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INTRODUCTION

THE SCARS OF MEMORY

they ask me to remember
but they want me to remember
their memories
and I keep on remembering
mine

—Lucille Clifton.

“why some people be mad at me sometimes”

Jonathan doesn't know his family history.

—Wendell Holloway

“Brrrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinng!”

The shrill ringing of an alarm clock opens Richard Wright's explosive 1940 novel *Native Son*, deploying a new kind of language for the reading public to consider when talking about race. *Native Son* simultaneously captivated and terrified its readers with the story of Bigger Thomas's abject poverty and his subsequent slide into an impossible nightmare when he accidentally kills a wealthy white teenage girl and then rapes and murders his girlfriend to whom he has confessed the original crime.

With this book, Wright tore into the consciousness of the reading public. *Native Son* won many accolades and sold nearly a quarter of a million copies soon after being named the March selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.¹ What was it that drew readers to Bigger's nightmare? It's unlikely they came for the mere spectacle of racial violence, since they could get something akin to that merely by opening their newspaper to the crime blotter, where "colored" really meant criminal. Instead, they came to *Native*

Son because they believed that it offered them a purchase on the Negro worldview. *Native Son* allowed white liberal friends of the race to see behind the veil and moan, stammer, and shout.

This was all by design, of course, and Wright said as much in his evocative essay “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born.” He had no intention of repeating in *Native Son* the “naïve mistake” he had made in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, published two years earlier. Upon reading glowing reviews of this earlier work, Wright lamented “that I had written a book which even bankers’ daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears.”²

In the world of black cultural expression, Wright’s *Native Son* came at the end of a two-decade-long celebration of arts, letters, and music. This era, the New Negro Renaissance, was animated by a new sensibility concerning African American cultural contributions as whites raced to consume black poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, and music. It was also an era of a changing political language as blacks began to assert their claim to full citizenship more aggressively than in the past. Nationalist Marcus Garvey thrilled the black masses gathering in increasing numbers in northern and midwestern cities with his call for race pride and a black empire; intellectual and provocateur W. E. B. Du Bois warned white America that black soldiers were returning from fighting in Europe and would continue to fight for their freedoms at home; poet Claude McKay urged his audiences to “face the murderous, cowardly pack . . . Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.” Political organizations, not just individuals, were also fluent in this new discourse. For example, the Communist Party USA and then the Popular Front looked appealing to many blacks who had become frustrated with the Democratic and Republican Party status quo.³

In the fall of 1940, a mere six months after *Native Son* was published, several prominent blacks lobbied President Franklin Roosevelt, urging him to desegregate the armed forces. When labor leader A. Philip Randolph, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) executive secretary Walter White, and National Urban League head T. Arnold Hill were rebuffed, Randolph developed a new tactic aimed at forcing Roosevelt’s hand.

As the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids as well as the first president of the Popular Front-era National Negro Congress, Randolph believed he could tap into a vast network of organized workers who shared his frustrations with the pace of change. In January 1941, and in response to Roosevelt’s stonewalling, Randolph issued a call for blacks to

march on the nation's capital to denounce segregation in the armed forces as well as rampant discrimination in the nation's defense industries.

Roosevelt sent New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia and then First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to convince Randolph to cancel the march. Randolph did not comply and even increased the size of the planned protest. In late June, with only one week remaining before the march was scheduled to start, Roosevelt called Randolph to the Oval Office and said that he would do something to meet Randolph's demands if he would call off the march. This time, Randolph agreed, and Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 making discrimination in the nation's defense industries illegal and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Randolph succeeded in calling the president's bluff, and soon the March on Washington Movement, one of the earliest national civil rights organizations, was established.⁴

Randolph's meeting with Roosevelt, the signing of Executive Order 8802, and the establishment of the March on Washington Movement suggested that there was a new opportunity in America's political landscape for blacks to be more than a mere presence. Now the broader public, embodied in this moment by Book-of-the-Month Club readers and Roosevelt's executive branch apparatus, had to acknowledge an ascendant black voice.

Using this moment as a starting point, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America since 1940* listens to that black voice and the stories that it tells over the course of the long second half of the twentieth century.⁵ More specifically, *Jim Crow Wisdom* observes how this voice is articulated through personal and public memories, academic and popular literature, dance, film, and heritage tourism, all the while examining how these ways of self-imagining are connected to a black identity that is engaged in a battle to secure full citizenship rights. Relying on so many different types of sources helps us develop a portrait of black memory work that is appropriately complex, reflecting the consistencies and contradictions embedded in the construction of the African American character.

Memory and identity have always been intertwined. Parents have always told stories about themselves, their families, or their people in order to contextualize their decisions in the present or to prepare future generations for the worlds to come. Similarly, politicians, clergy, artists, activists, and intellectuals have shared their visions of the past in order to stake claims to the present and future and to shape the collective identity of the groups they address. Speaking specifically about African America, we know that as long as enslaved people of African descent or, later, second-class citizens of African descent journeyed throughout the diaspora, many individuals have waged public and private battles to claim full citizenship rights and

have done so by weaving protest and admonitions into powerful autobiographies. One only has to think of the narratives written by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, or William Wells Brown to understand that there is a long history of claims for full human rights communicated via memoirs.⁶ These kinds of narratives have been consistently popular. One reason for the popularity, historian John Blassingame argues, is that the mere act of the autobiographical claim to humanity was deeply therapeutic for the author and the reading public. For black authors, the autobiography allowed them “to express their true feelings without having them distorted by whites. It imposed some order on an irrational world.” For black readers, the autobiography was a moment when a “fellow sufferer had ‘attacked’ their white oppressors, proved the race’s moral superiority over whites, and demonstrated that the readers’ failures were not due to personal shortcomings, but rather to racial discrimination.”⁷

Blassingame offered this assessment in 1973, almost perfectly in the middle of the era that is the focus of this book. Blassingame was writing in the years immediately following the apparent collapse of the modern civil rights movement and at the height of the black pride era when talk within the black community of its moral superiority over whites was especially resonant. As much as Blassingame reflected that era’s revolutionary sensibilities, he could not have seen that he was writing on the cusp of a radically intensifying phase of a different kind of revolution—this one related to information and technology.

When we consider the breadth, depth, and pace of technological change since the early 1940s—television saturation, twenty-four-hour news cycles, desktop publishing—we see that the scope and pace of sharing information has fundamentally changed.⁸ However, even though the technological changes of the last seventy years have made sharing a personal story with a consuming public significantly easier for an individual, thus suggesting the formation of new collective memories and identities, the stories’ themes, especially when they pertain to black life in America, have not changed dramatically. Indeed, as *Jim Crow Wisdom* reads black memories across time and across a broad spectrum of spaces, several phenomena abide: the traumas of racial humiliation and shame are regularly narrated, class issues hide behind the racial veil, there is a palpable anxiety about telling children the truth about race, and vexed questions about home and belonging abound. There is no doubt that black memory gets narrated in different ways over the breadth of the twentieth century, especially in light of the dramatic political, social, and economic changes since 1940, but this is largely a history of a changing same.⁹

At one level, it is easy to see why the narrative of the black past is so stable. Put simply, racism and the physical and psychological violence that accompanies it has and continues to be a key component of the American character. Reaching back to the Civil War, a moment that is undoubtedly fundamental to understanding just what this American character is, historian David Blight points to the effects violence had on how blacks narrated their past: "Mob violence and eventually lynching were so deeply embedded in black folk memory that virtually every major African American writer since emancipation has made these subjects central to his or her work in poetry and prose." Blight continues, "The sheer persistence of themes of ritualized violence in black writing indicates, as one critic has argued, that a form of 'racial memory' took hold."¹⁰

Violence, or the threat of it, is critical to understanding the formation of a black identity through memory. It is the literal or figurative cut, after all, that is simultaneously the original injury and the inspiration for observation and witness. It may well be, however, that the story of the resulting scar tells us more about the nuances of racial memory. The misshapen edges of the scar, its keloid surface, and the way one's fingers absentmindedly trace the original injury affect the retelling of the story that led to the cut in the first place.

THE CUT

The title of this book is taken from "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," a short autobiographical piece Richard Wright penned in 1936. In the essay, Wright recounts a battle he and his friends engaged in with white boys who lived, quite literally, on the other side of the tracks. On an almost daily basis the black boys targeted their enemies with cinders that were thrown from the trains that passed by their back doors. One day, the white boys responded with milk bottles. Exposed in the field of battle, young Richard was hit behind his ear. A neighbor rushed him to the doctor for stitches and then left Richard sitting on his front porch, feeling angry at the injustice that accompanied the differential in the boys' weaponry and waiting for his mother to come home to console him. More than sympathy, however, he wanted his mother to tell him "exactly what to do next time."¹¹

After Richard recounted the story, his mother examined his wound and then slapped him, asking him why he didn't hide, scolding him for fighting in the first place. Wright remembered, "I was outraged, and bawled. Between sobs I told her that I didn't have any trees or hedges to hide behind. There wasn't a thing I could have used as a trench. And you couldn't throw very far when you were hiding behind the brick pillars of a house. She

grabbed a barrel stave, dragged me home, stripped me naked, and beat me till I had a fever of one hundred and two. She would smack my rump with the stave, and, while the skin was still smarting, impart to me gems of Jim Crow wisdom.”¹²

Whether or not we agree with Mrs. Wright’s pedagogical style, it is clear that she was trying to prepare her son for a world where blacks often had no recourse when engaged in disputes with whites, a world where one had to know one’s place according to the dictates of racial etiquette. This was Arkansas in the 1910s, after all. But Richard’s interaction with his mother and his mother’s intention were not unique to that time and place.

I grew up in a situation quite unlike young Richard’s: two parents in the house, upper middle class, a comfortable and fairly sheltered suburban experience. My playmates were a polyglot mix of children of scientists, patent attorneys, and first-generation personal computer developers. Although I was not blind to race, I had lived my life fairly free of its negative contingencies. This slowly began to change in the fall of my first semester of high school.

I knew something was “different” when my father told me one morning that he wanted to drive me to school. We lived only about two miles from my high school, and I normally took the bus. A pattern had been established years ago: Whenever my father wanted to bring up difficult subjects, he took me to school, figuring that he could jump straight to the point, complete his thought, and get me out of the car before I could ask too many questions. There was the introductory sex-ed ride when I was just starting junior high school (he didn’t realize I had already learned the details in fifth or sixth grade); there was the follow-up ride informing me that I might be old enough to get a girl pregnant (a very awkward conversation to say the least, since I still wasn’t yet interested in girls in any sort of potentially reproductive way); and then there was this particular morning’s ride. As I got into the car, I wondered what the topic might be. That day’s theme: fighting.

In my father’s mind, I was now old enough and tall enough to know that I might be singled out by someone itching for a fight in order to prove who knows what. Having never been in a brawl myself, I was confused as to where this was coming from or going. My father pressed on. “The fact is,” he said, “if someone decides to go after you for whatever reason, you have to protect yourself, but you cannot afford to swing back.” He continued, “Because you are tall, people are going to think you are older than you actually are. But more importantly, because of ‘the way things are,’ people are going to suspect and punish you first if you ever get into a fight. It won’t

matter who started it, or what the reason was. People will assume you were the antagonist.”

My father didn’t have to tell me what he meant by “the way things are.” By this point in my life I knew enough code to understand that he was talking about what we now call racial profiling. Even though fair-skinned, I am clearly black. And, because of the way things are, I was suspect.

This was one of my first race memories. I have written elsewhere about elementary school teasing about being an “Oreo” and about a racist teacher in junior high school who refused to recommend me for high school advanced placement U.S. history because he feared it would be too hard for me.¹³ But this car ride with my father was the first instance I can recall when my race was involved as a threat. Because of my blackness, my right to protect myself was abridged; my presumption that I would be held innocent until proven otherwise was misplaced.

In retrospect, all of the preceding feels like a quaint memory, since I was sufficiently safe due to my temperament and the protection afforded by my privileged upper middle-class family cocoon. In time, however, I discovered that there was more to this story than a father merely preparing his son for a world of inequality.

THE SCAR

Just a few years ago, I discovered that my father’s early morning admonition was the result of his own experience as a teenager when he was thrown in jail for pulling a butcher’s knife on the white boys who lived on the next block. These were the same boys who beat him up every day on his way home from school, the same boys who everyone in the neighborhood knew were never up to anything good. While he was in jail for only a few hours (and was never charged with a criminal offense), the memory lingered. This was only one instance in my father’s life, but I’ve come to understand that having to live with the presumption of guilt was a scar he wanted to keep hidden. It is a scar, moreover, that he wanted his sons to avoid acquiring. (At some point in the last decade I learned that my older brother received the same advice in a similar morning drive to school.) Fortunately for me, my father did not feel the need to beat his gems of Jim Crow wisdom into me. But the lack of the literal lashing does not mean that anything less brutal was going on. Despite my father’s efforts to hide his own scars and thus protect his sons, the fact is that our morning drives were conveying their own burdens wrought of painful memories. These conversations were cuts, albeit clean ones, given all the contaminants that life presented.

This excursion into my own experiences is not the kind of momentary rupture in the historian's third-person omniscience that one typically finds in books' introductions or prefaces. Even though I fully intended to write this book with the third-person voice that is familiar to historians, the further I moved into my research, the more I realized that others' memories were similar to my own or to those of my parents before they passed them down to me. As I would discover, the consistency of particular themes in black memory overwhelmingly transcended the kinds of contextualizing particularities that would otherwise result in unique stories. Put another way, decades, class status, geography, civil rights law, and certainly temperament separated a young Richard Wright from a young Jonathan Holloway, but long memories of America's broken promises made it clear to our parents that they needed to do the same thing: prepare their children by sharing a deep knowledge of denial, even if, as was the case with my father, he was determined not to tell the actual story that motivated his actions. My father and young Richard's mother were, in Ralph Ellison's devastating formulation, giving their children a taste of the bitter medicine to come. "One of the Southern Negro family's methods of protecting the child," Ellison wrote, "is severe beatings—a homeopathic dose of the violence generated by black and white relationships."¹⁴

A CERTAIN KIND OF CUT, A CERTAIN KIND OF SCAR

There is a larger methodological point to the shifting perspectives that appear in *Jim Crow Wisdom*. It is my attempt to wrestle with the tension between memory and history and, in so doing, examine the very principles at the core of my training as a historian. When dealing with memory, the historian is faced with interesting challenges: What do you do when the memories of the actual participants in a specific event contradict official or archival records? What do you do when the people who are at the center of your study have been systematically denied a space in the official archive in the first place, since their lives had been deemed unremarkable and are thus "lost to history"? How reliable is the archive? How reliable is memory? What can be known? What is a fact?

Pierre Nora famously addressed aspects of these questions in his essay "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." Nora explored how sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) could be used in the modern world to connect the ephemerality of memory to the institutionality of history. Memory and history, Nora argued, were in "fundamental opposition": "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in

permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.” Because the living and the dead could not coexist in the same space, “history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.”¹⁵

In a very different context, essayist and novelist Tony Earley addressed similar challenges found in the clash between memory and history:

On the night of July 20, 1969, my little sister and I followed our father into the backyard, where we studied the moon through a surveyor’s transit owned by a neighbor. . . . When I wrote about that night almost thirty years later, I described the full moon in detail, how, once magnified, it had seemed almost too bright to look at. When a fact checker at *Harper’s* magazine informed me that the moon on the night of July 20, 1969, had not been full, but had been a waxing crescent, I refused at first to believe her. When I looked it up for myself and discovered that she was right, I was faced on one hand with a memory so strong I was sure it had to be true, and on the other hand with an objective truth significantly different than what I remembered. At that moment I came to understand, if not embrace, the true nature of the phrase *creative nonfiction*.

When I remember that night, the moon I see in my mind’s eye is still full.¹⁶

In *Jim Crow Wisdom* I accept Nora’s notion that memory and history are fundamentally at odds with each other. The historian in me recognizes that the past is messy and that the scholar’s task is to offer a reasoned judgment about what can be known. History may do violence to memory; it may be the original cut that invites the scar, but it’s likely the best we are going to do in our efforts to understand the past. At the same time, I just as eagerly accept Earley’s determination to embrace a faulty memory as a kind of reality, even in the face of a confirmable and objective truth. I recognize that it is paradoxical to hold both ideas simultaneously and to value them equally—but that is precisely the point of my movement between the first- and third-person perspectives in the pages that follow.

By way of illustration, there is much in my own memory that I can track down and confirm as true or false. But in *Jim Crow Wisdom*, the literal truth is less important to me than the act of remembrance itself. This is the act that shapes a consciousness and an identity, and this is the act that I find most compelling in telling stories about the black past. In charting this

course, I am embracing what Jeremy Popkin considers one of the historian's greatest fears (and the reason most historians refrain from writing about themselves): that in exploring and sharing my own experiences I will complicate or even contradict "generalizations [that I and my] colleagues have painstakingly elaborated to make sense of the past."¹⁷ So be it.

Making this methodological decision required that I think carefully about this work's relationship to the archive. Trained as a historian to seek out archives to answer questions and to rely on archives as arbiters of truth, I now recognize that archives are repositories of a constructed truth—one that is highly mediated by government officials, estate executors, authors, and families in advance of a collection's donation. When considered in this light, one can understand Michel-Rolph Trouillot's perceptive claim that the archive is a place where facts are "assembled."¹⁸

I still rely on and value deeply these brick-and-mortar archives, but my research in *Jim Crow Wisdom* has taught me to value the archive of the imagination as well. Like any archive, the imagination is a place that is fundamentally about assemblage: a mixture of our best efforts to remember the past accurately, the eroding effects of time, and a desire for narrative clarity and poignancy. Relying on the imagination for its archival properties is central to this book and helps us develop a richer sense of memory and of history.

Imagination, of course, is not only about a reconstruction of a truth. Quite often it is the result of a fabrication of a truth, either through a determination to leave out certain details or through a commitment to a flat-out lie. In his work examining southern identity and memory, W. Fitzhugh Brundage addresses the tension between memory and forgetfulness, pointing out that elisions are deliberate acts that must be understood as such. "One conspicuous manifestation of both the interpretive character of historical memories and standards of credibility," he writes, "is the propensity of groups to suppress as well as to recall portions of the past. Within collective memories a dialectic exists between the willfully recalled and deliberately forgotten past."¹⁹ Building on the same logic as Brundage, Jennifer Jensen Wallach adds falsehoods to the equation. Writing about the tension between what can be known (history) and what can be felt (memory), Wallach argues, "Historical reality, specifically the inside of a historical moment, can be composed of both lying and truth telling, remembering, forgetting, and perhaps reinventing."²⁰

Robert Penn Warren, though, says it best. In the foreword to his book *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, Warren recounted a conversation with a black leader who questioned Warren's faith that other blacks would be honest

with him during interviews: “What makes you think that Negroes will tell you the truth?” Warren simply replied, “Even a lie is a kind of truth.”²¹

Lying. Forgetting. The archive. The imagination. All are part of the process of fashioning a collective memory and identity. While I pay specific attention throughout *Jim Crow Wisdom* to African Americans’ memory work and its attendant nuances, the fact is that everyone participates in the construction of racial memory. It just so happens that some people are more aware than others of the silences, lies, and imaginations that construct that memory and identity and that these same individuals are equally unaware that the memory of the “other” has a direct effect on the memory of the “mainstream.” In fact, as this book hopes to make clear, black collective memory is a memory of the forgotten, a memory of those whose very presence made the rest of the country white, a memory of those who lived lives struggling against a denial of their citizenship so that others would know how to claim their stake in America. The narrator in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* says as much when he discovers that the secret behind Optic White, the brightest and most pure white paint produced by the Liberty Paint Factory, was ten drops of “the stuff”—a jet-black solution that enhanced Optic’s brilliance.

Although the precise date eludes me, I remember perfectly well when I began to understand that black memory was in a deep conversation with and had a profound effect on the formation of the American character. As it happens, the setting for this event told much of the story: Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. My parents, aware of my growing interest in jazz, took me to see Dizzy Gillespie, one of the masters. Even though Gillespie was headlining the event, I imagine that this was a free concert that residents of the district’s metropolitan area know as one of the frequent charms of the city. A military big band was playing with Gillespie, probably the United States Air Force Airmen of Note.

The audience that afternoon or evening was as one might expect, given the state and style of integration in 1980s America. This was a black, white, and brown audience that represented the area’s upper middle class. Given the setting, I imagine that this was also a “mainstream” audience, one that was fairly innocent of the broader range of jazz styles, that could cite only a handful of Gillespie’s most famous tunes, and that mainly knew Gillespie for his utterly unique embouchure and trumpet. Since I was sufficiently confident of my future status as a legendary saxophonist, I remember thinking that I was somewhere above the audience that joined me at the DAR hall to listen to Gillespie. I am at a loss to explain exactly why that was, however, since I was not especially versed in anything but Gillespie’s “Salt Peanuts” and “Night in Tunisia.”

The opening act featured an exciting version of Chick Corea's "Spain," a technically challenging piece that my high school jazz ensemble happened to be wrestling with at the same time. Granted, there was no comparison between the two groups' mastery of the material—the Airmen of Note were quite a bit better than the Winston Churchill Bulldogs High School Jazz Band—but the very fact that I was working on the same piece that the professionals were playing only reinforced my sense of insider knowledge.

Once the Airmen had sufficiently warmed up the audience, Dizzy Gillespie strolled out to adoring applause. The real show was about to start. In my estimation, the audience was going to receive a history lesson on America's most famous native art form. What I did not and could not anticipate was that Gillespie would offer a lesson on American social and political history even before the first downbeat or syncopation.

His stunning musical talent aside, Gillespie was beloved for his sharp sense of humor and his ability to win the crowd over with the physicality of his playacting—the arched eyebrow, the mugging for the audience, the short dance steps during an interlude. On this occasion, however, Gillespie chose a different path. As he walked onstage, he paused and dramatically looked around the theater. He slowly approached the microphone, taking in every last bit of the performance space. Eschewing even a simple greeting, Gillespie instead marveled aloud, "So this is what this place looks like inside. I thought I'd never see it."

All of my accumulated sense of self evaporated as the audience laughed loudly at his mock wonderment. I am confident that some members of the audience laughed louder than others and with a deeper, more psychologically personal understanding of Gillespie's comment. The observation, however, and the humor behind it, were completely lost to me. I looked at my parents, wondering what they knew that I did not as they joined in on what had to be the largest inside joke I had ever witnessed.

Until that moment, I thought I knew that Gillespie's humor tended toward sweet and innocent clowning onstage. After the concert, when I spoke with my parents about my confusion, I discovered how Gillespie's humor could also be filled with the pathos of individual and communal pain remembered across generations. I can now say with a historian's accumulated confidence that, *of course*, with his joke, Gillespie was thumbing his nose at the venue that hosted him. Some forty-five years earlier, the DAR notoriously refused to let famed contralto Marian Anderson perform in Constitution Hall, since her appearance would violate the hall's strict race rule that prohibited blacks in the audience and on the stage.²²

Gillespie knew that Anderson's experience with the DAR and then her eventual and triumphant Easter Sunday concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial served as an important marker in U.S. cultural and political history. Just a few of the basic facts surrounding the controversy underscore the concert's significance: First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned her membership with the DAR over the organization's refusal; remarkably, the 75,000 people who attended that morning's concert could not find signs indicating where "colored" or "white" must sit; and finally, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes introduced Anderson's performance, claiming, "Genius, like justice, is blind. . . . Genius draws no color line." Gillespie's mock astonishment, then, was a sly reminder of the DAR's unintentional role in altering the nation's consciousness about the possibilities of African American citizenship.

Years after I attended Dizzy Gillespie's concert, when I was researching my dissertation, in fact, I finally understood just how important Marian Anderson's concert was. One of my interviewees, an octogenarian native Washingtonian, recalled, "After that concert, everything looked different in America as far as blacks were concerned." This gentleman was not making a literal claim about difference; rather, he spoke to a communal sense among African Americans that addressed the possibilities of the future while remaining cognizant of and always responding to a long memory of racialized subjugation and second-class status. Although there clearly isn't a causal link between the concert and what followed, it is not unimportant that almost exactly a year after Marian Anderson's performance, *Native Son* was published, and that less than a year later A. Philip Randolph began to organize the march on Washington.

Clearly, in the worlds of culture and politics, new sets of possibilities were being contested. In the efforts to articulate a new black mentality, new memories were being assembled. This is a story about these memories and how they were used to shape the contours of African American identity in the long second half of the twentieth century. This is a story about the complicated subtexts that class-based narratives presented in the face of the more obvious and unifying logics that race offered. This is a story about the traumas and evasions as they were found in the academic world of ideas, the popular world of ideas, the consumable world of ideas, the public and private worlds of ideas, and the built environment of ideas. This is a story of Jim Crow wisdom.