defiance, just about halfway through the play, the Postman begins to speed up the proceedings. He pulls a gun on Woogie and revels in the fact that he, a Black man, will be killing another Black man. The Postman cheers, 'When I kill you, take you out, for the good of the community, I want to leave you with that striking phenomenon of social construct [...] that it is a negro that takes you off planet number three' (9). The Postman presents Baraka's nightmare. After decades of attempting to build organizations and political parties set up to fight racism, oppression, and, yes, Capitalism, the Postman, and all he symbolizes, remains.

As the play progresses, the old man grows weak. In a desperate plea, he asks, 'Why now?' and, with his answer, the Postman sets up another key theme of the play (10). The Postman replies, 'Because you're alone. Old and alone. In an empty house full of sounds and memories. Now you're vulnerable in ways you've never been vulnerable before' (10). The old man cannot win because his family has left him. Based on Baraka's new concept, beyond organizations or political parties, the strongest united front remains the family unit, ready to battle injustice together. But,

the old man has lost his unit. He admits, 'My wife was driven away from me by my own craziness, I guess. I was always... (*Ponders.*) busy. I had things to do. Things to make. Bringing things from inside my head to light up the world. I was busy' (10). The Postman retorts, 'Now you're alone. And vulnerable. Now I'm here' (10). In a way, the old man admits that he has fallen victim to Baraka's theory regarding a Capitalist family structure mentioned earlier. In an essay titled 'Protest and Progress: Toni Morrison's *Dreaming Emmett*,' Baraka declares, 'One of the most consistent distortions that the licensed robbers and killers that run this society put out in literature, stage, screen, and radio, is that the contradictions between the Black man and Black woman are more severe and deadly than the contradictions between the African American nation and white supremacy monopoly capitalism' (*Razor* 27). The old man is too concerned with being busy, or making things; he is too concerned with assimilating within the Capitalist system, and as a result, has lost his family.

As a last resort, though, the old man turns to Black African literary traditions, and calls upon The Signifying Monkey and Br'er Rabbit⁸³ to protect him. Both characters are meaningful representations of a rich Black culture, and ignite a new surge of energy into the old man. The Monkey ridicules the Postman and his family,—'Thought they was the bourgeoisie and shit' (11)—while the Rabbit is slick and able to slip the gun away from the Postman (11). However, the tables are not turned for long: '*A sleight of hand, the gun reappears in the POSTMAN's mitt*' (12). As victims of mainstream American appropriation, these ancient African literary figures only offer fleeting resistance. The characters' brief presence on stage, along with the Postman's ability to easily defeat them, reflects America's misuse/abuse of Black culture. Black Africans traveled the 'Middle Passage' towards slavery in the new world with cultural stories of Br'er Rabbit and the Monkey; America has since copped these traditions—turning Br'er Rabbit into Bugs Bunny⁸⁴, for example—for mainstream American entertainment and capital gain. Having been robbed of his culture, for the next few minutes, the old man is deflated and has nowhere to turn.

Suddenly, the old man goes to the door, swings it open, and reveals his two sons: '*One dressed in muted soft subtle colors, a sly grin on his face. The other in the latest fashions of the day, like Teddy Pendergrass, with a big strut, hand held stiff. They greet the OLD MAN/PROFESSOR together*' (14). Both sons, Blue Hot and Blue Cool, immediately begin to question what is going on.

⁸³ See the introduction and first chapter to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* for a detailed background of how these myths traveled from Africa to America to inform Black America's culture. In an essay from 1991 entitled *The Blues Aesthetic & The Black Aesthetic*, Baraka identifies Br'er Rabbit as cunning and sly, and the Monkey as a trickster (*Razor* 105-106). Hay confirms, 'The names taken from African American traditions (Br'er Rabbit, Signifying Monkey, "blue hot," and "blue cool") not only typified traits, but the names themselves represented issues' (123).

⁸⁴ Baraka also makes this clear connection in the same *Blues Aesthetic* essay from 1991: 'Brer Rabbit [...] got over through guile (showing in American culture as Bugs Bunny)' (*Razor* 106). As another example of America's propensity to appropriate such figures, see Joel Chandler Harris' *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus*, first published as a complete collection in 1955.

They tell their mother to not come in just yet, and the old man realizes that his wife has come to visit as well. Now, with his family intact, the Postman ceases to be a threat: *'The POSTMAN is backing up as the two young men coordinate their attack, moving on the POSTMAN slowly and cautiously'* (14). The reunited family can now defeat the symbolic Postman. The Capitalist killer must now be killed. Blue Hot tells Blue Cool to let the Postman keep his gun, just to make things interesting: *'Naw, don't let him put it down, let me have to take the motherfucker from him and wear him out. Naw, let him keep it till I get hold of his behind'* (14). With this scene, Baraka continues to intertwine the personal with the symbolic. In the 1993 article *'Fathers & Sons,'* Phil Petrie comments on the family's activism while also providing details regarding Amiri and Amina's sons: *'This seems a heavy dose of politics to pour down the throats of four sons: Obalaji, 26, Ras, 24, Amiri, Jr., 21, and Ahi, 20'* (97). While his boys were a few years younger when *Song* was written, it becomes clear that Baraka was a proud father who cared about the concept of family and his children. Indeed, in my travels to see Baraka speak, I always saw one or two of his sons travel with him.⁸⁵ Petrie continues, *'To Baraka's delight, the young lions of his pride have adopted their father's activism and are on the path toward fulfilling his dream: "I want them to transform the world"'* (97). Embedded within this quote is the key to Baraka's shift, expressed within *Song*; just as he had focused on Malcolm X, Maulana Karenga, and the election of Kenneth Gibson, he could focus on his children. Since his birth as an activist, Baraka had been searching for a revolutionary party; what he realized in the '80s is that he had always been building one at home.

As the play comes to its close, the old man's wife explains that they have come for his birthday. The old man does not know that it is his birthday, but, remains relieved to have his family back with him. As they talk, he asks his wife why she left him. She answers, *'Why do you always turn things around? You acted like you didn't need me'* (15). The old man replies, *'I was a fool...abstract, silly, vainglorious,'* and his wife returns, *'The same things I said, exactly, the very same things'* (15). These last lines could be read as Baraka's written apology to his real life wife, Amina, for his extreme chauvinism in the '60s and early '70s; again, this play masterfully connects the personal with the symbolic, and though it remains underperformed and is rarely written about, like so much of Baraka's later plays, for the quality of its writing and what it represents to Baraka's career as a revolutionary playwright, it deserves a rebirth. Hay declares, *'What Song shows that is new about Baraka is his place among the very best of the playwrights in world theatre'* (125).

Embracing Community and Family

Both *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* and *Song* detail the importance of unity in the struggle for liberation, and present interesting shifts in

⁸⁵ Personally, I've met Ras Baraka and Amiri Baraka, Jr. Ras Baraka, also a poet, is now a City Councilman for Newark, New Jersey.

Baraka's dramatic message. The *Lone Ranger* play marks a transition in Baraka's dramatic writing by depicting a female character, Donna, as the main protagonist. It is Donna who possesses the strength to unite the factory workers in armed resistance against the Capitalist symbols and system within the play. And it is Donna who begins to melt away Baraka's self-proclaimed chauvinism of the '60s and early '70s through dramatic storytelling, essentially paving the way for a new message in *Song*. In this story about the redemptive quality of love, the old man's wife mirrors the character of Donna as *Song's* platform of strength. The wife ultimately reminds Woogie of the power of family unity and delivers a fresh call-to-arms for Baraka's audiences. Not surprisingly, themes involving the necessity to embrace community and family stand as important precursors to Baraka's later drama, published and performed in the 1990s. As he endeavored to stage new theatre which linked communities with families, however, a drastic and unpredictable threat of death within Baraka's own family most likely contributed to yet another subtle shift in his dramatic representations of murder and killing.

Chapter 4

Death Threats: Continuing to Dramatize the Struggle

‘Death rules life. But death is like God & the devil, a lie. Not Matter in Motion.’

(Baraka, *Razor* 143)

‘I’ve never been afraid to struggle. But some people say, “Well you struggle too hard.” I think as long as you’re principled, as long as you’re not trying to wipe anybody out, kill anybody—I’m talking about the world of literature and art—that you have to struggle.’

(Baraka, *Razor* 340)

In critical scholarship the so-called ‘periods’ delineating shifts in Baraka’s political ideologies have been oversimplified. Too often, his legacy is frozen far in the past, and commentators rarely explore his latest works. In Daniel Matlin’s 2013 *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis*, for example, the chapter on Baraka, speciously titled ‘Be Even Blacker: Amiri Baraka’s Names and Places,’ drops off shortly after 1974, as if the named writer/activist ceases to exist in any place after this particular year⁸⁶. Despite its publication in 2001, Watts’ otherwise extensive and ultimately rather scathing study of Baraka fails to address the revolutionary artist’s later work of the 1990s. In fact, most contemporary critics treat him as though he did not continue to evolve. Shortly before his death, Baraka was scheduled to present a reading on 12 April 2014 at the University of Kent for a major international conference held in his honor titled ‘Baraka at 80.’ Though it would not be apparent from the majority of scholarship regarding his drama, Baraka continued to produce revolutionary plays throughout the 1990s and up through the present⁸⁷. When I spoke to him in November 2011, at a reception held after The Guild Theatre lecture in Sacramento, California, Baraka disclosed that he had just recently finished

⁸⁶ I do not mean to suggest that Matlin’s chapter is not well-researched or developed. Within the periods he chooses to focus on, his discussions are both engaging and informative, but typically, he lingers on Baraka’s conversion to Marxism:

At one level, Baraka’s Marxism allowed him to explain his previous ideological “errors”—including anti-Semitism, as well as “carping at the black masses”—as the all but inevitable results of his “petit-bourgeois” socialization. Yet his newfound materialism also served to mitigate the harshest claims he had made about black people’s moral culpability for their own subordination: he ceased to tell black urban audiences that they “deserve to be slaves.” And just as Baraka’s embrace of Lenin signaled that he no longer wished to ghettoize intellectual life in the pursuit of a hermetic “black” ideology, so his quest to reconvert black American to an “African” culture unsullied by Western influence yielded to a renewed appreciation for the culture of black people as it existed in the United States. (Matlin 194)

⁸⁷ In an interview from 2000, Baraka admits, ‘I write plays. I got plays that have not been produced. None of ‘em—a play about Mandela, a play about O.J. Simpson. It’s hard to get those kind of plays produced. It takes a while. I just wrote a play a couple of years ago called *Remembering Weselves* about the Harlem Renaissance’ (Steptoe). Despite my repeated attempts with archivists, Baraka himself, and his agents, none of these manuscripts could be made available for study.

a play about W.E.B. DuBois titled *The Most Dangerous Man in America*⁸⁸, which he hoped to stage at Woodie King Jr.'s New Federal Theatre. Only time will tell if this newly completed play will in fact receive a full production; what remains even more questionable, though, is how or why Baraka's accessible later dramatic work is consistently marginalized. An attempt to explain away such a lack of scholarship by defining Baraka's accessible drama of the 1990s as too controversial, or too against the mainstream, seems questionable. I argue that all of Baraka's dramatic work challenges traditional representations of American theatre, and given the scholarship that does exist on Baraka, critics tend to agree. If, by contrast, scholars have considered the later works artistically unworthy of criticism or attention, this chapter endeavors to set the record straight by unveiling their theatrical potentialities as part of the case for a re-evaluation of Baraka's 1990s work.

Essentially, this chapter breaks the critical deadlock. During the 1990s Baraka continued to explore themes of murder and death in revolutionary plays inspired by his Marxist ideology. Moreover, despite the lack of critical attention given to these plays, his commitment to provoke audiences through drama seemed to intensify as a new decade dawned. In his 1990 essay, 'Art & the Political Crisis,' Baraka prophesized:

It is necessary to reorganize an international Black Arts Movement like the '20s Renaissance, Harlem Renaissance [...] with the force and focus of the '60s Black Arts Movement or the 19th Century Black Convention and Slave Narrative Anti Slavery outbursts. Art carries peoples' lives, history, present and projects their future. If the art is allowed to live, be exposed and influence, then more and more people are molded by it. And what the art wants the people see and feel and want. Art valorizes and glorifies our lives. The creators. That's why it's so dangerous. (*Razor* 428)

Just two years later, however, tragedy struck Baraka's family, proving real life was no less dangerous; in 1992, as a dreadful example of life mirroring Baraka's representations of violence in art, Amina and Amiri's youngest son was shot in the head and severely wounded. Beginning with a brief introduction to Baraka's activism in the early '90s, along with details of his son's tragic misfortune, and Baraka's evolving politics, this chapter culminates with in-depth analyses of *Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial*, *The Election Machine Warehouse*, and *General Hag's Skeezag*, all published in the '90s and performed together for the Nuyorican Poets Café Theater in 1996. I argue that, while Baraka continued to dramatize conditions in the struggle for liberation for both Blacks and the working-class, rather than depict onstage killing or murder, these plays present

⁸⁸ While from what I can tell Baraka had been working on this play for many years,—he references the work in the Lamont B. Steptoe interview from 2000—all of my requests for a manuscript of the play, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, were denied by Baraka's literary agent.

America's threat of death as a means to invoke audience reaction. Perhaps, after focusing on the strength of family unity in *Song*, the haunting threat of his son's death further inspired new dramatic representations. Once again, in the new decade of the '90s, Baraka slightly adjusts his message, most likely, as a result of the recent personal tragedy. Far from taming or muting his Marxist fervor, the three plays analyzed within the pages of this chapter warn audiences of the very real danger present in America. As this chapter's epigraphs suggest, Baraka sees America as the ultimate symbol of death, built on the lie of an unattainable American dream. Unlike his drama of the past, a new dramatic message, presented in his theatre of the mid '90s, foregoes reactionary forms of killing as a means of self defense, and focuses on exposing the deadly American bourgeoisie as a major threat to the proletariat. Each play recalls aspects of Theodore Ward's 1938 Marxist drama *Big White Fog*, a major influence on Baraka's later plays, to present characters, and thereby audiences, with a unique death threat while simultaneously attacking different aspects of the Capitalist American society—*Jack Pot Melting* and *The Election Machine Warehouse* tackle the mainstream American media in different eras, while *General Hag* presents the urban drug trade as a metaphor for political corruption.

Tragedy Too Close to Home

Concepts of murder and killing are peppered throughout Baraka's writings of the 1980s. Throughout this work, with regard to art and drama, Broadway, Hollywood, or the American commercial arts machine more generally, are often personified as the murderer. Of course, Baraka's words, written to provoke activism, attack the American majority and offer an avant-garde alternative. In an essay titled 'Symposium on Institution Building: A Reanalysis of the Role and Nature of Arts Organizations,' written in the 1980s, Baraka declares, 'It is better that we be able to get twenty people in a room and perform the great works of history, the present and the future than be murdered mentally, metaphorically and literally by yet another Anglo-Broadway garbage can' (*Razor* 357). Predictably, by the start of the new decade, Baraka continued this attack on the mainstream and relentlessly promoted self-determination through independent production. Specifically for Baraka, though, a major Hollywood picture scheduled to begin shooting in the early '90s hit too close to home. Baraka saw Warner Brother's 1992 production of Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* as a personal affront, and has continued to link the Academy Award Nominated⁸⁹ film as a key example of America's propensity to murder the truth through the distribution and sale of an omnipresent white lie (Baraka, *Razor* 372-376).

⁸⁹ *Malcolm X* (1992) was nominated for Best Costume Design (Ruth E. Cater) and Best Actor (Denzel Washington). Interestingly, several years before Lee's film, in 1981, Washington portrayed Malcolm X in playwright Laurence Holder's *When the Chickens Came Home to Roost*, a dramatization of the fallout between Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm. The play was produced for Woodie King Jr.'s Henry Street Settlement's New Federal Theatre (Rich 1).

Lee's involvement with the film did not appease Baraka and only served to incite a more severe critique. Despite, or perhaps in spite of, his growing reputation as an outspoken Black film director and activist in his own right, as well as the relative success within Black communities of his early films, *School Daze* (1988), *Do The Right Thing* (1989), and *Mo' Better Blues* (1990)⁹⁰, Lee is held responsible, by Baraka at least, for aiding Hollywood in the commoditization of Malcolm X. With Warner Brother's backing, the 'X,' a former symbol of Black revolution and liberation⁹¹, now stamps clothing and merchandise to rake in the cash. In 1991 Baraka noted abrasively, 'Even Malcolm's "X" has already been transformed into a commercial symbol, now it can be sold, for Spike that X is simply a multiplication sign, as Spike Lee's Joint opened this morning in NY City's Macys!' (*Razor* 116). For Baraka this constitutes murder. The enemy, represented in this instance by Capitalist Hollywood, pimps and massacres the message and life of Malcolm for profit. Baraka's point is clear: The oppressed have responsibility to create and present works which prompt change; Malcolm's messages and life belong to Blacks⁹² and the working-class, and yet their voices are silenced as American conglomerates reshape American history through mass control of theatre, film, and broadcasting. In an essay titled 'Shorty Is Alive & Well & Making Movies for Warner Bros.,' written in 1993, Baraka proposes a solution to try and take back this control:

In my opinion the best thing Spike and Co. could do if they have any relationship to the masses of the American people would be to permit open discussions after each showing of the film, in theaters all over the world. Then, even though the brothers Warner are going to make at least a quarter of a billion dollars on the film, there would be some value in it for the people as well. (*Razor* 376)

Herein lies the connection which links Baraka's drama throughout the decades. Since the '60s, despite ideological shifts, Baraka has set out to produce revolutionary drama for the people, first and foremost targeting a reaction from the oppressed. In 'Writers, Critics & Social Consciousness,' from 1994, Baraka expands upon this concept of a linked message through time and establishes clear connections between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: 'The 1860s parallel the 1960s revolution; the 1870s the 1970s presumed reconstruction, and now the 1990s parallel the 1890s, the destruction of Reconstruction' (*Razor* 147). Just as the so-called abolition of slavery in the south birthed the all too similar 'separate but equal' mantra of Jim Crow, Capitalist Imperialists of

⁹⁰ Interestingly, Baraka's daughter, Lisa Jones, collaborated with Lee on all three films and the subsequent books detailing their productions. See Lee, Spike, and Lisa Jones. *Uplift the Race: The Construction of School Daze*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988, *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint*. New York: Fireside, 1989, and *Mo' Better Blues*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990. Ever the militant activist, his daughter's involvement with Lee's earlier productions did little to abate Baraka's aggression towards Lee's involvement in the commercialization of Malcolm.

⁹¹ In essay titled 'MX Impact on Culture,' written in 1993, Baraka reaffirms, 'Malcolm X was and remains the most influential Black Revolutionary of our age' (*Razor* 413).

⁹² Baraka is just one of many Black playwrights to dramatize Malcolm X on the American stage. His play, *The Death of Malcolm X* was first published in 1969 in *New Plays from the Black Theatre*, edited by Ed Bullins.

the '90s ruled as the lower classes toiled as second-class citizens, some, no doubt, still mollified by the successes of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements of the '60s. First and foremost an activist, Baraka set out to break what he saw as blind complacency of the '90s and once again turned to drama as a weapon of choice. His own family nightmare, however, struck the same year audiences packed cinemas to watch Hollywood, in Baraka's estimation, murder Malcolm.

In an essay entitled 'Newark, My Newark,' written in 1998, Baraka shares his family's personal tragedy involving the shooting of his youngest son, Ahi. Baraka's narrative reveals both his connection with family and ultimate heartbreak:

In June 1992, Amina and I gave a Father's Day gathering at our home and brought together close friends and their children with music and poetry and rounds of good feelings and pledges of recommitment to the family. After the gathering, our son, Amiri was taking a group of girls home when, at a traffic stop, a group of youths approached the car and pulled him out, robbed him, and took the car keys. Amiri, outraged, ran into one of his older brother's friends, who got the money and keys returned. But Amiri, still fuming, came home and got his younger brother and some of his pals to go back. They didn't realize that these boys were drug dealers, and when the car our boys were in approached the spot where Amiri had been victimized, shots rang out from a .357 magnum handgun. The huge slug tore through the car door, and even though Ahi ducked, the bullet struck him at an angle on the side of his head and whipped around, still under his skin, until it stopped, bulging horribly out over his eye! The bullet did not, thank whatever, penetrate his skull, and this is the only good luck we claim.

Even though the bullet was removed and Ahi lay in therapy for months, he was visibly damaged by that hideous crime. The boy who did the shooting was captured and jailed and later, when he got out, shot down, presumably by some competitors in the same business. But Ahi's speech is impaired, and the effects of his injury are protracted if not permanent. (*Razor* 467-468)

It is no secret that the rampant drug culture in America, where 'kingpins' or 'drug lords' control the product and distribute wealth and power as they see fit, often stands as a significant metaphor for American Capitalism⁹³. For Baraka his son was a victim of the American profiteering of the drugs trade. While it remains difficult to pin down exactly when each play was completed⁹⁴, and it is safe

⁹³ In recent years, for example, David Simon's hit television series *The Wire*, produced for HBO from 2002-2008, has received international praise for its depictions of drug life on the streets of Baltimore, Maryland. Considered a groundbreaking sociological text, *The Wire's* five seasons promote this metaphor, as the urban drug trade is written and portrayed as a reflection of American Capitalism.

⁹⁴ *Jack Pot Melting* was published in 1991, *General Hag* in 1992, and *The Election Machine Warehouse* in 1997.

to say that *Jack Pot Melting*, published in 1991, was penned before his son's shooting, the three plays which premiered at the Nuyorican Poets Café in 1996 present the death threat Capitalist America poses to the masses; a threat which became all too real for Baraka and his family. Undeniably, then, following in the footsteps of Ward's Marxist *Big White Fog*—a play Baraka labels 'the most impressive play I've read by an Afro American' (Clark 158)—*Jack Pot Melting*, *The Election Machine Warehouse*, and *General Hag* link together as revolutionary anti-Capitalist theatre, written to awaken audiences of the '90s to a new era of mass consumption and commercial tyranny.

Big White Fog

In an interview in 1993, Maya Angelou asked Baraka how he would describe himself politically. He answered:

I'm still a Marxist, and I think it shapes my art in the sense that I am trying to get to the material base of whatever is going on—whatever I am describing, whatever event or circumstance or phenomenon I am trying to illuminate. I'm always looking for a concrete time and place and condition. I want to know why things are the way they are and how they became that way. (262-263)

His answer here helps establish another crucial link between Baraka's three plays, to be analyzed within this chapter. Baraka's Marxism is explored through the presentation of a Black American family and/or community within a distinct and concrete time, place, and condition. For this reason, along with Baraka's several admissions of its influence over his own work⁹⁵, I see Ward's *Big White Fog* as an important precursor to Baraka's trio of plays produced in 1996. Just as *The Lone Ranger* play owes much to Hughes' *Scottsboro Limited*, Baraka's reverence for *Fog* shines through his later dramatic work.

Ward's *Big White Fog*, indisputably advanced for its time⁹⁶, premiered in Chicago at the Great Northern Theatre on 7 April 1938, before transferring to the Lincoln Theatre in New York on 22 October 1940. The play depicts the struggles of a Black family living in Chicago in the 1920s and '30s. Specifically, it details the conflict between Vic, a forthright follower of the Nationalist Marcus Garvey, and his brother-in-law, Dan, who values the 'white man's method' of 'individual

⁹⁵ As further evidence to his respect for the play, Baraka even attempted to have *Big White Fog* staged with Hughes' *Scottsboro Limited*: 'I wanted to put on both of these plays together; in fact I sent them to Woodie King, Jr., at New Federal Theatre, but he didn't want to produce them. I haven't yet found anyone who is willing to put up the money and produce these two plays up front' (Clark 158).

⁹⁶ The introduction to *Fog*, published in *Black Theatre USA: Plays by African Americans*, confirms this notion through a presentation of Ralph Ellison's review of the play: 'In its three-act attempt to probe the most vital problems of Negro experience, *Big White Fog* is like no other Negro play. The author takes a movement which has been passed off as a ludicrous effort by Negroes to ape British royalty and reveals in it that dignity of human groping which is characteristic of all oppressed peoples' (284).

achievement' (Ward 299). As the play gains momentum, Dan attempts to pressure Vic to accept Capitalism as the way forward; he hires Vic's son Les to work for him in his kitchenette and self-righteously claims power over the family because, as an individual achiever, he holds the most capital. By the second half of the play, however, having jumped forward ten years to the 30s, both Vic's Nationalism and Dan's Capitalism have failed, as Vic's family struggles through the depression, poorer than ever, while facing an inevitable eviction. In his essay 'The Black Theater Movement & The Black Consciousness Movement,' written in 1991, Baraka declares, 'There is no other play that handles the explosiveness of class antagonism within the Black family and the extension that is a Black community as sharply as *Fog!*' (*Razor* 111). As early as 1938, Ward dramatized the Capitalist wedge dividing communities as Blacks were lured by the false hope of a white bourgeois life. In the last act, Les, as a fully fledged Communist convert, presents the ideal path towards Black liberation; he takes charge and organizes his fellow Comrades to protect the house and the family. As sirens blare and the authorities arrive to carry out the eviction, Les's Comrades sing 'Mine eyes have seen the glory' (The Battle Hymn of the Republic) as they march towards the home to offer protection (322). Suddenly, as Vic resists the Bailiffs' orders, gun-fire erupts and Vic is fatally wounded. The play ends as Vic dies, and as the curtain closes a warning bell rings for the audience, as the screeching siren of an ambulance can be heard off stage. Though written and performed some fifty-six years prior to Baraka's '96 theatrical trio, *Fog* also captures the threat posed by American Capitalism. Essentially, Vic turns to Communism a bit too late and pays the ultimate price at the hands of the American Capitalist machine. Given the messages it presents, Baraka often turned to *Fog* as a model for dramatizing such threats while maintaining a pro-Marxist stance. While they stop short of depicting representations of death on stage, Baraka's three plays also go against the mainstream and are most interested in exposing American Capitalism as a death trap. To further explore these concepts, it makes sense to start with an analysis of *Jack Pot Melting*, the Nuyorican production's opener.

Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial

All three of the short plays which appeared for the first time on stage in 1996 are irrefutably anti-mainstream. In the same year the plays were produced for Nuyorican, in a Keynote address entitled 'The Role of The Writer in Establishing a Unified Writers Organization,' delivered in Johannesburg, South Africa on 21 March, Baraka urges writers to continue to fight against the mainstream: 'No more complaining that Big capital won't let our writing or other art undermine them sufficiently. That they won't publish our books which tell them to die or produce our plays, exhibit our paintings which show ways big capital can be destroyed' (*Razor* 166). The answer for Baraka, just as it had been in the '60s, with the establishment of Harlem's BARTS and Newark's Spirit House, is to partake in a sort of guerilla warfare with regard to theatre production—'We

must give plays in our living room (discussions in our basement or backyard)' (*Razor* 416). Miguel Algarín's Nuyorican Poets Café, founded in 1973, adheres to Baraka's mission to fight against 'Big capital,' and offers a communal space for revolutionary writers to produce their work. While discussing Nuyorican's early mission in his introduction to *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theater Festival*, published in 1997, Algarín remembers:

We looked for where the street drama was and who could write about it. Truth first, then theater. Actors benefitted from this process, because they were never asked to devalue their experience and backgrounds by playing *West Side Story* over and over. We looked for theatrical language that realistically portrayed life on Avenues D, C, B, and A, unlike the Hollywood epitomized by *Kojak* or *Baretta*. It worked as theater, but it also gave us the means to exorcise the pain of our lives. Theater as catharsis. (xv)

With Algarín, then, Baraka found a like minded anti-mainstream activist and, ultimately, a new home in which to stage his drama. In his 1995 essay 'Black Drama,' Baraka asserts that, 'The arts, the drama, must not wait around for the murderers to discover them so they can make its creators honorary murderers, or real ones. We must do it ourselves' (*Razor* 171). With Algarín's support, just one year later, a new trio of Baraka's short dramas set out to advance this concept of America as murderer.

Rome Neal directed the trio for Nuyorican, which opened with the shortest of the three plays, *Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial*. In this brief one act play, set in separate apartments, characters labeled as Brother and Sister speak with each other over the telephone as they view Capitalist caricatures of themselves on their televisions. As with most of Baraka's drama, the play grows more and more ominous; as their television alter egos distract Brother and Sister by both selling and spreading distorted lies regarding the value of American Capitalism, vicious, bloodthirsty dogs growl and bark outside their respective apartments, symbolizing the rapacious greed of American Capitalism.

Though TV Brother and TV Sister enact their commercial on television, the play ultimately serves as its own commercial for Baraka's audience. The 'Jack Pot' within the title represents capital and the myth of the American dream—a fable which suggests that living in or landing on American soil is equivalent to hitting the proverbial 'jackpot.' Attacking this myth, Baraka warns his audience against American Capitalism's threat to genuine democracy and self-determination for Blacks. According to William Blum, an oppositional leading expert on American foreign policy and recent author of *America's Deadliest Export: Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else*:

No matter how many times they're lied to, [Americans] still often underestimate the government's capacity for deceit, clinging to the belief that their leaders somehow mean well. As long as people believe that their elected leaders are well intentioned, the leaders can, and do, get away with murder. Literally. This belief is the most significant of [...] myths. (13)

Jack Pot puts forth the same message for American theatergoing audiences, and in 1996 specifically, the working-class audiences of Nuyorican were meant to be provoked by this particular theme. Algarín notes, 'That is why when I commission work from such writers as [...] Amiri Baraka, and Ishmael Reed⁹⁷, I ask them for work that is written in words that do not feed these stereotypes. Rather, I ask them for plays that will open doors, showing audiences ways out' (xv). Indeed, in the brief stage directions which open the published script of *Jack Pot*, Baraka reveals his play's intention to initiate audience response and provoke action: '*Drums should open and close the play and the last words okayed back and forth as a diversely spoken plea, command, question, hope, prediction, confidence, struggle, as a final note of instruction and direction*' (64). In this key note, Baraka reaffirms his revolutionary mission to stage drama which exposes the Black American struggle. The play means to instruct and direct audiences beyond the theatre.

As the play opens, Brother enters his apartment and turns on the television, revealing the '*Large head of [a] black man on TV*' bearing his likeness' (64). Baraka's set-up here, suggesting use of projection, and, perhaps, pre-recorded acting, offers modern theatre directors plenty to work with. On stage, TV Brother directly addresses his doppelganger and introduces his television program: 'Welcome to the gray nasty show, live from the stick's bottom. The wind is here standing, yes, the murderer's eyes. The rattle of the various truths and lost chords' (64). The play's theatrics and message remain exigent today, as Baraka unveils his attack on contemporary mainstream media, suggesting that within America mass conglomerates control broadcasting to dictate distorted truths, thereby murdering/massacring black American's ability to be self-determining. As TV Brother introduces the program's sponsor,—presented in stage directions as '*Chains and whips with bells and jingles*' to bond the slavery of the past with the current state of an oppressive American Capitalism (65)—Brother picks up the phone and dials Sister, as lights come up to reveal her own separate apartment.

The play seems to situate itself in and around 1991, the year it was first published, though in performance the year can certainly remain indeterminate. In his essay 'The Black Theater Movement & The Black Consciousness Movement,' also written in 1991, Baraka declares, 'Film and

⁹⁷ Baraka himself has had a rather conflicted relationship with fellow poet, essayist, and playwright, Ishmael Reed. In an essay from the late 70s, Baraka strongly opposes Reed's politics: 'Reed, in fact, says that those of us who uphold black working people are backward (see *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*, pp. 136-137), or, as he says, "The field nigger got all the play in the sixties"' (*Daggers and Javelins* 323).

television have replaced live drama in the main and large audience theater is strictly commerce aimed at tourists as part of middle class vacations' (*Razor* 107). *Jack Pot* attacks television in this era and positions itself among overt Black political dramas of the past, such as Baraka's self-proclaimed influence *Big White Fog*, to right this wrong. The branding of his characters as Sister and Brother tie in with Baraka's description of Ward's *Fog* as an explosive representation of both Black family and community. Essentially, the character titles carry a dual meaning. While they do eventually name themselves as Ben and Gloria and allude to a more intimate relationship, the character names of Brother and Sister invite Black solidarity and allow for audiences to connect. To take a case in point, in his *New York Times* review of the Nuyorican trio from 20 November 1996⁹⁸, Lawrence Van Gelder fails to offer the characters' given names, drawing greater significance to the nondescript titles: '[A] young man called Brother and a young woman called Sister are astonished to see how they are depicted on television' (1). Taken more literally, as common delineations for siblings, the labels recall two members of a family unit, while a more colloquial reading, which decodes these monikers as friendly designations for people of color within a Black vernacular tradition, reflects the Black community more generally. In his memoir, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, for example, Bobby Seale, co-founder of Oakland, California's Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, employs the more colloquial usage when discussing party recruitment within the Black community: 'We talked to brothers and sisters in colleges, in high schools, who were on parole, on probation, who'd been in jails, who'd just gotten out of jail, and brothers and sisters who looked like they were on their way to jail' (65). Essentially, no matter which way they are interpreted, the character titles in *Jack Pot* allow audiences to connect with what unfolds on stage and relate with Brother and Sister as a united, collective community. Further emphasizing his manifesto, in an essay from the early '90s, Baraka writes, 'The theater (& film) we should be trying to create today must perfect "the shorthand of poverty" and draw live human experience & reality from the maximum realization of our *actual* resources—beginning with the people, the cities and their institutions' (*Razor* 108). Audiences are meant to align themselves with Sister and Brother as the two main characters join forces in on stage conversation to sort through the sadistic messages transmitted through their televisions.

As the drama unfolds, TV Brother pushes products on both Sister and Brother in the commercialized American Capitalist tradition of advertisement: 'Drink Crazy X! Eat Wild Z! Like, yes, here we are, *live* under the monster's thumbnail' (65). Here, again, Baraka exposes mainstream America's proclivity to drug, and thereby silence, the people through the

⁹⁸ It should be noted, the 1996 *New York Times* piece on Baraka's Nuyorican trio, while relatively brief, is a rare review. As with *Song*, very little is written about the Nuyorican trio, or, more generally, the published scripts performed for the production.

commercialized sale of products—'Crazy X' recalls the mainstream American staple, Coca-Cola, with its intoxicatingly high levels of caffeine and sugar, for example—while personifying the American body politic which controls this commercialized media as a monster.

Next, on her television, Sister watches and reacts as TV Brother introduces her double to the viewing audience. TV Sister bursts on the screen declaring, 'Audience I am here with a sunbeam' (65). Once again, the dueling mirror images offer so much potential in performance, as the televised Capitalist caricatures of Brother and Sister reveal Baraka's disdain for mainstream American broadcasters' manipulation of content and image. To be sure, in 1991, Baraka was already protesting the production of Warner Brother's *Malcolm X* for this very reason. In the world of *Jack Pot*, TV Brother and Sister are depicted as whitewashed Capitalists, broadcast via television to sell the American myth of the great white way. As the TV personalities continue their sales pitch, Brother and Sister receive knocks on their respective doors. Sister reveals, 'My God, it's some dogs,' and the stage directions confirm, '*Dogs are slowly building up their vicious growling*' (66). As the ominous threat of attack by bloodthirsty dogs rises, TV Brother and Sister bring forth two white puppies named Fame and Fortune (66). Again, content and image is controlled by the American mainstream media. The very real threat of violence posed by vicious dogs is whitewashed on television as the puppies appear on screen. Addressing the American elite's propensity to dominate through violence, Blum recalls, 'Nothing I had been exposed to in any school or mainstream media had left me with that impression in any firm or lasting way' (11). *Jack Pot* breaks this pattern of deceit, and clearly depicts the hypocrisy presented through America's mass media.

As the play nears its end, Sister reveals how frightened she is, and Brother responds, 'Hey, we've got friends who'd help. People. Families' (67). Once again, with this line, Baraka draws his audience's attention towards the importance of family and community. Despite Brother's claim, however, Sister retorts, 'Why'd you leave that party early, anyway? I was looking for you' (67). In this case, knowledge of Baraka's earlier drama helps unpack this seemingly innocuous line. Taking into account Baraka's continuing stance as a Marxist, and recalling Donna and Reg from *The Lone Ranger* play, as well as their closing declaration to temporarily leave the factory for a party of a new type, reveals more behind Sister's comment than might be apparent on the surface. Though Brother maintains he knows people and families who can help, Sister offers an allusion to a legitimate political alternative—in the form of a progressive Communist party—to combat the oppressive American government. Unfortunately, Brother is accused of leaving the party early in favor of a male chauvinist alternative, and like Woogie in *Song*, has driven Sister—simultaneously

representing Brother's family and community—away as a result⁹⁹. In the midst of an ensuing attack by bloodthirsty dogs, Sister rebukes, 'God, Ben, you're a terrible male chauvinist' (67). Brother apologizes before one of the dogs bursts into Sister's apartment, berating her with both racial and gender slurs: 'It's "mouth" flaps, turning the dog growls to cries of "Nigger bitch, nigger bitch, nigger bitch..."' (68). To combat this direct threat to Sister's life, Brother declares, 'I'll be right there!', and Sister replies, 'I'ma get . . . Shango, now!' (68). As we have seen in his previous drama, such as *Slave Ship* and *Song*, Baraka once again calls upon an African tradition as a means to liberation, this time, more specifically, to counter the play's symbols of Capitalism with a Black deity representing truth and community. In the Introduction to *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*, published in 1992, William Branch explains:

In the long-established multi-cultural traditions of West Africa—from which the ancestors of most African Americans were abducted during the three-centuries-long holocaust of the European slave trade—the symbol of power, authority and rule is often the god of thunder: sometimes called "Shango," especially by the Yoruba peoples of Nigeria and other nations. Increasingly recognized and respected in other areas of the world as well—in the U.S., the Caribbean and particularly in Brazil, which has the largest population of African descent (acknowledged and otherwise)—this deity is prominently invoked on occasions calling for affirmations of truth, vision and service to one's communal grouping. (x)

It is noteworthy that Sister is the one to finally call upon Shango, as *she* understands the importance of community through Communism. Just before the lights dim, she warns Brother, 'Don't try to change the subject like this again!', and then before he can finish his rebuttal, she interjects, 'You the one disappeared' (68). With this statement, Sister once again reprimands Brother for 'leaving the party.' Just as Vic pays the ultimate price for avoiding the Communist party before it is too late in *Big White Fog*, Brother is made to understand that he too could have avoided this threat of death.

Significantly, the sounds of dogs and drums close the play, as if Baraka is sounding the alarm regarding the threat of American Capitalism for his audiences: '*As the lights dim, the dog's bloody barking gets louder*' (68). The closing direction for *Jack Pot* is reminiscent of Ward's ambulance siren at the end of *Fog*. As Canadian journalist Naomi Klein details in her 2007 critique of America's imperialist economic link with violence, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 'This fundamentalist form of capitalism has consistently been midwived by the most

⁹⁹ The parallels between Baraka's and Brother's ideological journeys are also hard to miss. The reader should recall, after receiving his 'dishonorable' discharge from the United States Air Force for harboring Communist sympathies, Baraka eventually ended up in Greenwich Village before traveling to and siding with Communist Cuba in 1960. Despite all of this, guided by the preaching's of Malcolm X, Baraka turned Nationalist, which served to heighten his male chauvinist views.

brutal form of coercion, inflicted on the collective body politic as well as on countless individual bodies' (23). She continues, 'Certain ideologies are a danger to the public and need to be identified as such' (23). And, according to Baraka, 'It is not a color or a religion or a nationality killing us, it is a social economic system' (*Razor* 179). In *Jack Pot*, Baraka vehemently critiques this system as the supreme ruler of mainstream media, and successfully presents the threat it poses to democracy, freedom, and self-determination for all working people, especially black Americans. Similar themes are addressed in *The Election Machine Warehouse*, for which Baraka mined his childhood to depict American Capitalism and the mainstream media in an altogether different context, time, and place.

The Election Machine Warehouse

In his 1994 essay 'Revolutionary Art,' Baraka remarks:

Even those of us who claim revolutionary stances spend most of our time talking about our enemies.[...] When we criticize them, we expend our energy and force on them, rather than on the creation of the new, the transformative, rather than with the creation of what does not yet exist, which we must swear to bring into being, if we are truly revolutionary. (*Razor* 139)

Baraka references his desire to experiment with new forms of art; as a result, his most recent play, in terms of publication at least¹⁰⁰, presented as part of the Nuyorican trio, attempts to present a new form, for Baraka, of autobiographical dramatic representation. While he continues to name American Capitalism as the enemy, Baraka drastically changes his dramatic style by basing *The Election Machine Warehouse* solely on his real life memories of childhood. To be sure, plays of his past, such as *The Slave* or *A Recent Killing*, directly draw from or touch on autobiographical elements; but a close study of *Election* reveals a more intimate connection with the real life past of its sometimes enigmatic revolutionary author.

Set in Baraka's hometown of Newark, New Jersey, *Election*, much like *Jack Pot*, promotes the themes of family and community, only this time in a new context; this particular play traces the history and threat of a manipulative and oppressive America through a lens of the past. The title references Baraka's childhood, situating the play in a time directly following the depression. In an interview with Julian Bond, Baraka provides details regarding the play's background as well as his motivations for writing it:

I even have a play called *The Election Machine Warehouse* 'cause my grandfather, that was his job. He was a Republican—he was a big-time Republican, and that's the job they gave

¹⁰⁰ While first performed in 1996, *The Election Machine Warehouse* was the last of the trio to be published (in 1997).

him, night watchman in the election machine factory. And my sister and I used to jump on top of those machines and run up and down. It was a whole block long, all the election machines in the county were in there. We would run up and down on the top of those machines. And I would wonder—you know, I wrote this play where the radio was—you know, the radio was what was happening [...]

And my grandmother's sitting there listening to that, or at least that's what I have in the play, that it's, you know, my grandmother's sitting there listening to this, and she runs out there where the election machine is: "Everett, Everett -- !"—talking to my grandfather: "The radio is talking to me. The radio—the radio is saying we can't get into Heaven." But that's the kind of stuff I would make up in my mind, sitting there listening to the radio and listening to this—watching my grandmother and grandfather in that context, you know. (Bond)

In this way, *Election* picks up where *Big White Fog* ends, fast forwarding approximately ten years to about 1940¹⁰¹, in the era of Baraka's own childhood. Essentially, *Election* represents another Marxist drama which follows in Ward's footsteps by dramatizing a Black American family victimized by the depression and Capitalism, told through recollections of Baraka's own life. Indeed, when comparing scenes with the above interview and Baraka's *Autobiography*, the vignettes presented within the play link directly to Baraka's past and family. With its setting in an election machine warehouse, the play addresses the politics of the time, and specifically criticizes 'The New Deal' as a precursor responsible for modern day American Capitalism. As with *Jack Pot*, *Election* also attacks the American mainstream media, only this time Baraka targets American radio as the victim. By grouping the two plays together on the same stage, as in the 1996 Nuyorican production, Baraka is able to attack different varieties of media, and does not limit his critique to one form. The radio broadcasts in *Election* brainwash their victims, the loyal listeners, and ultimately display the growing threat of American Capitalism.

The play opens with the juxtaposition between a Voice delivering realistic historical accounts of slavery set against the vacuous Jack Benny radio show¹⁰², in which Benny's Black chauffeur Rochester is caricatured as a racially stereotyped buffoon. The radio station broadcasting the Jack Benny show taunts and distracts its audience, while dictating a subliminal racist agenda. In contrast, the juxtaposing Voice delivers a harrowing narration detailing the horrors of chattel slavery:

¹⁰¹ In his *New York Times Review*, Gelder also references the play's context: 'The promise of the New Deal takes a beating in "The Election Machine Warehouse," set in Newark' (1).

¹⁰² Earlier in his career, Baraka had penned *Jello*,—published by Third World Press in 1970—a satirical drama based on the same Jack Benny radio show. Within the play, Rochester, Benny's otherwise loyal Black chauffeur, turns militant and accosts/robs Benny, as well other members of the show, thereby gaining revenge on these symbols of white America.

The American slave trade, therefore, meant the elimination of at least sixty million Negroes from their motherland. The Muhammadan slave trade meant the forcible migration of nearly as many more. . . . It would be conservative, then, to say that the slave trade cost Negro Africa one hundred million souls. (Baraka, *The Election* 121)

Set in the warehouse,—among *'long aisles of gray-brown quilted election machines. A full square block of them'* (120)—*Election* can be read as a memory play¹⁰³, as both Baraka and his dramatic creation, the narrative Voice, present respective recollections before the main story begins; the anonymous narrator recalls historic traumatic events while Baraka sets up the story of his childhood, about to unfold on stage. As the Voice fades with an ominous closing which reveals the power elite's propensity to deceive,—*'They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our people. This report eased us much'* (121)—Baraka continues to cast a shadow of himself: *'Figure of a boy moving quickly, almost unseen through machines like forest, a runaway. We hear his panting breath and dogs barking'*¹⁰⁴ *in the distance. [...] A ghost sweeps among the machines while making a moaning sound. A boy pursues stealthily. They disappear'* (121). Both the boy and the ghost carry dual meanings, as symbols of slavery and representations of Baraka's memories; the boy should be seen as both a runaway slave and a representation of Baraka as a child, while the ghost stands as a clear symbol of both the haunting memory of slavery and, more personally, Baraka's grandfather, still moaning among the machines as the clear inspiration for the play. The sound of barking dogs, of course, ring forth the horrors of slavery while remaining reminiscent of the dogs from *Jack Pot*. These links serve to help audiences connect the plays.

With these initial recollections providing theatre practitioners innumerable options, Scene 2 segues to a family arriving outside the warehouse: *'Outside the door a man and woman [MOTHER and FATHER] are just arriving in a car. An older woman [GRANDMOTHER] and two young children [BOY and GIRL] are ringing the bell and banging on the door'* (122). What remains unique for Baraka here is that these characters signify theatrical representations of Baraka's real life family. While connections between Baraka and some of his previous dramatic characters can be easily drawn, the boy here *is* Baraka as a child, and the girl, *his* sister; as a matter of fact, though

¹⁰³ Though they can be structured differently, memory plays refer to works that open with a remembrance from the past; the term itself is often attributed to playwright Tennessee Williams. In his production notes for his play, *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams coins the phrase and notes:

Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are. (229)

Baraka's *Election* certainly employs unconventional techniques, but as a remembrance of the past, does so to reveal truths, just as Williams suggests, about America and its politics.

their given names are slightly altered¹⁰⁵, each member of Baraka's immediate family depicted within the play is realistically recreated for the stage. The incontestable autobiographical nature of this dramatic piece, influenced by his own childhood, provides further evidence that, beginning with *Song*, Baraka saw an advantage in dramatizing an overt, strong Black family unit as a necessary force to combat the threat posed by American Capitalism. After all, as revealed in Chapter 3, Baraka equates writing about family with 'writing about ourselves' (Gilbert 57). With *Election*, then, Baraka draws attention back to the importance of family unity, only this time through a more overt personal recollection. However, despite the author's clear individual connection with his characters, perhaps the lack of distinct names, also discussed in my analysis of *Jack Pot*, suggest an ethnic political agenda. Much like the titles of Sister and Brother in *Jack Pot*, throughout the published script of *Election*, Baraka favors more impersonal labels—Father, Mother, Grandmother, Grandfather/Watchman. In this way, Baraka allows Black audiences, with families of their own, to better relate to his personal story as another warning against the American mainstream.

As Scene 2 continues, the family makes their way into the building and begins discussing the grandfather, who works as the warehouse watchman. The Voice continues to offer a personal slave narrative¹⁰⁶, creating a bridge between the plantation work of the past and Grandfather's position within the warehouse. As established in Scene 1, the row of machines cluttering the warehouse stands in as the modern plantation, with its workers and watchmen representing modern-day slaves. However, throughout the family's discussion, Grandfather/Watchman is revealed as a Republican¹⁰⁷ and criticized for his old values. Father ridicules, 'A lotta black people still think the Republicans freed them' (122). This statement, of course, stems from the fact the Republican President Abraham Lincoln held office as Black Americans fought to abolish slavery alongside Northern white soldiers during the American Civil War. The President in question in 1940, however, was the Democratic Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and it is his policies, commonly termed 'The New Deal,' which *Election* takes to task. While Roosevelt's domestic and economic programs positioned to offer relief, recovery, and reform, did, in fact, help America pull through

¹⁰⁵ Baraka's father was named Coyette LeRoy Jones, and his mother was Anna Lois Russ Jones. Within *Election*, the father, Roy, becomes Ray, while the mother, Lois, is named Elise. This slight deviation in naming is common throughout Baraka's writing. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these thinly veiled disguises pepper his autobiography. His current wife, formerly Sylvia Robinson, is named as Sylvia Wilson in the text, for example (Baraka, *The Autobiography* 378).

¹⁰⁶ The Voice continues to paint a terrifying picture of slavery: 'And shortly afterwards while laboring in the field, I discovered drops of blood on the corn as though it were dew from heaven . . . and I then found on the leaves in the woods hieroglyphic characters and numbers' (Baraka, *The Election* 123).

¹⁰⁷ As further evidence of *Election's* autobiographical nature, Baraka's *Autobiography* confirms, 'My grandfather was big in black Republican politics and after his grocery store folded in the Depression he got a patronage job as night watchman in the election machine warehouse for Essex County, on Wisely Street in Newark' (18).

The Great Depression¹⁰⁸, they also set a political machine in motion which prompted the modern American Imperialist/Capitalist monster Baraka detests. Klein argues, 'The Depression did not signal the end of capitalism, but it was [...] the end of letting the market regulate itself. The 1930s through to the early 1950s was a time of unabashed *faire*: the can-do ethos of the New Deal gave way to the war effort' (65). As a means of foreshadowing this impending nightmare, while the family debates Grandfather's politics, the radio announces its first explicit warning to Baraka's characters, and audience—'You think I'm a killer, wait till you get ahold of my son. He's the real gangbuster!' (122). Though the message in this instance is meant as part of an actual radio program, the underlying meaning suggests America's rising threat, as it transitioned from depression to global superpower. In his biting criticism of America's so-called democracy, Blum states:

One can consider that since the end of World War II the United States has

- endeavored to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically elected;
- grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries;
- attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders;
- dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries;
- attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries. [Bullet points in original] (1)

Blum is a cultural commentator to whom Baraka could be said to be easily aligned, except that Baraka always emphasizes ethnic inequality. But Baraka's plays of the '90s foreshadow much of what Blum and Noam Chomsky say a decade later, once again validating these plays as viable for modern production. With his memory play, Baraka reaches back to his past to both explore and critique how and why American corporations can continuously grow and abuse their powers. Essentially, the radio broadcasts presented throughout *Election* carry the same message as the television program depicted in *Jack Pot*. Image and content are controlled to mold the minds of listeners. Eventually, the radio speaks directly to the family, always dictating its racist agenda: 'What a friend we have in Jesus, daily slavery he make you bear. What a friend we have in Jesus. Brought you in the slave ship here' (124). By once again referencing the slavery of the past, the

¹⁰⁸ In *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein elaborates:

The market crash of 1929 had created an overwhelming consensus that laissez-faire had failed and that governments needed to intervene in the economy to redistribute wealth and regulate corporations. During those dark days for laissez-faire [...] Communism conquered the East, the welfare state was embraced by the West and economic nationalism took root in the postcolonial South. (21)

In the Black Belt South of the 1940s, racist Jim Crow laws meant these economic policies emphasizing domestic control of the economy, labor, and capital did not bode well for Black Americans.

underlying threat becomes clearer: religious freedom or independent thought are not viable options in America; to stand any chance at all, Black audiences and listeners must know their place as modern-day slaves. In this play the power structures are so repressive there is no room for resistance.

This concept is further explored throughout Scene 3. Initially, the mother calls out, 'You gotta take me to Gloria's house' (124). This line further establishes a link between *Election* and *Jack Pot*, since, in *Jack Pot*, Sister's given name is eventually revealed as Gloria. Despite their distinct representations of time and place, seeing that both plays were performed together in 1996, this simple repetition of a name provides another clue for audiences to draw connections between the plays' messages. Directly after Mother makes her request to visit Gloria, Kate Smith, a 1940s singer and star of radio, addresses Mother through her broadcast. Smith lectures, 'Now listen, you're a citizen. A modern American woman. Don't let anyone hold you back. The old nigger slaves. Your uneducated insensitive husband. Not even your children' (125). Buried within supposed individual praise, insults regarding both her ancestry and family attempt to condition Mother to submit to white power structures. As the radio attempts to break up her family unit and sense of community, though, symbolic actions are depicted on stage to present the reality of white supremacy. Among the election machines, '*Klansmen duck out of sight behind the machines. They have a black man in a Union uniform, with a noose around his neck, torturing him as they move*' (125). In his *New York Times* review, Gelder notes that throughout the play 'A dead hand is laid over black hopes by lynchings, the Klan and other white bigots and politicians' (1). I find Gelder's wording here crucial in understanding *Election's* significance as revolutionary theatre. The play is unyielding to audiences in its presentation of America's threat of death; in effect, this emblematic representation of a union worker's lynching serves to advance Baraka's message. Though, to conceal the horror witnessed on stage, Smith and the radio continue to sell the great American myth. Once again addressing Mother, Smith seeks to placate her: 'Now you know America is a greaat country. You know that. And you're . . . well, an American. . . . Equal opportunity' (126).

In the following scene, the radio attempts to pacify Father as well. In this short vignette, baseball, America's so-called 'Favorite Pastime,' is targeted as a further distraction to keep listeners' minds off the real threat posed by American Capitalism. The radio sports announcer tells Father, 'You can be all everybody wants if you give up what you is and be what you ain't' (127). In an essay from 1998, titled 'The Lone Stranger or White Supremacy Strikes Again!', Baraka elaborates on this concept of America forcing outsiders to assimilate: 'The immigrants' torture is that they had to hide and they could only cease being aliens as they amassed green cards. Apparently millions of them with pictures of American slave holders and war mongers. Who they now could salute, as a pledge of allegiance to death' (*Razor* 220). As Baraka makes clear, Father

and the immigrants among him become vacuous zombies as victims in the supposed land of the free. To simply walk among the elite, Father, essentially a slave and immigrant in his own right, must metaphorically kill his sense of self and vow loyalty to the Capitalist regime, with little hope of reaping any of its benefits. As a major theme of the play, both Father and Grandfather/Watchman are mollified or victimized by the mainstream, while they blindly suffer as insignificant casualties of a racist America's growing economic strength.

Scene 5 presents a flashback to the 1930s, in which the Grandfather/ Watchman loses his business at the hands of a white merchant: 'Now you know you taking business I should have. My papa was your goddam overseer! No, sir. Either you gonna work for me or your luck's gonna change' (128). While the American depression of the 1930s was a difficult time for all, plays such as Ward's *Fog* and Baraka's *Election* dramatize the altogether unique and oppressive hardships felt by black Americans during this time. The repressive and dominating Jim Crow South, with its sentiments bleeding northward, left little opportunity for Blacks as the nation struggled to find its economic footing. As the merchant explains, Blacks were denied self-determination and ownership, as a slave mentality continued to rule. As an additional example of this system of oppression, within Scene 6, a banker lectures Grandfather/Watchman regarding black America's inability to thrive amid American Capitalism:

You can't run a business and be friends with colored people. That's why you people fail in business, too soft. Don't know how to crack the whip. You can't be rich unless you can get high off it. Unless you can pray to it. Worship it. Money is Heaven and God and whiskey and women! And the colored don't understand. But wait a few years. A few will. Just wait. I predict that. (129)

At this stage, Grandfather/Watchman remains defenseless as he holds no real power to combat the racist Capitalist regime. Also, with these last few statements, Baraka has the Banker allude to the Spike Lees of the world, who find the path to money in America by shaking hands with the dictatorial mainstream; in Baraka's judgment, these are the Black Capitalists, the 'Dans' from Ward's *Fog*, who allow themselves to be manipulated and controlled by the majority as they covetously pursue personal economic achievement. Despite the banker's lecture, however, Grandfather/Watchmen looks to the Black community for strength and proposes a necessary alternative: 'So we must be able to go to the ballot box. We must support each other. We must support colored business and the colored church. We must get in politics and join together and finally take office. Join together so the whole race can go forward' (130). At its essence, Grandfather/Watchmen proposes unity and struggle, a common and consistent phrase employed

by Baraka as he continued to navigate the twists and turns of his own shifting ideologies¹⁰⁹. However, just as Mother and Father advance to join Grandfather/Watchman in unified defiance, Baraka repeats his warnings to his theatre audience. Symbolizing the American Democrats, as their symbol of hard work and struggle, and thereby the rising threat of New Deal politics, a 'NEGRO DONKEY/*Dog* enters' to antagonize the family (135). As the stage directions detail, drawing further parallels with both *Jack Pot* and *Fog*, the donkey/dog stands as the enemy and a metaphor for the threat posed by mainstream American politics: 'Now the Negro Donkey "hee haws" in a violent way. Twisting his head, terrorizing GRANDMOTHER and WATCHMAN, like he will bite them or trample them. His "hee haws" change easily into a police car's "hee haw hee haw hee haw" of sirens' (131). The Donkey represents a warning that the black American public should not be taken in by Democratic Party promises. Once again recalling *Fog*, Baraka's siren awakens the audience to the threat of America, as the Donkey/Dog, also reminiscent of the bloodthirsty dogs from *Jack Pot*, threatens violence.

With the threat of violence steadily rising, the play suddenly takes a turn for the worse. In a ritual mock lynching, Grandfather/Watchman is slowly hoisted up a 'light pole' with a noose around his neck as both the donkey/dog and banker salute (131). Rather than mirror his drama of the past, and depict triumphant civil disobedience through successful self-defense, Baraka focuses on America's prevailing threat towards the proletariat. Baraka relentlessly stages such threats, witnessed throughout these vignettes, to continually provoke audiences. For refusing to simply accept his token position as night watchman of the election machine warehouse, the Grandfather/Watchmen pays the price, and is attacked. The attack takes its toll, for the next time the audience sees him, Grandfather/Watchman is confined to a wheelchair (133). With Grandfather/Watchman out of the way, Father is now offered a job with the United States Post Office¹¹⁰. By blindly and graciously accepting his own token position, Father succumbs to the baseball announcer's previous invitation to acknowledge his status as a modern-day slave and align himself with the enemy; the father becomes complicit with the white power elite. Given his previous theatrical representation of a United States Postal Worker—Boogie, the Postman and murderous henchman for the American bourgeoisie from *Song*—it seems clear that Baraka's use of this position in *Election* should also symbolize a threat to Father, his family, and the audience. By

¹⁰⁹ In the 1970s, as Chairman for The Congress of African People, Baraka titled their independent publication and political organ *Unity and Struggle* (Komozi Woodard Amiri Baraka papers). And, it is a phrase Baraka continued to employ throughout his life. In addition to the publication, at public book signings, Baraka was known to write 'Unity and Struggle' before signing his name below the poignant call-to-arms. In fact, at the Baltimore Book Festival, held 26 September 2009, Baraka signed several of his books from my personal collection in the same manner.

¹¹⁰ As an autobiographical memory, the dramatic episodes within *Election* detail actual events from Baraka's childhood. In his *Autobiography*, Baraka remembers, 'From Barclay Street, a "luxury" project we had to move out of, \$24 a month was too much even though my ol' man had just got a good job at the Post Office. But he couldn't cut those prices, so we had to space' (2). The prevalent irony within Baraka's prose here should not go unnoticed; his father's so-called 'good job' could not pay for the oxymoronic 'luxury project.'

depicting the dialectic between Father and Grandfather/Watchman, Baraka poses the problem of complicity and corruption for Blacks who join the American workforce.

As the play nears its close, the radio broadcasts a new warning signal clearly linked with another of Baraka's Marxist plays: '*Suddenly we hear the music of the Lone Ranger and horses rushing off into the distance. The three radio characters laugh and shout profanity at the family from all sides of the stage*' (136). Unlike Donna and Reg from *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?*, however, Father does not resist, and remains seduced by his new job and the Capitalist mainstream. In fact, despite the ominous threat presented by both the Lone Ranger metaphor and the radio's maniacal laughter, Father gleefully brings gifts from the Post Office, and eagerly shares them with his family. The Boy receives a subway token and an apple; the tainted fruit is no different than one of Lula's apples from *Dutchman*—a poisoned symbol meant to lure its victim towards complacency and compliance. In effect, the token carries the same message, inviting the Boy to join his father in complicity. Next, the young Girl receives a little Black doll brandishing a knife. Symbolizing the media's distorted depictions of Blacks, the insulting doll literally cuts deep as the knife wounds each member of the immediate family. Mother receives a photograph of her children posed in space suits with Kate Smith. The image serves as another symbol of the mainstream media's ability to usurp control; as Mother declares, 'It looks like Kate Smith is their mother or something' (138). Finally, Father receives a button labeling him as 'Deacon' (139). Once again, Father gladly accepts this token as a newly ordained convert and slave to American Capitalism: He announces, 'But my new job is my real present. The Post Office!' (139). As the lights fade, the radio announcer presents the stations call letters, 'W.H.Y.,' and then, right before blackout, the audience hears their final warning as '*the faint horrible laughter of the radio trio, quickly and deadly*' (139).

The vast majority of the threats depicted in *Election* come quickly, presenting overt deadly messages, and purposefully so. Baraka's memories of his family's struggle serve as strategic warnings to contemporary audiences. All three plays presented for the Nuyorican Café are examples of works which pose the problem of resistance for Blacks in America. Regarding these specific productions from 1996, Gelder acknowledges, 'Good casts make these plays flash with bitterness, rage, puzzlement, disdain, love, history, satire, poetry, humor, hope and sadness. Minor works on a major subject, they nonetheless reward attention, and they constitute a welcome update on Mr. Baraka' (1). It is striking that Baraka's political message seems lost on Gelder. It is much more important to note the ideological shift that Baraka has undergone in this play: He is carefully weighing up the complexities of resistance and complicity.

*General Hag's Skeezag*¹¹¹

Like Gelder, the reviewer for the *New York Amsterdam News* offers both praise and criticism for Baraka's Nuyorican trio. In an article titled "'General Hag's Skeezag," Baraka at his best,' published on 26 October 1996, an anonymous critic opines:

"The Election Machine Warehouse" is ambitious but in need of tightening, pacing, and more energy. "Jack Pot Melting" could be left out altogether. Of the three, "General Hag's Skeezag" is clearly the monster piece. The acting is brisk and motivated, the script crackles with wit, sarcasm and astute, if cynical, observation .[...] Published but never mounted, it's one of Baraka's best plays. It's definitive Baraka and I'm glad Nuyorican has mounted it. ("General Hag's Skeezag," Baraka at his best')

Though choice is limited, as very little is written about these three plays and their shared production, I choose to open with this review, not for its seeming disregard of *Jack Pot* and *Election*,—for it is my hope that my analyses of these works provide their validation—but, rather, to highlight *General Hag* as another of Baraka's major dramatic works worthy of consideration.

Much like *Jack Pot* and *Election*, *General Hag* first and foremost sets out to warn Black audiences about the deadly threat of American Capitalism. Though the three plays share a similar theme, unlike the others, *General Hag* also tackles the American drug trade as a metaphor for corruption and the bourgeoisies' immeasurable hunger for control and capital. When analyzing the play, then, it bears repeating that Baraka's son fell victim to the drug trade as he was tragically shot in the head by an alleged dealer in 1992, the very same year *General Hag* was first published. As the play opens, Charles Blank, a 'rival' would-be Black Capitalist, is seemingly engaged in robbing Samuel Burgess, a middle-aged white proprietor of a religious book and merchandise shop (183). Gelder notes, 'What seems at first to be a clash between Evil and Good turns into an accounting of joint responsibility for ages of sin against blacks' (1). However, Joe Seth, significantly listed in the play's character descriptions as a 'young black messenger,' serves as the play's protagonist. Joe, as the messenger and linchpin principally responsible for revealing Baraka's critique of the American drug trade as a metaphor for American Capitalism, comes to the shop, and ostensibly disrupts the robbery. While the plot unfolds, Charles and Burgess reveal their twisted bond as Joe attempts to break free. Near the end, General Hag enters the shop to secure a fix as an innocent Black family happens upon the danger. As the principal Black characters of the play, both representing distinct ideologies and positions within American society, Charles and Joe mirror Dan and Les from Ward's *Big White Fog*. Ward's Dan becomes Baraka's Charles, the elite Black Capitalist, hungry for money and power reserved for and controlled by the white right;

¹¹¹ In the context of the play 'skeezag' is slang for drugs and/or heroin: '[I]t looks like some skeezag to me . . . ' (Baraka, *General Hag* 209).

Charles has been whitewashed, and sucked in by the intoxication of the bourgeois, though will never truly be welcomed by the elite. Les from *Fog*, who eventually sees Communism as the correct path towards productive unity and struggle, is represented by *General Hag's* Joe, who, in the end, finds strength in the communal unity of family—another common theme found among Baraka's later drama. Essentially, *General Hag* lays out the layers of power within the sale and distribution of drugs to present another unique death threat imposed by America. As Baraka puts it, America has never truly achieved democracy, as it has always, since its birth as an independent nation, been controlled by money and not the people. Above all, Malcolm's mantra regarding the hypocrisy of America's so-called democracy is illuminated within this play from the 1996 trio.

General Hag directly links its title character with a key symbol of American Imperialism. Indeed, a telling addendum to the published play notes, 'It may be helpful—though it is not essential—to recall that a General Alexander Haig was prominent in national affairs during the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan' (181). Alexander M. Haig, Jr. served as White House Chief of Staff for Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, as well as United States Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan¹¹². The titular General Hag represents a satirical caricature of the real life Haig, and, by extension, the American Imperialist military more generally. Once again, as part of his 1996 trio presented for the Nuyorican Poets Café, Baraka tackles an altogether unique time and place with this particular play. Given Haig's connections to Reagan, *General Hag* seems to situate itself within Washington during the time of Reagan's presidency¹¹³, most probably somewhere within the early to late 80s¹¹⁴. In the published play's character descriptions, General Hag is listed as 'a general who at one time was Secretary of State' (183). Though, given Haig's long reign and continued position of power within American politics, as well as his connection to Reagan's Vice-President, future President from 1989-1993, George H.W. Bush,

¹¹² For a detailed look at these Presidents and their politics, see Woodard, Bob. *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1999.

¹¹³ Ronald Reagan served as United States President from 1981-1989, reigning in the era of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Together, Thatcher and Reagan advanced conservative politics to promote monetary growth, often polarizing their respective nations. In a section of her introduction to *The Shock Doctrine* subtitled 'The Big Lie,' Klein addresses the sugarcoated myth surrounding Reagan and Thatcher's so-called achievements: 'According to this official story, after Reagan and Thatcher peacefully and democratically liberated their respective markets, the freedom and prosperity that followed were so obviously desirable that when dictatorships started falling, from Manila to Berlin, the masses demanded Reaganomics alongside their Big Macs' (22). For progressive activists such as Klein and Baraka, the controversies sparked by Reagan/Thatcher leadership are often paralleled with the Bush and Blair debacles surrounding the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Addressing the Iraq War as another political means to accumulate wealth, Klein also reports, 'The Bush administration immediately seized upon the fear generated by the [September 11, 2001] attacks not only to launch the "War on Terror" but to ensure that it is an almost completely for-profit venture, a booming new industry that has breathed new life into the faltering U.S. economy' (14).

¹¹⁴ It may be helpful to note that Reagan strengthened the Nixon coined 'War on Drugs' during the 1980s by enforcing mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders, thereby expanding the United States inmate population, or prison-industrial complex. It goes without saying that these laws more or less targeted Blacks, and had the greatest impact on poor urban communities and inner-cities within America.

the 1996 staging of *General Hag* also suggests a powerful indictment of the failures of the American government¹¹⁵.

From the beginning, *General Hag* recalls themes from *Junkies Are Full of (SHHH...)* as another of Baraka's anti-drug plays. Indeed, the opening line of *General Hag*, 'Big-time as life is, All you big-time reachers reaching' calls to mind the character of Bigtime, the assimilationist, Black drug addict from *Junkies* (Baraka, *General Hag* 184). While Joe first sings these words as he makes his way towards Burgess' shop, the play eventually reveals Charles as the 'big-time reacher,' serving as Baraka's critique on both assimilationists and Black Capitalists. The setting also foreshadows the play's ultimate critique on American government and politics. Stage directions set the play in 'a black community in some large city, a city where in the distance we might see shadows that imply some familiar governmental structures. Perhaps the shadow of the Washington Monument or the Capitol' (184). Essentially, the play consists of a series of symbols that, when put together, paint Baraka's picture of America as deadly and dangerous.

As Joe reaches the shop, he proceeds to bang on the door to be let in, unaware of the potential danger lurking within. Suddenly, Burgess opens the door, and is quickly revealed as another of Baraka's symbols. Burgess mirrors American Imperialism, as he symbolizes American foreign policy by seeking ownership outside of his own domain and culture. Dressed in a leopard-skin cloth African dashiki and labeled as 'Brother Burgess' on the store's sign, the white shop owner claims control over a distinct African heritage (184). Much like the radio and televisions from *Jack Pot* and *Election*, Burgess signifies the American Capitalist oppressor, with a propensity to usurp, manipulate and control. And, though he initially hides behind a myth of kindness, seemingly attempting to protect Joe, by the end his appetite for absolute power through capital is revealed. Addressing this contention between perceived intentions in his critique of American democracy, Blum argues, 'Washington's ambition for world domination is driven not by the cause of a deeper democracy or freedom, a more just world, ending poverty or violence, or a more liveable [sic] planet, but rather by economics and ideology' (5). At its core, *General Hag* lifts the veil of this American myth to reveal a similar conclusion to American audiences. Despite Burgess' halfhearted effort to keep him out, then, Joe is finally invited in by a mysterious stranger. Charles, described as 'a slender, tall black man in a blue business suit, impeccably tailored,' appears from the shadows with gun in hand (185). The suit represents the character's desperate attempt to join the power elite; if he looks the part, he will soon play the part. He proudly broadcasts his name—like a

¹¹⁵ Though it may have been impossible to predict in 1996, just five years later Washington would more openly air its dirty laundry regarding monopoly politics, as Whitehouse linens were replaced by incestuous sheets. In 2001, Bush's son, George W. Bush defeated incumbent Vice-President Al Gore by the narrowest of margins to become the 43rd President of the United States. The contentious decision remains marred in controversy as recounts of voting ballots in Florida were halted to award Bush the victory. John Ellis 'Jeb' Bush, the brother of the newly ordained President-elect, served as Governor of Florida at the time.

commercial—and demands money to partner with the bourgeoisie. During his initial encounter with Joe, Charles continues to self-aggrandize; when Joe expresses his love of books, Charles snaps, ‘You don’t seem bookish to me’ (186). Joe questions, ‘How do bookish people seem?’ and Charles responds, ‘Like myself’ (186). Charles accepts the mainstream notion of style over substance and further reveals himself as a petty assimilationist. Nevertheless, despite his posturing,—‘I’ll be a member of this gang yet. I want to enter those hallowed halls being saluted by music’ (190)—Charles eventually acknowledges and succumbs to Burgess’ absolute control: ‘The fat white man there is trying to keep me out of the power elite. He rules and I rule, but he has money and I do not. Give me money and this confrontation will cease’ (194). Like Dan in *Fog*, Charles may rule as an individual achiever within his own community, though he clings to the hope of achieving actual power among the American mainstream. Throughout the play, Baraka wages his own confrontation with audiences, as he shakes them from complacency by continuously presenting these diverse sides of American Capitalist corruption.

As Burgess and Charles continue to converse, they begin to compare their Capitalist conquests. Recalling the American holocaust of slavery’s middle passage, Burgess declares, ‘Remember the hold of the ship in the dark when you were inside chained and stinking? I owned the ship’ (194). Charles fires back, ‘So you don’t remember how I caught the niggers and sold them to you?’ (194). Here again, Baraka reaches back to draw connections between the past and what he considers a modern-day American slavery, where the proletariat are dominated by the real owners of the means to production. In addition, within this line of dialogue, Baraka continues to critique wannabe Black Capitalists who willingly participate as members in the Capitalist regime only to serve the owners and their agenda. In an essay from 1999, Baraka reaffirms, ‘And this remains the key contradiction between the revolutionary wing of Black artists and the retrograde trend. The retros, the buppies, neo cons, displayers of extreme negrossity cannot, will not, understand that we are not attachments to imperialism’s fingers’ (*Razor* 246). Essentially, Charles holds no real power and, as a result, turns his attention to Joe in order to project some semblance of authority. Up until this point, Joe has more or less observed the action; though, as messenger, his dual role as the observer spurs this action. Charles and Burgess’ conversations, as well as their underlying connection, are revealed to Baraka’s audience as a result of Joe’s presence in the shop. In the review from the *New York Amsterdam News* Joe is described as ‘a Black man who’s just trying to get by, past not one but two monsters’ (“General Hag’s Skeezag,” Baraka at his best’). Indeed, as the tension rises, the ‘monsters’ raise the stakes, thereby presenting the death threat imposed by a hierarchical American Capitalism. Charles turns on Joe and warns, ‘Maybe I’ll kill you. Not just rob you, but kill you’ (195). This threat of death reaches the audience as well, as Baraka drives home his message. Charles continues, ‘I have an ancient history of murder and madness too’ while Burgess supersedes, ‘I have an ancient glorious history of murder and madness’ (195).

Refusing to be outdone by his underling, Burgess reclaims his status and begins to exercise his absolute power.

Finally, Burgess grows tired of his back and forth dealings with Charles, and decides to pay him off. Burgess brandishes his wallet and proceeds to offer Charles three or four hundred dollars. The gesture stands as Baraka's statement on tokenism, or America's attempt to mollify its minions and subjects in symbolic effort alone. Despite Burgess' endless wealth¹¹⁶, however, the token seems to appease Charles with regard to his dealings with Burgess; nevertheless, Charles continues to harass Joe and begins to question Joe's relationship and duty to Burgess. At this point, the pecking order of the drug game—the very same game that led to Baraka's son receiving a bullet to the head—is detailed for the audience. Burgess, who sits at the top of America's power elite, controls both Charles, the aspiring assimilationist drug-pusher hooked by an inaccessible American dream, and Joe, the innocent but complacent messenger, who is exploited and used to deliver dope to the white upper-class. At this stage Joe is as lost as the character of Les in the early Acts of *Fog*; before finding salvation through Communism, Les is seduced to work for Dan, who selfishly offers the position to advance his own personal gain. To escape Burgess' and Charles' system of oppression, Joe must also seek unity beyond the mainstream. Addressing Charles, Burgess announces, 'I give away real dope. At least to the people I deal with. I would sell it to you. In fact, I sell it to you now, don't I? No, to somebody else, who sells it to you' (199). In the drug world, Burgess is the kingpin, responsible for distributing the dope as a means of controlling both capital and the masses. The drugs and money trickle down and eventually reach Charles, who peddles product to Black communities. Though disillusioned, Charles asserts, 'The dope becomes clean and black and has a different function. It is magical, black dope. It fills you full of grand vision and asymmetries' (200). In truth, under Burgess' dictatorship, no one is safe: the United States government, the white upper-class elite, the petite bourgeoisie, the working-class, and the under-classes are all targets to be regulated by the allocation and sale of Burgess' pure white powder.

On this particular night within the play, Joe is to deliver two pounds of product to General Al Hag, who Joe refers to as 'the Secretary of Snakes of the United States of America' (204). While Burgess labels Hag as 'small potatoes,' and gloats that on weekends he ships dope to 'actors and their wives,' the shop owner's haunting conceit regarding his purpose in keeping Hag, and all the others, high presents America's ultimate threat to Baraka's audience:

The shit flowing warmly, warmly. Carrying the info inside him, you see, up into the cortex, into the brain pan, into the idea box, the shit flows, so that when Al opens his trap, yours truly comes out. Funny thing, like when he calls up and talks to me on the phone it's like me listening to myself. Very amusing. But the shit flows warmly up into the mouth box,

¹¹⁶ Within the play, Burgess admits his wallet holds 'thousands, maybe even millions' (198).

the tongue room, the image maker. It's my shit, my words flowing. Like I'm in charge here or Bomb the Iraqi reactor, destroy Lebanon, great. I watch TV and laugh at myself. It's great. Best show on TV. (201)

Shortly after Burgess delivers his ominous justification for overseeing the mass distribution of heroin, a Black family approaches the shop and enters to ask for directions. The Swing family, consisting of Fred, the father, Harriet, the mother, and Mal, their son, represent a strong united family and reestablish *Song's* message concerning the power of family unity to combat American Capitalism. In the end, it is this concept of family which ultimately frees Joe from his bondage of servitude within the drug trade. After hearing their surname, Joe pronounces, 'Really, that's a coincidence, ain't it. I got people in my family, somewhere named Swings' (203). Here, Baraka once again dramatizes a relation between Black family and community.

Suddenly, General Hag bursts into the shop, both demanding and proceeding to get high. In scathing satire, Hag is written as over the top, scrounging for the shoe box of heroin decorated in America's red, white, and blue. In his review of the Nuyorican production, Gelder details, 'The props include a shoe box filled with heroin and painted with the Stars and Stripes. The general of the title is the buyer and the user' (1). Despite Hag's exaggerated antics, with the guiltless family as witness, a '*sense of danger*' rises (206). As Hag sinks deeper and deeper into his addiction, Harriet exposes her fear: 'There's no chance they won't let us out of here, is it?' (208). Of course, her dread is justified as Burgess once again reveals the threat of death. He orders, 'Joe, don't let those people get outa here. Mr. Blank, will you help restrain everyone?' (209). The threat is finally shattered as Joe disregards Burgess' demands and embraces his communal bond within the family: 'No, nobody getting' in their way. Them *my* relatives. Nobody getting' in their way' (209). United, Joe, Frank, Harriet, and Mal exit the shop, and in so doing, leave behind the system of oppression dictated by the fat white man deceitfully cloaked in African ancestry. In the play's last moments, Joe both confirms and embraces his role as messenger, while referencing Baraka's chosen weapon in the struggle for liberation. How is the message spread? Through writing, of course. As they exit the shop, Joe declares, 'I always wanted to be a writer. I always did' (210). The son, as a symbol of hope through family unity, replies, 'Well, right on!' (210). Given Joe's desire and declaration to write on, the dual meaning embedded within the son's last message is hard to miss. Though *General Hag* echoes the themes of *Jack Pot* and *Election*, and, through its use of symbolism, certainly presents audiences with a threat and warning of American Capitalism, its unique ending presents a rare onstage acknowledgment of Baraka's need to express a revolutionary model through dramatic writing.

Though Baraka continued to write drama, it may seem curious why so few choose to engage with his later or recent theatrical work. As I have tried to reveal through the detailed

analyses included within this chapter, Baraka's drama of the 1990s does undergo another shift, and yet most academics and theatre practitioners alike have neglected to address the later work. Of course, following the fall of European Communism in 1989, Marxist art became even more marginalized and Baraka's artistic position became more questionable. One of the difficulties in assessing this drama is that it is hard to see what political alternative Baraka is posing. It is possible that the plays have not been staged more often because they are not positive enough and they lack strong Black role models. It is also more difficult to determine what political changes Baraka thinks are possible to affect with these plays of the 1990s. These may be the reasons most producers do not find productions of these plays appealing; his attitude towards mainstream arts has even ostracized him from mainstream Black producers.

Afterword

Unless black unity is based on struggle, and revolutionary principles, then it cannot really unite the majority of the Afro-American people because it will not serve their needs.

(Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins* 288)

Since 2000, Baraka's position as a marginalized dramatist remains unchanged. His early works, such as *Dutchman*¹¹⁷, are still performed, but his more recent plays remain overlooked. My experiences in even trying to establish recent works Baraka has written for the stage have been frustrating. In public forums he seemed, to me at least, to be deliberately evasive. Though, up until his recent death on 9 January 2014, as he did with me in Sacramento in 2011, Baraka continued to endorse his recently finished play about DuBois, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, yet to be staged for an audience. During a recent interview with Sala Udin in 2011, Baraka summarized:

That's what the FBI called DuBois. But that man was 82 years old and had a cane. In the play he explains what they have done to him when they indicted him as an agent of a foreign power for talking about peace and condemning the hydrogen and atom bombs. They indicted him as an agent of a foreign power at 82 years old. He explained that once that had happened, publishers that sought his writing no longer did. (Baraka and Udin 12)

Nearly reaching his 80th birthday, having faced similar condemnation and marginalization, Baraka could relate to DuBois' story. It seems Baraka's most recent theatrical representation of death is to be his own, both literally, post his death, and metaphorically; as with DuBois before him, Baraka is silenced by the mainstream commercial arts machine he fought against since the 1960s. In this way, based on Baraka's brief description, *The Most Dangerous Man in America* most likely parallels Baraka's own controversial trajectory: 'If you do something that the powers don't like, they make you invisible' (Baraka and Udin 12). Still, Baraka cannot claim innocence, as he always proudly wrote himself out of Broadway or even off Broadway. In the early part of his career as a playwright, Baraka advocated killing as a means to destroy the opposition to Black liberation. More recently, however, he moved from dramatizing an attainable utopia to a more dystopian outlook.

Beginning with *Dutchman*, Baraka began to present representations of murder, killing, and death on the American stage to politicize viewers and expose truths surrounding racism and Black

¹¹⁷ By far, *Dutchman* remains Baraka's most frequently produced play. 43 years after its debut, in 2007, *Dutchman* received a revival at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York—the very same theatre where *Dutchman* first premiered (Bellafante E5). In 2013, visual artist Rashid Johnson attempted to recreate the tensions and discomfort *Dutchman* can elicit by staging the play in the sweltering Russian and Turkish Baths on 10th Street in the East Village of New York City (Kennedy C25).

oppression. As he embraced Nationalism as a militant activist, though, and continued to break from mainstream American theatre with representations of justifiable homicide against whites, his plays were either hailed as innovative and influential or targeted as hateful propaganda. Baraka admits, 'Art in an abstract setting is one thing, but art where you're actually telling people to do things becomes dangerous' (Baraka and Udin 6). What is uncomfortable for theatre producers and audiences beyond his assault on whites is that, from the start, his drama harshly attacks the Black middle class and is scathing about their complicity in the economic policies of America. In her *New York Times* review of the 2007 revival at the Cherry Lane Theatre, Ginia Bellafante opines, 'The white person who goes to see [*Dutchman*] leaves feeling like a viper sent off to repent; the middle class African-American is meant to go home regarding any embrace of prosperity as weak, self-negating and lethal, both politically and spiritually' (Bellafante E5). Still, despite valid criticisms, Baraka's 1960s drama sought to legitimize Black rage as a force to overturn the tide of white supremacy in America. In her book, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, published in 1995, bell hooks discusses the mentality Baraka fought against:

Most black folks believe that if they do not conform to white-determined standards of acceptable behavior they will not survive. We live in a society where we hear about white folks killing black people to express their rage [...] White rage is acceptable, can be both expressed and condoned, but black rage has no place and everyone knows it. (15)

By staging a deadly apocalyptic race war in *The Slave*, along with a slave uprising responsible for the death of a white God in *Slave Ship*, Baraka provoked Black audiences to both question their complacency and struggle for change. In essence, his early plays echo the fury of Malcolm X and offer an alternative to peaceful protest. In addressing this possibility, hooks agrees:

I understand rage to be a necessary aspect of resistance struggle. Rage can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action. By demanding that black people repress and annihilate our rage to assimilate, to reap the benefits of material privilege in white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture, white folks urge us to remain complicit with their efforts to colonize, oppress, and exploit. (hooks 16)

Still, for both depicting and condoning such rage, the majority of his work written in this era remains too radical for the conservatism of the American arts scene. In the same interview from 2011, for example, Baraka provides a reasonable answer as to why the majority of his dramatic works remain critically and commercially marginalized: 'Why should I have a play on Broadway? I mean you think that people want somebody to come up to them and say, "You need to die," and then they say, "Let's put this on Broadway." It's a choice you have to make, it's a choice you make and you have to live with it' (Baraka and Udin 13).

Since his start as a playwright, Baraka's choice had always been to fight the ideological myth that the American Dream pertains to Blacks. Though, as he embraced new political ideologies, the focus of his dramatic message shifted as well. With his denunciation of Nationalism and subsequent conversion to Marxism in 1974, Baraka began to dramatize Capitalism as the new enemy in the fight for Black self-determination and liberation. Throughout his Marxist drama, which he continued to write up until his death, Baraka challenges audiences and the myth—'that the triumph of deregulated capitalism has been born of freedom, that unfettered free markets go hand in hand with democracy' (Klein 22). *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* presents the destruction of Capitalism by armed unity and struggle, while *Song* depicts a similar message through the redemptive power of love and family. These themes of unity, struggle, and family also bond Baraka's drama of the 1990s; however, these works serve as bleak visions for black Americans and, if staged today, would fervently stand in opposition to America's current supposedly post-racial climate. *Jackpot Melting: A Commercial, The Election Machine Warehouse*, and *General Hag's Skeezag* present aspects of family, but all representations disregard today's concept of colorblindness¹¹⁸, and serve to warn Blacks against the threat of American Capitalism. Addressing a black American public astutely aware that they have crossed a major threshold by electing Barack Obama as their first Black President, Baraka states, 'You got a whole wave of people who are influenced by this post-struggle art. People who believe that simply to write a poem about themselves or their family is sufficient. That's not what it is' (Baraka and Udin 7). Though his later drama, beginning with *Song*, presents strength in family unity, in the '90s his message shifts to expose problems with complicity and resistance. As a result, Baraka's anti-Capitalist drama of the '90s remains piercingly dystopian.

With the dawn of a new millennium, Baraka continued to push boundaries with his art; only this time, he pushed too far. Tragedy struck American soil on 11 September 2001 as planes crashed through the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and into the U.S. Pentagon. As a result of his artistic response, which remains in print¹¹⁹, Baraka received one of the most controversial backlashes of his career. Serving as the honored Poet Laureate of New Jersey at the time, Baraka penned a poem entitled 'Somebody Blew Up America' to question who was responsible for and knew about the planned attacks. For suggesting that Israelis knew¹²⁰, Baraka

¹¹⁸ 'Claiming colorblindness is absurd in a society highly structured around racial inequality, where admitting consciousness of race is mistaken for evidence of one's racially prejudiced views' (Greenfield and Rowan 4).

¹¹⁹ See Baraka's *Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems*.

¹²⁰ All of the controversy surrounds just a few key lines in the rather lengthy poem:

Who know why Five Israelis was filming the explosion
And cracking they sides at the notion (Baraka, *Somebody Blew Up America* 46)

And:

Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get
bombed
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers

was promptly confronted by New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey and asked to give up his title. In 2007, Baraka explained:

When my poem *SOMEBODY BLEW UP AMERICA* was written a month after 9/11, I was trying to sum up all the people throughout the world who had suffered some form of terrorism or another. The poem was sent around the world with positive feedback. It was not until my reading at the Dodge Poetry Festival that Gov. McGreevey's office called me to apologize & resign. (*Razor* 361)

The verdict was in; of all people, Baraka should have understood racial and ethnic sensitivities. This poem seemed to suggest, more so than his drama, that at times Baraka positively courts controversy, however negative. Still, though Jewish communities were outraged, Baraka emphatically defended his artistic license and reminded anyone who would listen that the poem was, first and foremost, an attack on the American political machine's ultimate culpability. Unquestionably, others, such as award-winning journalist Naomi Klein, have attacked America for its actions surrounding 9/11:

When the September 11 attacks hit, the [...] Bush team seized the moment of collective vertigo with chilling speed—not, as some have claimed, because the administration deviously plotted the crisis but because the key figures of the administration, veterans of earlier disaster capitalism experiments in Latin American and Eastern Europe, were part of a movement that prays for crisis the way drought-struck farmers pray for rain, and the way Christian-Zionist end-timers pray for the Rapture. When the long-awaited disaster strikes, they know instantly that their moment has come at last. (Klein 14)

The quizzical nature of the poem does suggest a line of inquiry which aligns with Klein's (also controversial) point of view. In an essay entitled 'Culture, Language, Media, Meaning,' written in 2006, Baraka confirms this line of inquiry and a shared contempt for Bush: 'Can anyone speak of Terror without acknowledging the terror of the Slave Trade or Colonial rule? This is what my poem "Somebody Blew Up America" was about. Yet after the initial terror of the attacks (by whom is the question I still ask), nothing was as abusive and infuriating as to hear Bush [...] speak of terrorism' (*Razor* 299). Regardless of his explanations, in 2003, Baraka was eventually stripped of his title, as the Supreme Court decided to remove the position of Poet Laureate from the state of New Jersey as a result of the controversy. The stigma continues to haunt Baraka's legacy today and irrevocably affects his plays' chances of production. Still, Baraka is not alone in his criticism of American

to stay home that day
Why did Sharon stay away? (49)

Capitalism and Imperialism. Perceived anti-Semitism aside¹²¹, Klein, Blum, Chomsky and others are very forthright about their criticism and all are recognized in major publications for spreading much the same message as Baraka. None of these critics of American Capitalism are Black, nor do they write drama. Though it certainly does not absolve him of criticism, it seems the theatre in America is still controlled by the white elite Baraka had always fought against—and that the same white elite should find his dramas too dangerous.

But, losing the title of Poet Laureate and facing obscurity in American theatre hardly compare to the personal tragedy Baraka and his family faced in August of 2003, the very same year the Supreme Court weighed in on Baraka's right to 'freedom of speech.' Just a little over ten years after the heartbreak of his son's shooting, Baraka's daughter, Shani Baraka, was shot and killed at the age of 31 while visiting her sister's apartment. In an essay from 2005, Baraka references 'our daughter Shani's ghastly murder, from which we will never recover' (*Razor* 273). According to police reports, Shani and her sister, Wanda Pasha, often shared the apartment. Shani and her friend, Rayshon Holmes, were both shot and killed by Wanda's estranged and abusive husband, James Coleman (Hanley B7). The horrifying event recalls Ahi's tragedy with an altogether distinct chill of permanence, forever leaving Baraka with a nightmare of murder and death beyond the stage.

Following the repeated ebb and flow in his career as both a writer and activist, up until his recent death, Baraka devoted the majority of his attention to politics. Specifically, as a real life reflection of his dramatic model regarding strength in family unity, Baraka worked to support his son, Ras Baraka. Currently, his son is campaigning to become the next Mayor of Newark, New Jersey in 2014, having served as a public school principal, former Deputy Mayor, and as a member of City Council. When asked, in 2011, what projects he is currently working on, Baraka replied, 'We're just trying to do things now to support Ras and his struggle because he's the most progressive person on that city council' (Baraka and Udin 13). Despite his ultimate disappointment in Kenneth Gibson, the first Black Mayor of Newark, supporting Ras as a Democratic candidate suggested Baraka's renewed acceptance that political change becomes possible by getting involved with the system in place. In essence, he once again shifted his personal relationship to the political machine. Despite the election of a Black president, Baraka felt there is much work to be done; and his family stand as troops on the front line. Certainly, Obama's election represents a leap forward in American politics; nevertheless, in reference to Obama's election, Baraka confesses:

The problem is that I have to support Obama because I remember the Republicans. I remember Bush, and I see the ones they have lined up over there now. At the same time he has to be criticized [...] Even when he was first elected we sent 10,000 newspapers out

¹²¹ The lines in question can also be read as anti-Zionist.

saying “President Obama, no bailout, nationalize the banks, nationalize the auto company.” I had forums to talk about that. The only way I could justify his actions is that he thought that above all, capitalism—not just petty capitalism, but big time capitalism, monopoly—has to survive for this country to survive. [...] I’ve got to support him to the extent I can, but at the same time I’ve got to criticize him. (Baraka and Udin 9)

Baraka clearly altered his attitude that to be part of mainstream politics is to betray a Marxist cause. He acknowledges, in fact, it is the way to effect change. This creates a radical contradiction between his art and a new commitment to activist politics. What is interesting to note is that despite the artistic stagnancy, Baraka supported his son as a political figure within mainstream politics. Just as it is with Ras, it is the voice of others who ultimately carry Baraka’s legacy forward.

Already, Baraka has influenced a number of noteworthy playwrights. August Wilson, described by Harvey Young in his introduction to the 2013 *Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* as ‘widely considered to be the most influential voice active in the American theatre,’ has often referenced Baraka as a major inspiration (1). For example, when asked to name his influences as a playwright in 1987, Wilson responded, ‘Baraka wrote a book called *Four Revolutionary Plays* which I liked—I liked the language, I liked everything about them. In my early one-acts I tried to imitate that’ (Savran 23). Though he eventually developed his own style in such awarding winning plays as *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*¹²², Wilson’s acknowledgment validates Baraka’s theatre as inspirational. Wilson’s 1996 keynote address, delivered for the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), and later published under the title ‘The Ground on Which I Stand,’ also emulates Baraka¹²³. In an early essay from 1965, titled ‘the legacy of malcolm x, and the coming of the black nation,’ Baraka puts forward, ‘What the Black Man must do now is look down at the ground upon which he stands, and claim it as his own’ (*Home* 272). Clearly, by 1996, Wilson still felt compelled to ‘imitate’ Baraka. Of all of the playwrights influenced by Baraka, then, including Ed Bullins, Marvin X, Rob Penny, and Ntozake Shange¹²⁴, to name just a few, for the heights he reached as a black American playwright, Wilson serves as a choice example when presenting Baraka as a definitive influence on others. Despite the controversy Baraka often invites, his legacy will certainly continue to live on in the work of those inspired by him. Though it is as yet

¹²² Both plays received the Pulitzer Prize: *Fences* in 1987 and *The Piano Lesson* in 1990.

¹²³ Within this speech, Wilson addresses the 1960s’ concept of Black Power, and by association the Black Arts, as a major influence on his life and work: ‘[I]t was the kiln in which I was fired, and has much to do with the person I am today and the ideas and attitudes that I carry as part of my consciousness’ (14).

¹²⁴ In the Introduction to *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*, Branch notes, ‘Bullins [...] found inspiration in the writings of LeRoi Jones and tunred his considerable energies to Black Theater, quickly establishing himself as a force to be reckoned with’ (xxiii). In fact, for all artists within the Black Arts movement, ‘[I]t was LeRoi Jones—by now renamed Amiri Baraka—whose work in this area continued to set the pace’ (Branch xxvii). Penny, a playwright from Pittsburgh, has also claimed Baraka an influence

unclear how his current theatrical work will play out, Baraka still brings political and human rights issues to the fore in America.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Afterword. *Blues for Mr. Charlie: A Play*. By James Baldwin. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.
- Algarín, Miguel. Introduction. *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theater Festival*. Eds. Miguel Algarín and Lois Griffith. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1997. xiv-xvii.
- Amiri Baraka Collection. Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.
- Amiri Baraka Collection of Playscripts, 1964-1986, Sc MG 279, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
- Angelou, Maya. 'Maya Angelou Interviews Amiri Baraka.' *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*. Ed. Charlie Reilly. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 260-266.
- Baldwin, James. *Blues for Mr. Charlie: A Play*. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.
- Baraka, Amiri. *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress*. New York: Morrow, 1972.
- . *A Recent Killing*. *Black Drama: African, African American, and Diaspora 1850 to Present*, courtesy of the Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives held in the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University (<<http://solomon.bladr.alexanderstreet.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philo/naviagate.pl?bladr.22>>).
- . *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*. New York: Freundlich Books, 1984.
- . *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*. 1984. Lawrence Hill Edition. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997.
- . 'Black "Revolutionary" Poets Should Also Be Playwrights.' *Black World* 21.6 (Apr., 1972): 4-6.
- . *Bloodrites*. *Black Drama Anthology*. Eds. Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York: New American Library, Inc., 1971. 25-31.
- . *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. 1963. Payback Press Edition. Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1995.
- . *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984.
- . *The Dead Lecturer: Poems by LeRoi Jones*. New York: Grove Press, 1964.

- . *Dutchman and The Slave: Two plays by LeRoi Jones*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.
- . *The Election Machine Warehouse. Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theater Festival*. Eds. Miguel Algarín and Lois Griffith. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1997. 120-139.
- . *Eulogies*. Agincourt: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- . *General Hag's Skeezag. Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*. Ed. William B. Branch. New York: Mentor, 1992. 181-210.
- . *Home: Social Essays*. 1966. AkashiClassics: Renegade Reprint Series Edition. New York: Akashic Books, 2009.
- . *Jack Pot Melting: A Commercial. Plays in One Act*. Ed. Daniel Halpern. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1991. 64-68.
- . *Junkies are Full of (SHHH...)*. *Black Drama Anthology*. Eds. Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York: New American Library, Inc., 1971. 11-23.
- . *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*. Ed. William J. Harris. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991.
- . *The Motion of History and Other Plays: The Motion of History, Slave Ship, S-1*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1978.
- . *Play On*. Print on Swathmore. 1996. Parchment Gallery Graphics, Department of Humanities, University of Charleston, WV.
- . *Preface. Amiri Baraka & Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters*. Edited by Claudia Moreno Pisano. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. xiii-xxiv.
- . *Preface. Woza Afrika!: An Anthology of South African Plays*. Edited by Duma Ndlovu. New York, George Braziller, 1986. xiii-xvi.
- . *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*. New York: Totem Press, 1961.
- . *Raise Race Rays Raze: Essays Since 1965*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.
- . 'A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion.' *A Raisin in the Sun and The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. By Lorraine Hansberry. Ed. Robert Nemiroff. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- . *Razor*. Chicago: Third World Press, 2011.
- . *Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems*. Philipsburg: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2003.

- . *Song: A Play in One Act. New Plays for the Black Theatre.* Ed. Woodie King, Jr. Chicago: Third World Press, 1989.
- . "‘Why I Changed My Ideology: Black Nationalism and Socialist Revolution.’ *Black World* 24.9 (July, 1975): 30-42.
- Baraka, Amiri and Amina Baraka. *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987.
- Baraka, Amiri and Amina Baraka, eds. *An Anthology of African American Women: Confirmation.* New York: Quill, 1983.
- Baraka, Amiri and Ben F. Jones. ‘An Intimate Evening with Amiri Baraka and Ben F. Jones.’ The Guild Theater, Historic Oak Park, Sacramento. 12 Nov. 2011. Lecture.
- Baraka, Amiri and Sala Udin. ‘A Conversation with Amiri Baraka: Civil Rights, Black Arts, and Politics.’ *Sampsonia Way.* Sept. 2011. Web. 2 Oct. 2011.
- Barnes, Clive. ‘The Theater: New LeRoi Jones Play.’ *New York Times.* 22 Nov. 1969: 46.
- Barry, Ann, ed. ‘Arts and Leisure Guide.’ *New York Times.* 20 May 1979: 2.
- Benston, Kimberly W. ‘Amiri Baraka: An Interview, Kimberly W. Benston/1977.’ *Conversations with Amiri Baraka.* Ed. Charlie Reilly. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 105-117.
- Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement.* Dir. Woodie King, Jr. California Newsreel, 1978. DVD.
- Bryden, Ronald. ‘Destruction—by a violent talent.’ *The Observer.* 14 May 1967: 25.
- Bryer, Jackson R. and Mary C. Hartig, eds. *Conversations with August Wilson.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006.
- ‘Bunuel Film Wins Top Venice Award; Other Prizes Booed.’ *New York Times.* 9 Sept. 1967, Special to the *New York Times*: 25.
- Clark, VÉVÉ. ‘Restaging Langston Hughes’ *Scottsboro Limited.* *Conversations with Amiri Baraka.* Ed. Charlie Reilly. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 157-167.
- Davis, Angela. ‘Black Nationalism: The Sixties and the Nineties.’ *Black Popular Culture.* Ed. Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay Press, 1992. 317-324.
- Dutchman.* Dir. Anthony Harvey. Perfs. Al Freeman, Jr. and Shirley Knight. Planet (UK), 1967. DVD. Image Entertainment, 1994.

- 'Festival in Senegal Honors Armstrong.' *New York Times*. 9 April 1966: 12
- Friedland, Samuel. 'Letter to the Editor 5.' *New York Times*. 14 Dec. 1969: D15.
- Frost, David. 'David Frost Interviews LeRoi Jones: David Frost/1969.' *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*. Ed. Charlie Reilly. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 62-70.
- Gelder, Lawrence V. 'Theater in Review: Ages of Sin Against Blacks: Enough Blame to Go Around.' *New York Times*. 20 Nov. 1996: 1.
- "'General Hag's Skeezag," Baraka at his best.' *New York Amsterdam News*. 26 Oct. 1996: 28. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 14 Aug. 2013.
- Goodell, William. *The American Slave Code in Theory and in Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by its Statutes, Judicial Decisions & Illustrative Facts*. London: Clarke, Beekon, and Co., 1853.
- Gordone, Charles. *No Place to Be Somebody: A Black Black Comedy in Three Acts*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.
- Hanley, Robert. 'Daughter of Controversial Poet is Killed at Her Sister's Home.' *New York Times*. 14 Aug 2003: B7.
- "'Harassment" Hurts LeRoi Jones Plays.' *New York Times*. 6 Apr. 1965, Special to the *New York Times*: 31.
- Hughes, Langston. *Mulatto. Three Negro Plays*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969.
- . *Scottsboro, Limited : a one-act play. The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: The Plays to 1942: Mulatto to the Sun Do Move / Ed. with an Introduction by Leslie Catherine Sanders*. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Jones, Hettie. *How I Became Hettie Jones*. New York: Grove Press, 1997.
- Kennedy, Randy. 'A Play That's Sure to Make You Sweat: Baraka's "Dutchman" to Be Staged in a Bathhouse.' *New York Times*. 1 Nov. 2013: C25.
- Kerr, Walter. 'Is This Their Dream?' *New York Times*. 23 Nov. 1969: D1.
- King Jr., Martin Luther. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Ed. Clayborne Carson. New York: Abacus, 2000.
- Komozi Woodard Amiri Baraka papers. Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System.

- Lelyveld, Joseph. 'LeRoi Jones's "Dutchman" in Exile.' *New York Times*. 18 Sept. 1966: 7, 13.
- Lowell, Robert. *The Old Glory: Three Plays: Endecott and the Red Cross; My Kinsman, Major Molineux; and Benito Cereno*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.
- Malcolm, Derek. 'Review: Double Bill at the Hampstead Theatre Club.' *The Guardian*. 9 May 1967: 7.
- Melville, Herman. *Benito Cereno*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.
- Neal, Larry. 'The Black Arts Movement.' *The Drama Review* 12.4 (Summer, 1968): 29-39.
- Odets, Clifford. *Three Plays: Awake and Sing, Waiting for Lefty, Till the Day I Die*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- 'Orgena Tells True History of Afro-Americans.' *Muhammad Speaks Newspaper* 1.4 (December, 1960): 6.
- Riley, Clayton. 'A Black View of *Slave Ship*: Art is What Moves You.' *New York Times*. 23 Nov. 1969: D3.
- 'Shriver Prodded by Fino on Black Arts School Fund.' *New York Times*. 29 Dec. 1965: 15.
- The Slave*. By LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka. Dir. John Doyle. Perf. Richard Bradford, Lesley Berkowitz, and Bob Weick. The Adrienne Theater, Philadelphia. 5 Oct. 2011. Performance.
- Smith, Stewart, and Peter Thorn. 'An Interview with LeRoi Jones: Stewart Smith and Peter Thorn/1966.' *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*. Ed. Charlie Reilly. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 12-19.
- Stern, Michael. 'Police Look Into Harlem Racists.' *New York Times*. 18 Mar. 1966: 18.
- Taubman, Howard. 'The Theater: "Dutchman".' *New York Times*. 25 Mar. 1964: 64.
- . 'Theater: An Angry Man.' *New York Times*. 17 Dec. 1964: 51.
- . 'Theater: "Blues for Mr. Charlie".' *New York Times*. 24 Apr. 1964: 24.
- '"The Trial" Becomes Broadway Smash Hit.' *Muhammad Speaks Newspaper* 1.4 (December, 1960): 10.
- Ward, Theodore. *Big White Fog*. *Black Theatre USA: Plays by African Americans 1847-1938*. Eds. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine. New York: Free Press, 1996. 284-324.

Wilson, August. "The Ground On Which I Stand." *American Theatre* 13.7 (1996): 14. *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text*. Web. 11 July 2013.

X, Malcolm. *By Any Means Necessary*. New York: Pathfinder, 1970.

---. 'The Ballot or the Bullet.' *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. George Breitman. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966. 23-44.

---. 'God's Judgment of White America (The Chickens Are Coming Home to Roost).' *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X*. Ed. Benjamin Karim. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1971. 121-148.

X, Malcolm and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. London: Penguin Books, 1968.

Zolotow, Sam. 'LEROI JONES PLAY DUE FOR STAGING: "A Recent Killing" Weighed by Rastar Enterprises.' *New York Times*. 16 Aug. 1968: 20.

Secondary Sources

Anadolu-Okur, Nilgun. *Contemporary African American Theater: Afrocentricity in the Works of Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, and Charles Fuller*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Andrews, W. D. E. 'The Marxist Theater of Amiri Baraka.' *Comparative Drama* 18.2 (Summer, 1984): 137-161.

'Arrival of first Africans to Virginia Colony: 1619.' *PBS Online: Africans in America/The Terrible Transformation* (People & Events). 4 Apr. 2011
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p263.html>>.

Asante, Molefi K. *Maulana Karenga: An Intellectual Portrait*. Cambridge: Polity, 2009.

Banton, Michael. *Racial Theories*. 1987. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Baraka, Amiri. *Arm Yourself, or Harm Yourself*. Newark: Jihad Publications, 1967.

---. *The Baptism & The Toilet: by LeRoi Jones*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967.

---. *Ba-Ra-Ka. Spontaneous Combustion: Eight New American Plays*. Ed. Rochelle Owens. New York: Winter House LTD, 1972. 175-181.

---. *Black Music*. 1968. AkashiClassics: Renegade Reprint Series Edition. New York: Akashic Books, 2010.

- . *The Coronation of the Black Queen*. *The Black Scholar* 1.8 (June, 1970): 46-48.
- . *The Death of Malcolm X*. *New Plays from the Black Theatre*. Ed. Ed Bullins. New York: Bantam Books, 1969. 1-20.
- . *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- . 'Emory Douglas: A "Good Brother," A "Bad" Artist.' *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*. Ed. Sam Durant. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2007. 169-181.
- . *The Essence of Reparations: Afro-American Self-determination & Revolutionary Democratic Struggle in the United States of America*. St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2003.
- . *The Fiction of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2000.
- . *Four Black Revolutionary Plays: Experimental Death Unit 1, A Black Mass, Madheart, Great Goodness of Life*. New York: Marion Boyars, 1998.
- . *Home on the Range*. *The Drama Review* 12.4 (Summer, 1968): 106-111.
- . *Jello*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1970.
- . *Police*. *The Drama Review* 12.4 (Summer, 1968): 112-115.
- . *Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical*. *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theater Festival*. Eds. Miguel Algarín and Lois Griffith. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1997. 496-535.
- . *The Sidney Poet Heroical: In 29 Scenes*. New York: I. Reed Books, 1979.
- . *Tales of the Out & the Gone: Short Stories*. New York: Akashic Books, 2007.
- . *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, 1961-1995*. Ed. Paul Vangelisti. New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995.
- . *Un Poco Low Coup*. Berkeley: Ishmael Reed Publishing Co., 2004.
- Barrett, Lindsay. Foreword. *Four Black Revolutionary Plays: Experimental Death Unit 1, A Black Mass, Madheart, Great Goodness of Life*. By Amiri Baraka. New York: Marion Boyars, 1998. 7-14.

- Bellafante, Ginia. '60s Prejudice and Capitalism as a Big Blond Metaphor.' *New York Times*. 24 Jan. 2007: E5
- Benston, Kimberly W. *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
- . 'Ellison, Baraka, and the Faces of Tradition.' *Boundary 2* 6.2 (Winter, 1978): 333-354.
- . 'Introduction – *Dutchman*: Theatrical Ghost of a Future Politics.' *Political Stages: Plays that Shaped a Century*. Eds. Emily Mann and David Roessel. New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002. 133-136.
- . *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Benston, Kimberly, ed. *Imamu Amiri Barak (LeRoi Jones): A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1978.
- Bentley, Eric. 'The First "Lulu": Nine Notes.' *The First Lulu*. By Frank Wedekind. Trans. Eric Bentley. New York: Applause, 1994. 1-29.
- Bernstein, Charles, ed. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- 'The Black Arts Era.' *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Ed. H.L. Gates, Jr. & Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004. 1831-1850.
- Blum, William. *America's Deadliest Export: Democracy: The Truth About Us Foreign Policy and Everything Else*. Halifax: Fernwood Pub, 2013.
- Bond, Julian. 'Explorations Is Black Leadership.' *University of Virginia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 July 2013. <<http://www.virginia.edu/publichistory/bl/index.php?fulltranscript&uid=50>>.
- Bottoms, Stephen J. *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Branch, William B. Introduction. *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*. Ed. William B. Branch. New York: Mentor, 1992. ix-x.
- Breitman, George, ed. *Malcolm X Speaks*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966.
- Brown, Cecil M. 'Black Literature and LeRoi Jones.' *Imamu Amiri Barak (LeRoi Jones): A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Kimberly Benston. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1978. 29-35.

- Ceynowa, Andrzej. 'The Dramatic Structure of *Dutchman*.' *Black American Literature Forum* 17.1 (Spring, 1983): 15-18.
- Chomsky, Noam, and Andre Vltchek. *On Western Terrorism: From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Chothia, Jean. *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Chrisman, Laura. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Coldcut. *Sound Mirrors*. Montreal: Ninja Tune, 2006. Sound recording.
- Collins, Lisa Gail and Margo Natalie Crawford, eds. *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Crespy, David A. *Off-Off Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960s Ignited a New American Theater*. New York: Back Stage Books, 2003.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself* (1845). *Slave Narratives*. Ed. W.L. Andrews & H.L. Gates, Jr. New York: The Library of America, 2002. 267-368.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 'The Conversation of Races.' *The Idea of Race*. Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000.
- Durkheim, Emile. *On Morality and Society*. Ed. Robert N. Bellah. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Effiong, Philip Uko. *In Search of a Model for African-American Drama: A Study of Selected Plays by Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2000.
- Elam, Harry J., Jr. *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez & Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.
- Elam, Harry J., Jr. and David Krasner, eds. *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

- Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Farber, David. *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.
- Feitz, Lindsey. 'Creating a Multicultural Soul: Avon, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Race in the 1970s.' *The Business of Black Power: Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America*. Eds. Laura W Hill and Julia Rabig. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012. 116-137.
- Gates, Henry L. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Gilbert, Derrick I. M., and Tony Medina, eds. *Catch the Fire!!!: A Cross-Generational Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.
- Goodman, Lizbeth, and Jane de Gay, eds. *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Green, Paul and Richard Wright. *Native Son: The Biography of a Young American*. New York: Samuel French, 1980.
- Greenfield, Laura and Karen Rowan, eds. Introduction. *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011.
- Gussow, Mel. *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey (A Biography)*. London: Oberon Books, Ltd, 1999.
- Harpham, John Samuel. "A Fierce Silence Falls": Lu Xun's Call To Arms." *Criticism* 55.1 (2013): 95-118.
- Harris, Joel C. *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955.
- Hay, Samuel A. *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Heyliger, Yvette. *Bridge to Baraka: The Pen Instead of the Gun. 24 Gun Control Plays*. Eds. Caridad Svich and Zac Kline. South Gate: NoPassport Press, 2013.
- Hill, Anthony D. *Pages from the Harlem Renaissance: A Chronicle of Performance*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

- Hill, Errol, ed. *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Applause, 1980.
- Hill, Errol G. and James V. Hatch. *A History of African American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Hill, Laura W, and Julia Rabig. *The Business of Black Power: Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012.
- Hill, Robert A., ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Volume I, 1826-August 1919*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- . *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Volume VII, November 1927-August 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Hirsch, Foster. 'Slaveship.' *Educational Theatre Journal*. 22.1 (1970): 102-103.
- Holmes, Ronald M. and Stephen T. Holmes. *Murder in America*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003.
- hooks, bell. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995.
- Houen, Alex. *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing Since the 1960s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Hudson, Theodore R. *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1973.
- Ignatiev, Noel. 'Reading Malcolm X with White Students.' *Teaching Malcolm X*. Ed. Theresa Perry. New York: Routledge, 1996. 101-103.
- In Motion: Amiri Baraka*. Dir. St. Clair Bourne. The Chamba Organization, 1983. VHS. Facets Video Image Series, 1989.
- Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Jones, Lisa. *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.
- . *Combination Skin. Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology*. Eds. Kathy A. Perkins and Roberta Uno. London: Routledge, 1996. 215-229.

- Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.
- Karim, Benjamin, ed. *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1971.
- King Jr., Woodie. *The Impact of Race: Theatre and Culture*. New York: Applause, 2003.
- Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.
- Klinkowitz, Jerome. 'LeRoi Jones [Imamu Amiri Baraka]: *Dutchman* as Drama.' *Negro American Literature Forum* 7.4 (Winter, 1973): 123-126.
- Krasner, David. *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Krasner, David, ed. *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005.
- Kumar, Nita N. 'The Logic of Retribution: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*.' *African American Review* 37.2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 2003): 271-279.
- Lacey, Henry C. *To Raise, Destroy, and Create: The Poetry, Drama, and Fiction of Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)*. 1981. Second Printing. Albany: Whitston Publishing Company, Inc., 2001.
- 'Landing of Negroes at Jamestown from a Dutch Man-of-War, 1619: 1917.' *PBS Online: Africans in America/The Terrible Transformation* (Historical Documents). 4 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h289.html>>
- Lee, Spike, and Lisa Jones. *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint*. New York, N.Y: Fireside, 1989.
- . *Mo' Better Blues*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.
- . *Uplift the Race: The Construction of School Daze*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988.
- Levinson, David, ed. *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment: Volume 1*. Thousand Oaks: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2002.
- Mally, Lynn. "Exporting Soviet Culture: the Case of Agitprop Theater." *Slavic Review*. 62.2 (2003): 324-342.

- Mann, Emily and David Roessel, eds. *Political Stages: Plays that Shaped a Century*. New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002.
- Martin, Thaddeus. 'Dutchman Reconsidered.' *Black American Literature Forum* 11.2 (Summer, 1977): 62.
- Matlin, Daniel. *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- McCarthy, Gerry. *Modern Dramatists: Edward Albee*. London: Macmillan, 1987.
- Meder, Theo. "In Search of the Dutch Lore of the Land: Old and New Legends Throughout the Netherlands." *Folklore* 122.2 (2011): 117-134. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 Mar. 2012.
- Miller, Henry. *Theorizing Black Theatre: Art Versus Protest in Critical Writings, 1898-1965*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2011.
- Mitchell, Loften. *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theatre*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 'Cruising the Toilet: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity.' *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13.2-3 (2007): 353-367.
- Murray, Timothy. *Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video, and Art*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Nathans, Heather S. *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861: Lifting the Veil of Black*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Neal, Larry. *Visions of a Liberated Future: Black Arts Movement Writings*. Ed. Michael Schwartz. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.
- Nealon, Jeffrey T. *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Nelson, Hugh. 'LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*: A Brief Ride on a Doomed Ship.' *Educational Theatre Journal* 20.1 (Mar., 1968): 53-59.

- Noer, Thomas. 'Segregationists and the World: Foreign Policy and the White Resistance.' *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*. Ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 141-162.
- O'Connor, John E, and Peter C. Rollins. *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. *Scars of Conquest/masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Petrie, Phil W. 'Fathers & Sons.' *Essence* 24.7 (1993): 97.
- Perito, Robert. *Where Is the Lone Ranger When We Need Him?: America's Search for a Postconflict Stability Force*. Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004.
- Perry, Theresa, ed. *Teaching Malcolm X*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Pisano, Claudia Moreno. *Amiri Baraka & Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013.
- Quinney, Richard. *Bearing Witness to Crime and Social Justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Rampersad, Arnold. Introduction. *Native Son*. By Richard Wright. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1998. ix-xxii.
- Rebhorn, Matthew. 'Flaying Dutchman: Masochism, Minstrelsy, and the Gender Politics of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*.' *Callaloo* 26.3 (Summer, 2003): 796-812.
- Reed, Daphne S. 'LeRoi Jones: High Priest of the Black Arts Movement.' *Educational Theatre Journal* 22.1 (Mar., 1970): 53-59.
- Reilly, Charlie, ed. *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.
- Rice, Julian C. 'Leroi Jones' *Dutchman*: A Reading.' *Contemporary Literature* 12 .1 (Winter, 1971): 42-59.
- Rich, Frank. 'The Stage: Malcolm X and Elijah Mahammad.' *New York Times*. 15 Jul. 1981: 1.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1983.

- Sanders, Leslie Catherine. *The Development of Black Theater in America: From Shadows to Selves*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- Savran, David. 'August Wilson.' *Conversations with August Wilson*. Eds. Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006. 19-37.
- Seale, Bobby. *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Scharine, Richard G. *From Class to Caste in American Drama: Political and Social Themes Since the 1930s*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991.
- Scott, Darieck. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Sell, Mike. *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- . 'The Drama of the Black Arts Movement.' *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Ed. David Krasner. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005. 263-284.
- Smethurst, James Edward. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Sollors, Werner. *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism."* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Stephoe, Lamont B. 'Interviewing Amiri Baraka.' *Left Curve*. N.p., 14 June 2000. Web. 18 July 2013. <<http://www.leftcurve.org/LC27WebPages/BarakaInt.html>>.
- Streeter, Thomas. 'Television and the Law.' *Television Studies*. Ed. Toby Miller. London: BFI, 2002. 42.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.
- Taumann, Beatrix. *Strange Orphans: Contemporary African American Women Playwrights*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999.
- Taylor, William P. 'The Fall of Man in Imamu Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones] *Dutchman*.' *Negro American Literature Forum* 7.4 (Winter, 1973): 127-131.

- Thompson, Deborah. 'Keeping up with the Joneses: The Naming of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones.' *College Literature* 29.1 (Winter, 2002): 83-101.
- Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. 1967. Vintage Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.
- Turner, Nat. *The Confessions of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrections in Southampton, Va. As fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray, in the prison where he was confined, and acknowledged by him to be such when read before the Court of Southampton; with the certificate, under seal of the Court convened at Jerusalem, Nov. 5, 1831, for his trial. Also an authentic account of the whole insurrection, with lists of the whites who were murdered, and of the Negroes brought before the Court of Southampton, and there sentenced, &c.* (1831). *Slave Narratives*. Ed. W.L. Andrews & H.L. Gates, Jr. New York: The Library of America, 2002. 243-366.
- Walker II, Victor Leo. 'Archetype and Masking in LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*.' *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*. Eds. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. 236-243.
- Ward, Brian, ed. *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Waters, Tony. *When Killing is a Crime*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007.
- Watts, Jerry Gafio. *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
- Wedekind, Frank. *The First Lulu*. Trans. Eric Bentley. New York: Applause, 1994.
- Williams, Mance. *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Williams, Sherley Anne. 'The Search for Identity in Baraka's *Dutchman*.' *Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones): A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Kimberly W. Benston. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1978. 135-140.
- Williams, Tennessee. *The Glass Menagerie. A Streetcar Named Desire and Other Plays*. London: Penguin, 2000. 227-313.
- Wofford, Harris. *Of Kennedys & Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.
- Wood, Joe, ed. *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

- Woodard, Komozi. *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Woodward, Bob. *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954.
- . *Native Son*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1998.
- Young, Harvey, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Young, Vershawn Ashanti. 'Should Writers Use They Own English?' *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Eds. Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011.
- Zygmonski, Aimee. 'Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts Movement.' *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre*. Ed. Harvey Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.