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“THE CRACK IN THE VOICE” AND
“JOE TURNER BLUES”

Abstract. Great art has been created under conditions of immense suffering and social injustice. How can one responsively and sensitively make sense of and appreciate such art? How does one acknowledge the suffering that went into making the art, while seeing the creators as something other than victims of circumstance? I offer some reflections on the challenge of appreciating African American music, with the central example of the song “Joe Turner Blues.” I outline two possible approaches to these questions (those of Arlene Croce and Fred Moten) before offering my own suggestions.

And how would it be if black people were
loved as much as black music?
—Arthur Jafa¹

EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLK music has its roots in the atrocity of slavery and the political oppression of the post-Civil War period. Hence it is a body of work created under conditions of immense suffering and social injustice. In this paper I offer some reflections on the challenge of appreciating such music, given the circumstances of its origins.

If we do attend to the morally troubling origins of early African American music, then how do we do so properly? It would seem morally appropriate to acknowledge the suffering that must have gone into the creation of this music. However, when we try, a number of challenges emerge, and these are likely to be especially acute for audiences and critics who are cultural outsiders. One challenge is the ever-present danger of cliché in writing and thinking about suffering; in particular,

the danger of minimizing or rationalizing suffering by a focus on the redemptive power of art. (This is one dimension of the romantic “suffering artist” motif, still so central in Western culture.) Another challenge is the danger of seeing the creators of such work as “merely” victims, thus depriving them of agency, and feelings of pity or compassion that audiences are likely to have for those who have suffered injustice threaten to manifest themselves in a patronizing or condescending attitude toward the work in question. Finally, as a number of thinkers have alerted us, compassion is a complicated emotion. Our engagement with others’ suffering risks “appropriating” that suffering and diverting attention from them to ourselves.

I owe this last point to a book that has influenced my thinking on these issues: Elizabeth Spelman’s *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering*.² While by now a large literature exists on the intersections between art and morality, I have not come across work devoted to the questions Spelman raises. Instead, discussions have centered on the evaluation of morally problematic works and the connections between ethical and artistic value. My concerns in this paper are different.

A challenge arises at the outset: why attend to the conditions under which any artwork was created? Why not restrict oneself to a “narrow” conception of aesthetic experience and attend primarily (or even exclusively) to a work’s formal and expressive properties? A “broad” conception of aesthetic experience, in contrast, would encompass attention to a work’s cognitive and moral properties as well. While “circumstances of origin” might not be a cognitive property of an artwork in an obvious sense, attention to the meaning of song lyrics in many of these cases takes us quickly to considerations of the song’s origins. I cannot provide here a full defense of the broad conception of aesthetic experience, although I will say that it strikes me as a better descriptive account of how many people actually do experience artworks, especially artworks that they have come to care about.³ I will return to this topic later and argue that, at least for some works, a broad conception provides for a richer experience and deeper understanding.

My central example will be the song “Joe Turner Blues.” Rather than examine historical recordings, I have chosen to focus on a recording of the song made in 1962 as part of Harry Belafonte’s multivolume anthology of Black music, *The Long Road to Freedom*.⁴ While I will limit my discussion to a single song, I hope that readers will find my remarks applicable to other early examples of African American music, and to music created subsequently, as African American people continued to

make music under conditions of systematic racism and structural injustice. I have chosen to write about early African American folk music for two reasons. First, this music has been incredibly influential and has affected nearly every single extant genre of popular American music. Second, it is all too evident that appreciation of this music can coexist with racist attitudes and behavior toward its creators. Some attention to proper appreciation therefore seems fitting.

I will outline two possible approaches to these questions before offering my own suggestions. First, I consider Arlene Croce's notorious dismissal of "victim art."⁵ Second, I draw on Fred Moten's work on the aesthetics of the Black radical tradition.⁶ Neither Croce nor Moten exactly addresses the problem that is my focus, but both come close enough that their accounts are relevant. Finally, in the last section, I offer my own suggestions for how to responsibly and sensitively appreciate art born out of suffering and injustice. However, before turning to philosophy, I want to say something about the song and the recording that constitute my central example.

I

"Joe Turner Blues" is a very old blues song, indeed one of the earliest blues songs known.⁷ As is typical of many blues songs (and folk songs more generally), the lyrics are simple and repetitive. Here is how one version of the song begins:

They tell me Joe Turner, he done come
They tell me Joe Turner, he done come
Come with forty links of chain

They tell me Joe Turner come to town
He brought forty thousand links of chain
And he's got one poor soul for every one

They told me Joe Turner come to town
They told me Joe Turner come to town
And he's got my sweet man and gone.⁸

The song (again, like many folk songs) exists in numerous versions with enough distinct variations to fuel debates about musical ontology. Historians believe that the lyrics refer to Joe Turney, the brother of Peter

Turney, who was governor of Tennessee from 1893 to 1897. W. C. Handy (“father of the blues”) explained the origins of the song:

Joe had the responsibility of taking Negro prisoners from Memphis to the penitentiary at Nashville. Sometimes he took them to the “farms” along the Mississippi. Their crimes, when indeed there were any crimes, were usually very minor, the object of the arrests being to provide needed labor for spots along the river. As usual, the method was to set a stool-pigeon where he could start a game of craps. The bones would roll blissfully till the required number of laborers had been drawn into the circle. At that point the law would fall upon the poor devils, arrest as many as were needed for work, try them for gambling in a kangaroo court and then turn the culprits over to Joe Turney.⁹

Research by historian Leon Litwack lends credence to Handy’s recollections. By the 1890s, convict labor was a way of life in the New South. It was a source of great profits for state government and employers, and extraordinary suffering for Black men, “who were all too often worked to death.”¹⁰ The cost in suffering to women and children left behind, and to communities robbed of companionship, protection, and potential leaders, was also immense.

The musical and lyrical simplicity of “Joe Turner Blues” belies its historical and cultural significance. The subject of the song is not the titular Joe Turner but the destruction of a community and the work of mourning done by those left behind. The song is both testimony about a historical injustice and an early attempt by African Americans to confront the atrocity of mass incarceration. Some of the song’s power comes from its understatement. The lyrics do not spell out the full horror of men entrapped into penal servitude, women and children forcibly abandoned, and communities left bereft. With the shift from “forty” to “forty thousand” links of chain between the first and second verse, the injustice depicted goes from personal or local to systematic and general. The phrase “Joe Turner come to town” is a code or circumlocution for something too painful to name directly, or indeed that those involved were not permitted to name directly.

The particular recording of “Joe Turner Blues” that has informed my thinking about the song and about these issues features the vocalist Gloria Lynne and pianist Herman Foster. It has a typical straight-ahead, slow-blues feel. Their performance, like the song itself, is understated, and derives much of its power from understatement. Neither Lynne nor Foster is in any way “showy” or does anything to draw our attention away

from the simple, repetitive lyrics. Belafonte, who organized the project and recruited many of the musicians, described Lynne's participation in the project this way: "She came to the songs with tremendous dignity and enormous integrity, and labored over every nuance of what she did—and did it magnificently."¹¹

II

Croce was a dance critic for *The New Yorker* magazine from 1973 to 1998. One of her most famous columns, "Discussing the Undiscussable," is about a performance she refused to attend. "I have not seen Bill T. Jones's *Still/Here* and have no plans to review it," she begins (Croce, p. 54). Croce found it impossible to review *Still/Here* (that is, to treat it as art) because it incorporates videotape of terminally ill performers who talk about their experience. By including dying performers, Croce charged, Jones had placed his work "beyond the reach of criticism" (p. 54). In theater, Croce writes, one chooses what one will be, and these performers cannot choose not to be sick. Hence the work's express intentions are unintelligible as theater. Croce found that her only possible response was to decline to review it (and then to write about that refusal).

Croce places *Still/Here* within the broader context of modern dance and Jones's earlier work (which she clearly knows well). While her focus is a particular work, Croce uses the piece as an opportunity for cultural criticism and to discuss more general topics, including meta-reflections on the role of a working art critic. Jones is, she writes, "the most extreme case among the distressingly many now representing themselves to the public not as artists but as victims and martyrs" (Croce, p. 54), making it clear that she means her reflections to be generalized beyond *Still/Here*.

Exactly what Croce means by "victim art," and what the term encompasses, is not obvious. She offers a few examples: Charlie Chaplin, "in his more self-pitying moments"; Pina Bausch; and (possibly, she is not clear) Robert Mapplethorpe. Croce traces the development of "victim art" to two factors. First, to the institutional bias for socially relevant "utilitarian" art by U.S. federal and private funding agencies since the 1980s. Second, to rampant cultural narcissism and "the cult of Self" (Croce, pp. 56–57).

Croce has two main objections to Jones's piece (and presumably those like it). The first is that the work is "intolerably voyeuristic" (Croce, p. 54). Her use of the qualifier "intolerably" indicates to me that Croce

recognizes that some degree of voyeurism may be inevitable in appreciating and evaluating live performance. However, works like *Still/Here* cross a line from “acceptable” voyeurism to morally or aesthetically unacceptable voyeurism. Audiences are confronted by something they may not want to see. The resulting feelings for the viewer presumably range from discomfort to a sense of moral compromise. Such feelings—to draw out what I take to be Croce’s position—are unpleasant in themselves (and hence to be avoided). Furthermore, these feelings make critical engagement with a work difficult, if not impossible.

Croce’s second objection to works she categorizes as “victim art” is that they arouse emotions of pity or despair, which again makes critical engagement difficult or impossible. “I can’t review someone I feel sorry for or hopeless about,” she writes, saying that she has learned to avoid dancers with “obvious problems,” which includes dancers who are too heavy to be graceful, or old, or who bear physical deformities yet appear in roles requiring beauty of line (Croce, p. 55). Together with these physical shortcomings, Croce also finds impossible discussion of performers whom she is “forced” to feel sorry for because of the way they present themselves—performers “who make out of victimhood victim art.” She lists, as examples, “dissed blacks, abused women, [and] disenfranchised homosexuals” (p. 55). She finds Jones is guilty in this regard. By disclosing his HIV-positive status and making AIDS-focused pieces, he has effectively disarmed criticism. Performers like him are “not so much above art as beyond it” (p. 58).

Croce does not elaborate on what she takes to be the difference between performers who simply happen to be from socially disadvantaged or marginalized groups, and those who use their inferior social status to “force” audiences to pity them (Croce, p. 55). These issues are complicated, and Croce frames them with an urgency and sharpness not often seen in academic philosophy. The article is now more than twenty-five years old, and reads as though it comes from a time very different than our own. I have struggled with the appropriate level of generality on which to present Croce’s position. On the one hand, positions under discussion should be presented charitably so as to foster critical engagement. Critiquing a plausible position is more fruitful than critiquing a flawed or implausible position. On the other hand, I believe that the harsh or difficult things that a thinker says or implies should be confronted rather than minimized or explained away.

Croce’s solution—refusal and avoidance—is one answer to the problem of how to respond to art created under conditions of suffering

and oppression. A refusal to engage with some works of art, including those that arouse pity for disadvantaged groups, may be right for some viewers, in some circumstances. After all, recognition of this fact is one reason why we now have “trigger warnings.” Croce may have been correct about the specific example of *Still/Here*, which is beyond the scope of my concerns here and not something I am qualified to discuss anyway. Concerning the more general issue, good reasons exist to reject the idea that feelings aroused by a work or performance always place those works and performances “beyond” criticism, and to reject the strategy of avoiding art created by victims of oppression or those who may be otherwise disadvantaged.

Certainly an audience can feel pity or compassion for a performer for reasons external to the performance itself. Such feelings may or may not be appropriate, and they may or may not influence an audience’s assessment of the performance. Yet the audience’s feelings are beyond the performers’ control, and outright appeals to those feelings may or may not be successful. For example, an audience might reject such appeals as manipulative.

An audience typically comes to a performance with expectations about what they will experience, including possibly feelings for or about performers. Such feelings and expectations may be based on, among other factors, the performers’ racial or social identity, or information about his or her life circumstances that is in the public domain.¹² The feelings aroused by performers can interact in complicated and unexpected ways with our evaluation of that performance. An aging dancer may arouse our pity, and this feeling may lend a sense of poignancy to the performance. When we watch a film with the knowledge that an actor was harassed during its making, we may feel sorry for her, and yet admire her achievement in the performance all the more. While such feelings complicate our responses, and aesthetic formalists may rebuke them, they do not render performances and works “beyond criticism.”

I once attended a benefit concert for victims of an earthquake in the Middle East. One of the solo performers was a foreign student who came from the area where the earthquake had occurred. The audience understood that his loved ones may have been counted among those affected by the disaster, and we may have anticipated that feelings of personal loss would influence his performance. Did that make his performance “beyond criticism”? Perhaps for some it did, but that was hardly the performer’s responsibility. Nor did it mean that he should have declined the invitation to perform.

Are any works or performances “beyond art” in the sense that critical judgment is inappropriate or impossible? One can understand Croce’s reluctance to view *Still/Here*, even while rejecting the idea that her qualms deserve wider application. Generally, I would argue that adults who present themselves as professional artists and performers should be treated as such, and that includes subjecting their work to criticism.

Before ending my discussion of Croce, I would like to highlight a remark she makes about audiences rather than performers: “The public likes to see victims, if only to patronize them with applause” (Croce, p. 55). I take her to mean that audience approval is patronizing when it is motivated, not by the excellence of a performance but by factors the performer cannot control, such as her social identity (including racial identity, physical and mental disabilities, and what may be known of his or her life story). I appreciate Croce’s insight that audiences should be aware of the possibility of condescension in their approval, and I will return to this point in the final section of the paper.

III

A very different approach to art made by members of oppressed groups, specifically to art created by Blacks, is offered by poet, critic, and theorist Moten, who draws on work by postmodern and postcolonial thinkers. His ideas are wide-ranging, provocative, and difficult to summarize. Rather than attempt to do them justice, I will borrow and then riff on a few key themes, with the hope that my application of Moten’s ideas is in an inventive spirit he would endorse.

One of Moten’s main themes is the improvisatory element that he sees animating Black performance and Black life more generally. In a discussion of Édouard Glissant’s analysis of how Creole language was shaped under conditions of oppression, Moten refers to “black performances, which is to say black history” (Moten, p. 7). His notion of performance, then, extends beyond artistic performance. Yet his discussions of particular performers (Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, and others) indicates that he means to include both artistic and everyday performance.

Black performance (in the widest sense) developed under conditions of oppression, when Black people were treated as literal objects. This had profound consequences. Some remarks by African American artist Arthur Jafa are illuminating here:

Avant-gardism bears some relationship to blackness. To be improvisatory or to be avant-garde is the difference between life and death. Everybody around you had to be avant-garde just to be alive. To teach yourself to read was breaking the law. Your relationship to law is thrown into question. Law and order is thrown into question on a fundamental basis. That's a different way of being for human beings, to be fundamentally at odds with social order. That's a new set of circumstances. Human beings have always experienced tragedy, but the blues is something different from tragedy. (AJ, n.p.)

"The blues is something different from tragedy" because (turning back to Moten), Black experience is structured by an improvisatory surface that can occasion "something very much like sadness and something very much like devilish enjoyment" (Moten, p. 255). Cornel West makes a similar point when he writes of the "subversive joy and sublime melancholia" that comes from Black artists who probe the depths of a Black sense of the tragic and the absurd. He offers examples from the work of Louis Armstrong, Ellington, and Sarah Vaughan.¹³ In this tension between sadness and devilish enjoyment (or if you prefer, between melancholia and joy) lie the seeds of a way to appreciate African American art that encompasses both the sadness and despair of life under conditions of oppression and the moments of joy that can also be found there. To record this "immanence" in Black art is, Moten says, "a daunting task" (p. 255).

As I read him, part of Moten's project in discussing particular performers is to uncover and record both the sadness and the devilish enjoyment where they might not be readily apparent. For example, in his discussion of Holiday, Moten draws attention to "the crack in the voice," referring to the moments in a performance when she seems at the limit of her vocal range or breath. Moten hears these moments as a willingness on Holiday's part to fail, yet this willingness to fail is "reconfigured as reason to go past" (Moten, p. 107). In other words, the willingness to fail has become part of her expressive repertoire. In a lesser performer, the "crack" would be an actual failure (if unsuccessful) or a mannerism. Holiday's skill is such that it is neither.

Moten calls Holiday's *Lady in Satin* recording "the record of a wonderfully articulate body in pain" (Moten, p. 107). The sadness is evident; the devilish enjoyment comes from the fact that bodies in pain are anything but articulate. The pleasure we take in her voice and her performance—and the pleasure Holiday likely took in her own mastery of

her instrument—exists alongside the sadness aroused by the music and any pity audiences might feel for Holiday, based on their knowledge of her life history. To share the sadness but fail to see the devilish enjoyment is to fail to appreciate the performance fully.

In other places in Black performance, we can recognize both the sadness and the devilish enjoyment. I am thinking in particular of Ella Fitzgerald's phrasing of certain lines, in the Nicholas Brothers' gravity-defying dance spectacles, and in Cab Calloway's on-stage mugging. I will leave to others Moten's "daunting task" of recording both the sadness and devilish enjoyment in Black art more generally. Instead, in the next section, I will take on the (slightly less daunting?) task of how to appreciate songs like "Joe Turner Blues"—African American art created under conditions of injustice, deeply rooted in suffering, and where joy, play, and an improvisatory surface are not easy to see.

IV

I began this paper with the challenges of appreciating art that was created under conditions of injustice or oppression. How do we acknowledge that the creators of such art were victims, while recognizing that they were creators of art as well? How resist the temptation of a self-serving compassion in which we lose sight of the objects of our compassion in self-congratulatory moral superiority?

These challenges extend beyond the issues raised by the arousal of negative emotions in art more generally. Many sad songs have been written, but the sadness of "Joe Turner Blues" is rooted in real events whose repercussions extend to this day. Many artworks have been created under difficult or even tragic conditions, but these conditions may or may not have been integral to the creation of those works. To give a recent example, Jonathan Larson, composer of the musical *Rent*, died suddenly the night before the play's off-Broadway premiere. No doubt knowing this fact can make attending a performance of *Rent* especially poignant. But Larson's premature death was not a factor in the creation of *Rent*. With a song like "Joe Turner Blues," however, the very art we take pleasure in would arguably not have been created but for the oppression experienced by its creators. And so our appreciation is burdened with this knowledge.

At the outset of this paper I rejected a "narrow" conception of aesthetic experience that would have us attend only to formal and aesthetic features and pay no attention to a work's origins. I promised to return

to this issue with an example of how a broad conception of aesthetic experience—including attention to a work's circumstances of origin—could give us a deeper understanding of it. The example I want now to introduce is also from folk music. I have in mind Nicholas Wolterstorff's thoughtful discussion of work songs in *Art Rethought*.¹⁴ Wolterstorff takes the position that these songs are worthy of philosophical attention and devotes some of his discussion to the origins of the songs. (To discuss work songs without discussing their original use would be strange indeed.) Wolterstorff points out that some of the work that the songs accompanied was performed under duress. For him such songs hold particular value as manifestations of the human spirit.

Wolterstorff's discussion is very welcome, and one can only wish that he had devoted even more attention to the topic. Had he considered some of the particularities in the origins of these songs, the discussion would likely have been even richer. For example, he might have considered that most of the work in question (and so most of the singing that accompanies it) is segregated by gender. In the section on sea shanties he might have remarked upon the living conditions on board, including forced proximity, unwilling labor (as some sailors were deceived into going to sea), and constant physical danger. Most telling for my purposes, Wolterstorff says nothing about racial oppression in the context of work songs. He relates the detail that prison and chain gang overseers sometimes stopped workers from singing. But he does not mention that for the most part overseers were white and prisoners were Black, although this should have been obvious from the source material he discusses, namely Alan Lomax's prison recordings. Once we are made aware of the racial dimension of this example of forced labor (that the singers were not only oppressed by being in prison but also on racial grounds), we can think more deeply about the meanings of these songs and the harm to singers' self-expression, culture, and solidarity when they were forbidden to sing.

V

So far I have examined two possible approaches to the appreciation of art created under conditions of oppression and injustice. While I largely rejected Croce's suspicion of "victim art," I have tried to take heed of the danger she identifies, that appreciation of such art can be mixed with condescension. I then turned to Moten, who urged recognition of both the sadness and the joy that is found in Black art. But how can

audiences take heed of Moten's suggestions when confronted by work in which it is hard to see past sadness and anguish? How, in particular, to appreciate a song like "Joe Turner Blues"?

I propose three strategies that can be pursued separately but are most powerful when practiced together. They are: 1) to widen one's focus beyond obviously sad works to include works where joy is more readily evident; 2) to educate oneself about particular works of art and the social conditions from which they arose; and 3) to pay close attention to performers' agency and think about the possible reasons for the choices they made.

The injunction to appreciate sad music by seeking out happier music no doubt seems paradoxical. Yet we can honor the sadness of a song like "Joe Turner Blues" when we widen our gaze past it and compare it with other material that arose from similar historical conditions. The jazz critic Albert Murray cautions us against confusing "the blues as such" (a psychological state) with blues music, which is music for all aspects of life from despair to joy, and from lonely solitude to partying with friends.¹⁵ Both enjoyment and subversion abound in other blues material, and in other songs on *The Long Road to Freedom*. Seeing African American musicians as more than victims of circumstances means attending to a wide variety of the music they created. This wider context reminds us that thinking of some work as "victim art" can greatly oversimplify artistic achievement.

In suggesting that audiences attend to performers' agency, I draw on Paul C. Taylor's *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*.¹⁶ In particular, I have taken inspiration from his claim that Black artists insist on agency, meaning, and beauty in the face of oppression and despair. What might this mean in practice?

As I mentioned earlier, the performance of "Joe Turner Blues" that first caught my attention is deliberately understated. There is little rhythmic variation, although Foster, an accomplished jazz musician and bebop pianist, was certainly capable of approaching the material differently if he chose. Similarly, Lynne, who had a vast vocal range and a wonderful technique, could have sung the song with more vocal flourish. Overall, their performance, with clear communication of the lyrics and the piano accompaniment never distracting from the singer's voice, is akin to "classical" in its restraint. If this were a vocal recital, I could more easily imagine the pair next presenting a Schubert Lied than singing a raunchy or gritty blues number. Yet both are performers well capable of what Moten calls "devilish enjoyment." Why did they choose not to

approach their material in that way? I can only imagine that the seriousness of the song's themes, and the fact that the injustices suffered by African Americans persisted in 1962, made them want to present the song in a straightforward and affecting manner. Thinking about the choices they made, and recognizing the possibility of different choices, leads to a fuller appreciation of their artistry.

My final suggestion is to educate oneself about particular works and about the social conditions from which they arose. This might mean reading ancillary material, including liner notes, musicians' memoirs, and social history more broadly. Many fans might well do this anyway. Understanding the political and social context of musical works helps one to appreciate more fully those works because it allows one to move beyond clichés. Reading about the early history of the blues certainly helped me better understand the songs that I heard. For example, Adam Gussow's *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* allowed me to hear beyond tales of hard times and strange references to the devil to glimpse the possibility that many blues songs were coded responses to public spectacle lynchings and other forms of white supremacist violence.¹⁷ Learning about penal servitude in the 1890s helped me understand the reasons why Belafonte might have chosen to include "Joe Turner Blues" in the musical anthology he was compiling in the 1960s.

The questions I have considered throughout this paper do not have easy answers. The idea that some art has been created under conditions of immense personal and social suffering is not new. In a famous scene in the 1949 film *The Third Man*, criminal antihero Harry Lime claims, "In Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace—and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."¹⁸ Lime is here rationalizing his own appalling conduct and attempting to minimize the very real suffering he has caused. But his remark does point to something we easily lose sight of: the suffering that sometimes goes to produce great art is not limited to the suffering of individual artists. It can also be the suffering of many people whose names we will never know and whose distinctive stories we will never hear. Appreciation of the art they created or inspired should encompass recognition of this fact.

For discussion of these issues and comments on earlier drafts, I am grateful to Ted Gracyk, Ian Jarvie, Jennifer Judkins, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Paul C. Taylor.

1. Arthur Jafa, interview with Kate Brown, *ArtNet News* (February 21, 2018), news.artnet.com/art-world/arthur-jafa-julia-stoschek-collection-1227422; hereafter abbreviated AJ.
2. Elizabeth Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
3. For such a defense see Alan Goldman, "The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (2013): 323–33.
4. *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music*, arr. Leonard De Paur, Buddha Records, 2001, CD; hereafter abbreviated LR.
5. Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker* (December 26, 1994): 54–60; hereafter abbreviated Croce.
6. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); hereafter abbreviated Moten.
7. See the historical information provided by Paul Merry at paulmerryblues.com/2015/01/is-this-earliest-blues-ever-known.html.
8. Transcribed from the recording of the song found on LR.
9. Quoted by Paul Merry from Handy's 1941 memoir, *Father of the Blues*. See <http://paulmerryblues.com/2015/01/is-this-earliest-blues-ever-known.html>.
10. Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 270–71.
11. Harry Belafonte, "A Musical History of America's Africans," in the eponymous book accompanying LR, pp. 11–26 (23).
12. For more on this see Jeanette Bicknell, *Philosophy of Song and Singing: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), chap. 4.
13. Cornel West, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West, *The Future of the Race* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), p. 77.
14. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
15. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976).
16. Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).
17. Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
18. See genius.com/Orson-welles-cuckoo-clock-speech-annotated.