Introduction

Jazz Brothers in Rhythm and Spirit

On March 8, 1965, two weeks after Malcolm X's assassination, tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp recorded "Malcolm, Malcolm Semper Malcolm," a tribute to his hero's revolutionary political consciousness. It was later included on the album *Fire Music.*[1] Shepp, who played with John Coltrane on several albums, identified a continuity between Coltrane's music and Malcolm's speeches:

> I equate Coltrane's music very strongly with Malcolm's language . . . they were just about contemporaries. . . . And I believe essentially what Malcolm said is what John played. If Trane had been a speaker, he might have spoken somewhat like Malcolm. If Malcolm had been a saxophone player, he might have played somewhat like Trane.[2]

Unlike Malcolm X, the Pan-Africanist leader and spokesman for the Nation of Islam, noted jazz saxophonist and composer John Coltrane did not identify himself as a black revolutionary. But Archie Shepp was not the only one to note the parallels between Coltrane's music and Malcolm's politics. As trumpeter Miles Davis pointed out,

> Trane's music . . . during the last two or three years of his life represented for many Blacks, the fire and passion and rage and rebellion and love they felt, especially among the young Black intellectuals and revolutionaries of that time. . . . He was their torchbearer in jazz.[3]

Malcolm X and John Coltrane were two of the leading stars in what might be called the golden age of African American Islam and jazz. This book explores the historical connections between jazz, African American Islam, and black internationalism from the 1940s to the 1970s.

It shows that from about the late 1940s through about the 1970s, Islam rose in prominence among African Americans for reasons that were related to the embrace of the religion among jazz musicians. The rise of black Islam is most often framed in relation to the Nation of Islam, and often we hear about how prison experiences, like that of Malcolm X, were influential in spreading Islam among African American communities. That was certainly a part of the story. But this book sets out to show that the golden age of jazz music was instrumental in shaping black encounters with Islam, and that not only the Nation of Islam but other strands of Islam were involved in this influential interplay between religion and black culture.

This book argues that the values that Islam and jazz shared were key to the growth of African American Islamic communities, and that it was jazz musicians who led the way in shaping encounters with Islam as they developed a black Atlantic "cool" that shaped both religion and jazz styles as well as black masculinity and femininity. As we will see, jazz musicians even used their participation in America's Cold War diplomacy cultural programs to foster connections between jazz, Islam, and black internationalism in both the United States and the Third World. Through their efforts, Islam became a prominent theme in US State Department jazz tours beginning in the Cold War and continuing up to the civil rights and Black Power movements in the 1960s. An understanding of shared black global connections in the golden age of African American Islam and jazz reveals how much jazz musicians contributed to the development of a new diasporic Afro-American identity in the 1960s. African American Islam and jazz shared parallel goals and values of black affirmation, freedom, and self-determination. Black followers of Islam and jazz musicians expressed these values by rejecting systemic racism, constructing black notions of masculinity, and developing a sense of African American religious internationalism. The term "black internationalism" in this book refers to a global black consciousness and interconnected resistance movements that led African Americans to think universally about their struggles for freedom. As the middle of the twentieth century approached, they began to see themselves in a larger global context, as part of the worldwide liberation struggles of blacks in the African diaspora and Africa, and also sometimes in solidarity with the oppositional struggles of people of color who were not black.

During this period, blacks in the United States exemplified the growing trend of religious internationalism and developed a new sense of self, in which they embraced spiritual and musical experimentation and constructed religious and racial identities, musical styles, and political protest movements against the background of rising black internationalism. This resulted in the contemporaneous development of a global diasporic consciousness connecting people of African descent. In Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, black jazz artists experimented with new musical forms, religious identities, and ideas about freedom that appealed to their fans, who were largely northern blacks, southern migrants, and Caribbean immigrants. These musicians' solidarity with the Muslim religion was one of the ways they expressed the jazz world's relationship to black internationalism.

While World War II was being fought in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, the leaders of modern jazz and the black Islamic movements transformed the musical and religious identities of black communities in the northern cities of the United States. This era of migration, urban religion, and musical creativity also witnessed a change in black masculinities (i.e., the gendered constructions and representations of the black male body and experience), expressed in the programs of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Sunni Islam, and the black Atlantic cool that provided performative structure and aesthetic shape to both black religion and jazz styles. Black musicians infused jazz with cool during their performances in clubs, dance halls, and jam sessions as well as performances for Muslim communities. They also interfaced with the programs of Muslim communities to consider their own conversion to Islam and to influence others in the 1940s and the post–World War II era. Black Atlantic cool emerged among these self-determining musicians as an alternative musical and spiritual vision characterized by an embodied, transcendent, and purifying African diasporic mode of style, performance, self-composure, social balance, and resistance that shaped the construction of black identities in religion and music.

This book traces the history, experiences, and identities of diverse African American Islamic groups from the 1940s to the 1970s, including some whose practices and theology did not conform to the traditional beliefs of Sunni Islam. Black Muslims dazzled the United States with their new communities in the urban North, communities that encountered the successive presentations of Islam during the Great Migration by religious leaders including Noble Drew Ali, W. D. Fard Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal, Wali Akram, Muhammad Ezaldeen, Sheik Nasir Ahmad, and Talib Dawud. This book reveals how new constructions of blackness and religion in the Nation of Islam interacted with the differing versions of Islam shaped by the transnational Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Sunni communities in the United States, and how the debates among the proponents of Islam in black America influenced the religious and musical landscape of jazz. Ahmadiyya Muslim missionaries were exemplars of transnationalism: they circulated their religious message widely across a number of countries, ranging from India and Pakistan to England, Ghana, and the United States, and their mission to blacks transformed the meaning of conversion among African American jazz musicians. Communities like these relied on global networks created by international migrants whose spiritual and political identities were shaped by their travel and by their religious connections to both their countries of origin and their communities in their host countries.

John Coltrane was at the forefront of those black American musicians who infused jazz with Islamic themes and with musical and religious forms from regions spanning Africa and Asia,[4] and Malcolm X led a movement to connect black American liberation to religion and politics in the Third World. Coltrane admired Malcolm's internationalist political and religious perspectives and attended his speeches in New York City. His conception of jazz was deeply influenced by Islam, and he considered converting to the religion when he was living in Philadelphia. In his early years, Malcolm was a lindy hopper star in Boston and New York. He loved jazz and was involved with Muslim communities during the rise of African American Islam, interactions that influenced his own youthful musical and religious expression. John Coltrane and Malcolm X were jazz brothers in rhythm and spirit. They lived during the era of global black liberation that spanned the period from World War II to the very beginning of the Black Power movement. During this period, hundreds of jazz artists experimented with Islam, Christianity, new forms of jazz, and other black Atlantic connections that linked Africa, the Americas, and the Muslim world, searching initially for personal transformation and freedom and ultimately circulating their claims for African American religious internationalism in national and global contexts. Coltrane and his musical colleagues played an important role in what music historian Ashley Kahn has called the "golden age of jazz," which lasted from the late 1950s to the 1970s, "when more jazz players than ever before (or since) were alive, representing every era of the tradition."[5] Paralleling the golden age of jazz was a golden age of African American Islam, which lasted from the 1940s to the 1970s, an era when many prominent black Muslim leaders and their communities presented the religion in all its dynamic diversity to the United States. As a result of their efforts, Islam emerged during the 1940s and 1950s as the iconic religion of African American religious internationalism.

Malcolm and Muslim musicians including Yusef Lateef, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, and Max Roach were the link between these two golden ages. Their stories reveal the intersecting goals and values of Islam and jazz and offer a wide lens on this era, in which musicians and their fans explored black Atlantic performance styles and began to understand spirited connections between swing, bebop, hard bop, free jazz, Christianity, Islam, and new representations of black masculinities. This book explores parallels between the social, political, and cultural foundations of both jazz and African American Islam within the broad historical context of the Great Migration, the Marcus Garvey movement, and the impact of Afro-Caribbean communities in the big cities of the 1940s and 1950s.

The story of black Boston, a community in which musicians took the lead in exploring the interactions between Garveyism, black Christianity, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam, and modern jazz, is central to this inquiry into the origins of the golden age of African American Islam. The theme of African American religious internationalism also has a compelling history in New York City, as exemplified by the soul-searching performances of black musicians including Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Ahmed Abdul-Malik, Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Art Blakey, Pharoah Sanders, Ahmad Jamal, Sahib Shihab, and Etta James. This book, then, explores a history of this internationalist era, offering a picture in which jazz frames and reshapes diasporic blackness, black American interactions with Islam, and black Atlantic religious consciousness.

In the golden age of African American Islam and jazz, performances of music, dance, and religious forms inspired and celebrated a new African American religious internationalism, which was expressed in the black Atlantic cultural innovations of jazz musicians. In the urban-based African American Muslim communities that flourished in the twentieth century, African American religious internationalism circulated visions of freedom, identity, black Atlantic cool style, artistic creativity, self-determination, and conversion.[6] Cultural historian Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, reveals how jazz musicians' "boundary-breaking"[7] performances of modern jazz and embrace of African American Islam exemplify the musical and political spirit of African American religious internationalism in the black Atlantic world:

> Examining the place of music in the black Atlantic world means surveying the self-understanding articulated by the musicians who have made it, the symbolic use to which their music is put by other black artists and writers, and social relations which have produced and reproduced the unique expressive culture in which music comprises a central and even foundational element. . . . Apart from the music and the musicians themselves, we must also take account of the work of those within the expressive culture of the black Atlantic who have tried to use its music as an aesthetic, political, or philosophical marker.[8]

Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam leader and Pan-African convert to Sunni Islam, grew up in Boston, and during his teenage years, the city's vibrant jazz culture deeply influenced his identity. Even as a young man, he strove to expand his family's Pan-African consciousness beyond Marcus Garvey's UNIA, with its focus between World Wars I and II on black internationalism, to incorporate black musical identity, black Christianity, and black Islam. Pan-Africanism can be described as a modern black consciousness promoting the global unification, freedom, and empowerment of people of African descent. Its goals are the decolonization and liberation of Africa through means as seemingly diverse as the recrafting of African culture and identity in the African diaspora and the emigration of diasporic peoples back to Africa. These ideals, African American religious internationalism, and the performative practices of jazz experimentation and improvisation shaped Malcolm's conversion to the Nation of Islam while he was in prison in his twenties as well as his interactions with religion and politics after his release.

John Coltrane, the great jazz saxophonist, had a spiritual awakening in Philadelphia in 1957 while he was married to his first wife, Juanita Naima Austin, a Muslim. He also shared cultural and political affinities with influential Muslim jazz musicians of the 1950s and 1960s, including McCoy Tyner, Art Blakey, Yusef Lateef, Sahib Shihab, Ahmed Abdul-Malik, Idrees Sulieman, Kenny Clarke, Lynn Hope, Kenny Dorham, and Rashied Ali.[9] Islam was largely responsible for shaping his musical and religious identity and his expressions of black independence, self-determination, and freedom. Coltrane's spiritual awakening inspired his second wife, pianist Alice Coltrane, saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, and other jazz musicians to synthesize musical and religious forms from a variety of black Atlantic sources including Christian nations, West and North Africa, and the African diaspora in their performances as well as in their religious lives. Coltrane's iconic performances and albums (especially *A Love Supreme*) and his spiritual quest in the 1960s fostered awareness of the enduring connections between music, religion, and freedom in the United States, the global African diaspora, and Africa—connections that paralleled Malcolm X's internationalist perspectives on black liberation in the last year of his life. Coltrane's jazz, then, provided "a soundtrack to a movement,"[10] a musical iteration of an internationalist Afro-American identity encompassing race, religion, and politics that Malcolm described as unity between black Americans, the Third World, and Africans in a struggle for freedom "by whatever means necessary."[11]

Another musician whose career reveals the mutual influences of Islam and jazz was jazz and rhythm and blues singer Etta James. James was drawn to the jazz brotherhood that Malcolm and Coltrane exemplified, and she immersed herself in African American Islam. As a young woman in Atlanta in the 1960s, she converted to the Nation of Islam and changed her name to Jamesetta X. In 1960, while she was living in the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, James came under the sway of Malcolm X. The young boxer Cassius Clay—later known as Muhammad Ali—was one of her fans when she performed in New York City, and she tried unsuccessfully to convert him to the Nation of Islam when he was eighteen years old. James eventually left the Nation of Islam and embraced the

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, but her musical career continued to be influenced by black Islam.[12]

Tenor saxophonist Yusef Lateef was a close friend of John Coltrane and his first wife, Juanita Naima Austin. In 1948 Lateef became a devout Muslim and converted to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community because, he explained, "it taught all of the virtues, of being kind and respectful to your parents and others, to have feeling and compassion for the poor. . . . When almighty God turns a person's heart toward Islam (peace) there is no other choice for the person."[13] Yusef Lateef's Islamic faith had a clear influence on his music. On albums such as *Eastern Sounds*, for instance, he incorporated Arab and Asian musical sounds into his jazz compositions.

This book explores the historical relationship of jazz not only to Islam, but also to global black religious consciousness more broadly. The stories of the jazz musicians in this book exemplify a larger history of American musicians, fans, dancers, religious folk, and political activists who practiced African American religious internationalism, which encouraged black people in diaspora to think of themselves as more in concert with Africans and the "darker races of the world" than with Europeans and white Americans. They used these ideas to construct powerful strategies against racial oppression in the United States. For many musicians, then, jazz provided a springboard for global perspectives about blackness, self-determination, social justice and resistance, and liberation.

This era also witnessed the dynamic connections between Muslim jazz artists' spiritual journeys and the way their iconic performances of jazz, their belief in Islam, and their projection of black internationalism intersected with one another to recreate rhythms, sounds, rituals, and memories evoking the legacy of Africa, the global African diaspora, and the black liberation movement in the United States. Only a few musicians, including Yusef Lateef, Ahmed Abdul-Malik, John Coltrane, and Pharoah Sanders, achieved this ambitious goal of connecting the dots between their religious discipline and musical performance practice. The performances of these Muslim jazz artists exemplified and circulated Atlantic world visions of Africa, diaspora, and blackness, showing the creative resistance strategies of black Americans that were nurtured by the extraordinary urban jazz and Muslim communities that thrived in American cities from the 1940s to the 1970s.[14] Their performances also resonate with performance studies scholar Joseph Roach's reflections about the provocative relationship between memory, performance, and the recreation of the genocidal and diasporic histories of the black Atlantic world in *Cities of the Dead* and African American studies scholar Mark Anthony Neal's reflections about black masculinity and popular culture in *Looking for Leroy*.[15]

The Great Migration, immigration from the Caribbean and West Africa, and the global travel of jazz musicians fueled dynamic interactions between Islam, jazz, and African American religious internationalism in the black communities of cosmopolitan cities including Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, where both Malcolm X and John Coltrane lived. A focus on African American religious internationalism allows us to map the thematic links of jazz and Islam to Black Power, civil rights, black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and anticolonial movements in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. African American religious internationalism also prompts an investigation of constructions of diaspora, which recall some of Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" reflections about race, enslavement, and modernity in Caribbean, British, and black American contexts, and the way these themes find expression in subversive musical sounds and identities.[16]

This book is motivated by several essential research questions: What is the historical relationship of jazz to Islam and African American religious internationalism in the lives of black jazz musicians? How does the identification of important jazz figures with African American religious internationalism and black masculinities and femininities in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia help us to document the golden age of African American Islam and jazz? How are their performances of music and religion connected to the internationalist black Christian and black Islamic "communities of resistance" and to intercultural perspectives about Africa, the African diaspora, and African American freedom?[17] What are the identity claims and controversies surrounding Islamic jazz musicians' black Atlantic religious and musical legacies in the late 1960s and early 1970s?

As research in the humanities and the social sciences suggests, the life stories, performances, and political legacies of important jazz musicians are central to our understanding of the black Atlantic roots of

African American Islam and jazz in the 1960s. In *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, Frank Kofsky studies Afro-Asian influences and black nationalism in avant-garde jazz, exploring the political connections between Coltrane and Malcolm X from a Marxist perspective. Kofsky understands that jazz musicians "perceived a fundamental reality about this country . . . that you could only know if you were black and had worked your way up through the tangled, fetid jungle of jazz clubs, dance halls, bars, narcotics, alcohol, gangsters, and so on."[18]

This book fills an important gap in the scholarship on the mutual influences of Islam and jazz in the history of popular music and African American religion. No one has systematically utilized the religious studies scholarship on urban religions and the new research on black masculinities to analyze the religious and musical significance of Islamic jazz musicians in the African diaspora. This book unites three traditions and situates the stories of Muslim musicians and their fans in the context of work in African American religious studies, black masculinity studies, and African diaspora jazz studies. All of these perspectives underline the ways the lives and work of black musicians articulated the complex connections between jazz, American religion, and the African diaspora.

The book includes four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 examines how important stylistic changes in jazz's sounds and musical practices, which influenced the reception of swing and bebop, helped to shape the construction of African American religious internationalism in black Christianity and Islam. It explores how the interplay between jazz and African American Islamic identities played out in Boston and New York in the 1940s. Chapter 1 presents the journey of Malcolm Little—later Malcolm X—as a swing jazz dancer and a practitioner of black religious internationalism and Garveyism in Boston and New York City during World War II as a case study of the larger themes of social justice and African American representations of masculinities that jazz and Islam shared. The chapter traces the origin of Malcolm's jazz practices and constructions of masculinity to black Atlantic cool, the influences of Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, and Dizzy Gillespie, and the specific historical, economic, sociological, and demographic factors in the Roxbury community of Boston, where Afro-Caribbean immigrants and black southern migrants experimented with Christian and Islamic influences in jazz, ultimately shaping African American religious internationalism in the 1940s. Chapter 1 also discusses Malcolm's early interactions with African American Christianity and the way they influenced his first encounters with Islam, which took place when he studied the religion with Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis and an Indian missionary and musician from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Roxbury.

Chapter 2 traces the development of the Nation of Islam and its first appearance in American prisons, where themes of black masculinity, Asiatic identity, racial separatism, and restoration of the black body took root. It examines Malcolm X's and Shorty Jarvis's identification with the Nation of Islam in Massachusetts prisons in the 1940s and 1950s and shows how African American Islam and jazz became synthesized in the minds of black youth during this period. The chapter then goes on to explore bebop jazz, which encouraged new performances of black masculinities and religious and musical configurations outside the earlier musical world of swing. Bebop also offered a creative space where new visions of African American religious internationalism flourished due to its heady mix of spiritual philosophy, musical practices, and experimentation. Finally, chapter 2 explores the interplay between musical and religious traditions at Boston's Nation of Islam Temple, which Malcolm X established along with black jazz musicians and budding civil rights activists in 1954.

Chapter 3 looks at the forces of transnationalism, black internationalism, masculinity, freedom, and social justice that encouraged black bebop musicians to convert to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the 1940s and 1950s, forces that expanded the Ahmadis' popularity in the jazz community during this period. It examines the transnational Islamic mission of the Ahmadiyya community in Boston, Chicago, and Detroit, the spiritual awakening of jazz artists such as Ahmed Abdul-Malik, Dakota Staton, Talib Dawud, and Yusef Lateef, Kenny Clarke's migration to Paris, the Muslim musicians in Dizzy Gillespie's band, the missionary work of the drummer Art Blakey in New York City, his sojourn in West Africa, and the Jazz Messengers and hard bop.

Chapter 4 examines the shared goals and values of jazz and Islam through the wider lens of Sunni Islam, the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and the soulful and militant aesthetic of hard bop and free jazz in the late 1950s and 1960s. This was a period in which black internationalists saw a contemporaneous emergence of black American and African freedom struggles and diasporic consciousness in religious and political movements across the modern black Atlantic world. The chapter argues that the conversion of jazz musicians to Islam was central to the ascendancy of the religion in the internationalist era of the 1960s. It tells the story of the jazz musicians who used their participation in America's Cold War diplomacy cultural programs to foster connections between jazz, black internationalism, and the transnational reception of African American culture in the Islamic world and Africa. The US State Department jazz tours began during the Cold War in 1956 and continued during the era of anticolonialism, African independence, and civil rights in the 1960s. The African American artists dispatched on these tours, including Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Randy Weston, played their music in Muslim countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, and their performances and political insights celebrated transnational musical collaborations with Third World musicians and the freedom struggles raging across diverse countries in the Islamic and African diasporas. Chapter 4, then, takes us to Philadelphia, where African American musicians like saxophonist John Coltrane, drummer Rashied Ali, and pianist McCoy Tyner forged vibrant links between Islam, jazz, and rhythm and blues in the late 1950s and 1960s. Coltrane's spiritual awakening in 1957 and his new religious identity made him an exemplar not only of black Atlantic musical and religious practices, but also of the emerging Islamic spirit that was coming to infuse Philadelphia as it had New York City and Boston.

Chapter 4 also looks at the religious and musical performances of John Coltrane, Max Roach, Etta James, Malcolm X, and several other jazz musicians, performances that exemplify the culmination of African American religious internationalism and shifting black masculine and black feminine identities in the 1960s. This chapter traces the Islamic roots of Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, Etta James's spiritual awakening in the Nation of Islam, and Coltrane's artistic and spiritual quest in hard bop, free jazz, and the Black Arts movement in New York City. It also describes how Malcolm X's and John Coltrane's quintessential meditations on Islam, jazz, and African American religious internationalism across space, time, and soundscapes resonated with the spirit of Afro-American freedom and identity during the civil rights and Black Power era, a period that saw similar black Atlantic liberation and identity formation movements in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. African American religious internationalism was a pivotal spiritual and political philosophy for Malcolm and Coltrane in 1964, an iconic year when their parallel religious and artistic paths intersected profoundly in a way that would ultimately shape the golden age of African American Islam and jazz. For in this year, John Coltrane composed his most spiritually oriented album, *A Love Supreme*, and Malcolm X performed the hajj in Mecca, became a Sunni Muslim, and articulated his jazz story and his journey to Sunni Islam in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

The conclusion completes our exploration of African American Islam and jazz by analyzing the black Atlantic visions of Islamic jazz artists and their musical and religious legacies among jazz musicians including Alice Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders during the post-Coltrane era in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It calls our attention to the generation of hip hop artists who embraced Islam in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Islam and jazz exemplified the rhythm, spirit, and political and musical mood of urban black America in the golden age of African American Islam and jazz and beyond.

Malcolm X, John Coltrane, Max Roach, Yusef Lateef, Art Blakey, Lynn Hope, and several others committed their lives to exploring black Atlantic religious and musical forms. In doing so, they spoke eloquently to diverse communities throughout the African and Islamic diasporas in ways that allow us to understand their political and cultural connections to one another and to black revolutions in the United States and the Third World. Their religious practices and musical performances expressed the vitality of a new Afro-American racial identity in the 1960s and 1970s and continue to provide insight into the black international experience in African American Islam and jazz in the twenty-first century. In short, Muslim jazz artists' search for new ways to express black affirmation, self-determination, freedom, black masculinities, and African American religious internationalism, as well as their opposition to systemic racism, exemplify the parallel goals and values of jazz and African American Islam and speak profoundly and universally about the loftier possibilities of the creative imagination and the power of the human spirit.