Introduction

Anthem: Toward a Sound Franchise

Get them to sing your songs and they’ll want to know who you are.
—Paul Robeson

Music is a method. Beyond its many pleasures, music allows us to do and imagine things that may otherwise be unimaginable or seem impossible. It is more than sound; it is a complex system of mean(ing)s and ends that mediate our relationships to one another, to space, to our histories and historical moment. The movement of music—not simply in response to its rhythms but toward collective action and new political modalities—is the central exposition of Anthem. Within the African diaspora, music functions as a method of rebellion, revolution, and future visions that disrupt and challenge the manufactured differences used to dismiss, detain, and destroy communities. The anthems developed and deployed by these communities served as articulations of defense and were so powerful that they took flight and were adopted by others. Marginalized groups around the world have taken advantage of the special alchemy that musical production demands, including the language, organized noise, and performance practices that represent, define, and instruct the performers and receivers of these musics. The statement by Paul Robeson used here as epigraph acknowledges these processes by situating music as a meaning-making endeavor, one that is strategically employed to develop identification between people who otherwise may be culturally, ideologically, or spatially separate or
distinct from one another. Through “get[ting] them to sing [his] songs” Robeson compelled sounded and embodied action, thereby constructing an audible global public with the potential to radically adjust their political circumstances.

The songs of tragedy and triumph that Robeson offered to arouse beleaguered workers offer evidence of the transformative elements of music and performance. They are not the only such evidence. *Anthem* is an interdisciplinary cultural history that charts multiple acts in diasporic music making that have transformed Black political cultures. From the Black South’s demand to “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” to the Black women workers who declared “We Shall Overcome,” certain songs have helped to sustain world-altering collective visions. While they are compelling, it is more than the artistry or charisma of the music or performer that draws people together.¹ In the ways that they symbolize and call into being a system of sociopolitical ideas or positions, the songs that I analyze as anthems are devices that make the listening audience and political public merge. Listening to Black anthems is a political act in performance because it mobilizes communal engagements that speak to misrecognition, false histories, violence, and radical exclusion. The songs carried alternative theorizations and practices of blackness, becoming representations that were sought out, not stumbled upon. Unlike standard national anthems, Black anthems were not ubiquitous but instead were performed selectively, and even when their usage was not formalized there was always some clarity of ends engendered by the performance. Collectively singing and listening within these choice circumstances, then, was a method of participation within the freedom dreams and liberation projects of an emergent diaspora.

Through anthems, the delineation between art and politics as well as listener and actor is blurred. Anthems demand something of their listeners. In performance they often occasion hands placed over hearts or standing at attention. Yet more than a physical gesture, anthems require subscription to a system of beliefs that stir and organize the receivers of the music. At its best this system inspires its listeners to believe that the circumstances or world around them can change for the better—that the vision of freedom represented in the song’s lyrics and/or history are worth fighting for in the contemporary moment. Black communities boast remarkable histories of struggle for freedom through collective
mobilizations that often expand beyond the level of the nation, and their anthems are the sound texts that most poignantly record the political issues and contests that arise therein.

Anthem investigates the music that organized the Black world in the twentieth century. As performative political acts, this music is able to mobilize Black populations in service of a particular set of goals through careful attention to and debate over intragroup conceptions of community, racial formation, and political affiliation. These anthems are transnational texts composed of a set of musical forms and a set of organizing strategies within Black movement cultures and are bound together by African derived performance techniques, Western art traditions, attachments to social justice organizations, iconic performers and performances, relationships to exile, and collective visions of freedom. In their performances around the world they take with them myriad histories and struggles that both ground and invent the audience's relationship to their sociopolitical present.

There is a politico-theological basis for the composition and performance of anthems that disrupts any easy categorization of Black-produced texts as such. Within the ancient Western traditions of the antiphon from which the word “anthem” derives, the call-and-response that lies at the center of Black musics was used as a response to a sovereign body, initially the godhead. The word of God was recited to the congregation, who in turn answered with their anthem, a song style that by the nineteenth century was delivered by a nation in response to their government. This type of response, whether it be to a God figure or state formation, relies upon performances of acquiescence and obedience, two techniques of survival under domination employed only selectively by the African descended. Black cultural practice was the release, the counternarrative that did not identify response as its sole, or even primary, imperative. There were other communicative and methodological strategies at play. Black anthems were not intended as responses to the state/nation, nor to local authorities, although their practice and performance by an organized group of Black women and men initiated an exchange between the surveilling and listening state (local, national, international) and the movement actor and/or organization. An inability to recognize the politico-sonic decentering of a governing subject of response (the Godhead/nation) by the African descended has led
recent critics of Black anthems to erroneously identify their projects as nonracial and, by extension, apolitical. As a movement strategy, anthemic musical exchange was a social relay practiced, first and foremost, among the organization, its members, and those whom they sought to mobilize. Motivated by the need to instill the ethics of self-determination and pride in their members, these movement organizations first negotiated relationships to their families, friends, and neighbors. Because there were elements of intraracial difference that conditioned these engagements, these actors did not capitulate to the political as a static realm of engagement controlled from the top down; the political was wherever three or four gathered in the name of justice and labored to speak to one another. This intensive effort at political struggle through racial formation is the process and project, for example, that allowed “We Shall Overcome” to grow from a locally situated protest song to an anthem that transgresses the ideo-temporal frames used to simplify and contain Black movement activity.

When placed alongside Western definitions and practices, the anthemic formation described above approximates a counteranthem, in that there is a critical engagement with the form already embedded within Black anthems. The anthems of the African descended represented here engaged in parallel political projects with those of the liturgical or national variation; they were similarly imagined as effective and powerful performances of cohesion, yet they were situated as internal communiqués and acts of political performance that resisted the containments and fixity of nations and rights—both of which were barriers to the imaginations that through Black music condoned improvisation and exploration, demand and accountability beyond rhetoric. I am interested in pursuing the anthem as it moves in excess of these limits not as a way of setting Black anthems up as an antidote per se but as a way of foregrounding the ways in which Black musics have remixed the modalities of the state in order to foster alternative exercises and experiences of freedom and justice. Beyond a rights paradigm that privileges only those principles and persons established and enlisted, Black anthems negotiated and announced the ambitions and claims of those whose very bodies threw into crisis the normativity of rules and liberties. Black anthems construct a “sound franchise,” which I argue is an organized melodic challenge utilized by the African descended to
announce their collectivity and to what political ends they would be mobilized. These conversations did not exist outside of the political geographies in which the performers gathered, yet neither were they defined by them. This “franchise” works inside of tension by signaling the presence of a state even as the Black anthems work against or in defiance of its privileges. Composed of a series of alternative performance practices developed and executed to counteract the violent exclusions and techniques of silencing contained within the governing structures of white supremacy, the sound franchise is also proactive and in advance of these codified structures because it works toward an ideal that exceeds the rights bestowed by any particular nation, thereby ushering its performers into formative international solidarities. The terminology of the franchise signals the duplication of these texts across community, time, and space, and like the corporate models, these anthems are situated in differently located, yet aligned, political conditions, thereby becoming representatives or approximations of the original in performance rather than an exact replica.

Anthem begins from the premise that an analysis of the composition, performance, and uses of Black anthems allows for a more complex reading of racial and political formations within the twentieth century and expands our understanding of how and why diaspora was a formative conceptual and political framework of modern Black identity. Scholastic emplotments of the African diaspora grew through anticolonial histories during the Cold War and carry with them an attachment to political struggle, an attachment that I preserve in Anthem. The African diaspora is a “dynamic, ongoing and complex phenomenon stretching across time and geography” that has in the past decade been challenged to also consider not only (in)voluntary movement but also what Hazel Carby and Tina Campt discuss as the “settling” of those populations. The art/work of these communities demonstrates the “production” of identity described by Stuart Hall that, like diaspora, “is never complete, always in process.” My use of the signifier “Black” throughout Anthem is a way to call attention to the overlapping projects of diaspora and racial formation that actively seek recognition in mutual struggle. “Black” signals a transnational culture composed of but always negotiated by a group of individuals who share a common ancestry in Africa. Because it too often is used to dismiss or obscure difference, “Black” in
Anthem is duly troubled through those who make sounds in its name. So too is Africa, which is represented not only as a site of struggle and imagination but also as the progenitor of a flexible set of transferable knowledges of technique and performance that, as Olly Wilson argues, organize “Black music” as “the common sharing of a core of conceptual approaches to the process of music making [that] is not basically quantitative but qualitative.”

The sound productions of political actors are undervalued within Black movement literatures, even those histories of well-known and appreciated groups and figures such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association under Marcus Garvey. While scholastic adjustment is part and parcel of any academic project, I am less interested in revising previous accounts of these figures and movements than I am in demanding that we listen to them. Through an intense engagement with their sounds, I argue that new perspectives and consequences are realized. I will again situate these organizations and movement organizers within Black freedom struggles, but I do so in order to document the ways in which the musical performance of anthems both guides and throws into crisis their political aims and objectives. Like any effort at representation, these anthems are flawed and embody contradiction; there are exclusions embedded within their composition—whether textual or musical—that limit their effectiveness and reach. They are not universally held or appreciated—at best, they speak to and for most of the people most of the time (more likely, they managed speech for some). In this respect, they are not unlike any other national anthem in that their communities are selectively imagined and exclusive. Black anthems also are similarly powerful, however, because they exhibit efforts by the African descended to compose an alternative politics and repertoire of belonging, sometimes defined and/or practiced as nationalism, other times as camaraderie or affiliation. Whatever the terminology, these pieces demonstrate the vivid imaginations and performances of solidarity employed by the African descended.

The impulse behind each anthem’s composition and performance was unique, but each creatively combined racial and political insights and proscriptions. This tandem imperative, in which one was necessarily conjoined to the other in theory and praxis, produced dense texts that changed the contemporary realities and futures of the composers,
performers, and their audiences. Their sonic experiments grew and conjured new projects and structures of identification that challenged, at various moments, white supremacist modernity, Western empire, two-party politics in the United States, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. In the absence of free speech, the vote, and other methods of state-sanctioned political participation, Black men and women constructed their own methods and spheres of subjection, influence, and communication. Music has been centrally configured within this project, both pre- and post-Emancipation, and has, according to theorist Fred Moten, evidenced the impossible commodity speech rued by Karl Marx that has pushed against, undermined, and reconfigured value. Black music remains that horizon of “both the performance of the object and the performance of humanity” but is recalibrated through Black anthems, which, as collectively imagined and practiced speech acts, attempt to mobilize sonic rebellions outside of financial exchange. Although multiplied in performance, differences in language and location meant that these anthems, most often, were not experienced as ritualized tomes; performance condones, and oftentimes demands, innovation and change, and these pieces, even if regulated, remained dynamic. They did, however, carry resonances of both technique and position. These anthems are projects of political accumulation; from performance to performance the text grew to incorporate other histories, voices, and political circumstances. In this way, Black anthems cannot be isolated within one incident or performance—they must be understood comparatively. With this expressive vehicle at their disposal, the African descended used their spheres of influence to define new culturo-political communities in direct defiance of the regimes erected to contain them. The most powerful of these articulations were the anthems, which constituted Black political thought in performance.

Black anthems are dense texts that expose the negotiations at work between the West and its Others, the marketplace and the commons, and the individual and the collective. The Western hymn tradition that influenced many of the arrangements for European anthems was not the sonic landscape into which Black anthems were launched. The development of Black anthems occurred at a moment of increased capital gains for Black popular music. Mamie Smith's 1920 hit for Okeh
Records, “Crazy Blues,” set into motion an industry-wide investment in Black music through “race records.” Blues and jazz took center stage as the popular representations of Black America and became mediating tools in race relations. Black anthems, more than Black popular music, insightfully document these articulations because their use and practice are not primarily motivated by financial imperatives; they instead may be described as motivated by what historian Robin Kelley terms “freedom dreams,” ideas and artistic practices attached to movements of conscience. While Black musics have traditionally been a hybrid of sentience and principle, emotion and movement, Black anthems are particularly capable of creating “a world of pleasure, not just to escape the everyday brutalities of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, but to build community, establish fellowship, play and laugh, and plant seeds for a different way of living, a different way of hearing.” The circulation of 1920s Black movement anthems offered a potent political counterpoint to the mass-produced “race records” of the time in that they publicly grappled with how the “race” of “race records” was (and should be) constituted. Through that, they liberated the collapsed Black identity of the marketplace by articulating associations and communities of both race (“a different way of living”) and sound (“a different way of hearing”).

The six songs discussed and analyzed within Anthem are the political acts of performance that defined and called attention to Black cohesion and, through this sound franchise, mobilized hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of the African descended and their allies in the twentieth century. The music in these scenes of political struggle was more than a “soundtrack” for the events surrounding it. These sonic productions were not ancillary, background noise—they were absolutely central to the unfolding politics because they held within them the doctrines and beliefs of the people who participated in their performance, either as singers or listening audience. Those involved in the performance were actively engaging in a quest for alternatives to their political present and were assisted in imagining and enacting that change by the songs on their lips and in their ears: the anthems. These texts were not envisioned or managed by culture brokers in order to accompany the movement actors; the anthems were, instead, the music made by those actors who proactively arranged their own sonic treatises. The reach of
the anthem was proportional to the reach of the movement, although it often exceeded it. As the organizations and political communities grew, so too did their anthems, yet it was not unidirectional. Anthems allowed these groups to connect with populations beyond their immediate reach (through staff, organizers, literature) and therefore were both a result of movement momentum and a propelling force behind it.

While certain universals are apparent, the complicated interplay of performer and audience is specific to each of these songs. Some of the anthems were written with four-part harmonies that organically lace together a rich communal performance, while others are solo-voiced anthems whose performers embodied the political struggles of an aggrieved global majority and, through their complicated relationships to the nation, became troubadours for various movements. The attachment of these songs, performers, and performances to political struggle differently configured the acts and actors through a process of meaning making that centered the stakes involved in musical production and performance. This act of “musicking,” to borrow from musicologist Christopher Small, was agentive and future-sighted in its forecast of the music’s effects.14 It was an organized and organizing effort in which the individual singers were no longer soloists: they were, within movement struggle, the embodied amplifier for a collective who refused the limitations of the term “audience” and instead became a “public.”15 Drawing upon philosopher John Dewey,16 I contend that Black diasporic publics grew in response to their radical exclusion from an imagined Great Society and communicated with one another through music in order to form and mobilize its alternative: the locally driven “Black counterpublics” described by political scientist Michael Dawson, which are antibourgeois and harbor critiques of liberalism. Although far from perfect, these counterpublics have the potential to “provide the institutional and political base to facilitate communication and criticism across . . . diverse elements.”17 Twentieth-century musico-political counterpublics were composed of members of Black and interracial social justice organizations, radical of-color intellectuals and cultural workers, and allied actors from myriad class and national backgrounds. This diverse constellation of movement participants grounded the various camps engaged in organized struggle, yet, far from being uncritically unified, these organizations and their extended publics worked
under tension. In addition to external political and social pressures, there were internal struggles for recognition and acceptance that were often (and perhaps unknowingly) played out in the performance of their anthem. The multivocal antiphony characteristic of Black music is, through these anthems, identifiable as both the straightforward layering of sound (call-and-response) and the intracommunity contests embedded within and emboldened by that exchange. Gender, nation, and class are all negotiated affiliations within these organizations, and their anthems demonstrate, through composition and text, the ways in which members and performers were instructed and constructed within their political community and imaginary.

The genealogy of Black music details the ways in which it has served as a laboratory for the interplay of racial solidarity and struggle. An Afro-Anglophone tradition of resistance among the enslaved is heard in the spirituals and field hollers, which carried messages of rebellion and techniques of survival. These messages have continued unabated throughout the twentieth century, taking shape through rags, art music, the behemoth of jazz, folk, soul, and, most recently, the lyrical urban symphonies of the disinherited through hip-hop. Leverage is constituted through this musical method in myriad ways: as communication and strategy to listening comrades or enemies, flight through performance or technologies of sound, and finance through recording industries. In *Anthem*, I investigate the first and second of these effects.

Black anthems are particular incubators for intraracial dynamics and relationships because they are attached to on-the-ground mobilizations. As ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt argues, “Musical play is a vital environment within which black folks . . . learn to improvise with what it means to be dominant and subordinate in musical and nonmusical relationships.” This “play,” as a three-dimensional practice, is pronounced within anthems and accounts for the sound and innovation of musical acts, the uneven participation within them, as well as the politics that are mobilized through their performances. Power is, therefore, present throughout and working on multiple, and sometimes competing, registers. Guided by a desire to further materialize the powerful “blues epistemology” theorized by Clyde Woods, *Anthem* builds on literatures of Black music and social movements—an especially present consideration in jazz and hip-hop studies—by situating the anthems
discussed here as productions that organize sound and community in
dense and fantastic ways.23

Music is a participatory enterprise that requires certain performa-
tive knowledges in order for its political and movement aims to be
realized. Racial communities have long participated in the protective
subterfuge of coded language and performance practice, commonly
referred to as “insider” and “outsider” knowledges. The “dissemblance”
employed by Black women and theorized by historian Darlene Clark
Hine models the strategies that accompany minority life under majority
rule.24 The musical literacy of the performers and audiences for Black
anthems covered the spectrum, from the formally trained to the illiter-
ate, yet technical precision was less important than the experiences of
living a life of difference. Anthropologist James Scott uses the idea of
public and hidden transcripts to discuss the ways in which oppressed
peoples communicate with power and one another. Public transcripts
are the “open interaction between subordinates and those who domi-
nate,” while hidden transcripts are those that “[take] place ‘offstage’,
beyond direct observation by powerholders.” These texts and spaces are
not uniform or absolute. As he notes, “Power relations are not, alas, so
straightforward that we can call what is said in power-laden contexts
false and what is said offstage true. Nor can we simplistically describe
the former as a realm of necessity and the latter as a realm of freedom.”
What is true, according to him, “is that the hidden transcript is pro-
duced for a different audience and under different constraints of power
than the public transcript.”25 Black anthems are neither condoned as
public texts nor completely absented from the public sphere as hidden
text, yet they similarly rely on codes produced through the intimacy of
difference that demand observance of cultural practices in relation to a
majority society, even as they double back to challenge that culture and
society. Black arts have their own tradition of “speaking truth to power.”
This speech, as theater scholar David Krasner argues, includes “[c]oun-
tercodes, innuendoes, and subtle shifts in emphasis [that] suggest that
the significance underlying [Black] performances was open to broader
interpretations,” while also signaling an acknowledgment by perform-
ers, composers, and audiences of their access to a “multifaceted cultural
(ethnic) capital,” which, drawing on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, makes
meaning for those with the cultural expertise to understand the code.26
The anthems investigated here combined both understated and explicit overtures within their compositions and performances, situating their impact as both affirmations of the unique knowledges of the African descended and rebellion against the diffuse violences of white rule on a global scale.

The state and nation as contiguous, though distinctly employed, geopolitical configurations are disarticulated within the worlds of the anthems described in this book. Black anthems are transnational by design and reach publics beyond the scope of their place of origin. While a number of the songs are situated within certain national contexts and grow from specific conditions of bondage, violence, and exclusion, their narratives resist the fixity of place and follow the indictments of anthems by encouraging identification from and by a number of communities. Within Black anthemic production, this mass of individuals is bound not by geography but instead by their intersectional conditions as raced and (post)colonial subjects and their shared freedom drive/impulse. There is, however, engagement with the state/nation and/or its representation through these texts, not only in their molding/modeling of the genre but also through sonic and textual employments that play off of the entrenched knowledge of existing national anthems. Black cultural production has historically functioned as a rebuttal to the state's power to control and manipulate national consensus, yet the African descended have creatively employed the state's rubric of cohesion through productions of musical iconography. For example, the national anthem of the United States, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” haunts chapter 1’s “Ethiopia (Thou Land of Our Fathers),” the anthem of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and is replayed in an augmented form within the composition. The anthem of the African National Congress (ANC) under investigation in chapter 6, “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika,” was wed to the anthem of the apartheid regime, “Die Stem van Suid-Afrika,” in the postdemocracy moment, with both texts now hailed as co-national anthems. Both of these examples demonstrate the insidiousness of the state in sonic histories and the ways in which the violences of the state are (re)entrenched through music even in the pursuit and wake of racial justice victories.

The Black and interracial organizations that these anthems represent serve to rebut, reorient, or reimagine the state's role in the lives
of Black citizens, not replace it as the sole object of allegiance. These anthems are intended to conjure alternative affiliations that meet people where they are, in their communities, churches, schools, and organizations while also allowing them to grow through the mobilizations within those “translocal” spaces. They are not meta-texts in the same way as national anthems; they derive their power not from a rigid and controlled nationalism—although as the UNIA demonstrates, nationalism was part and parcel of the organizing framework for some of these songs—but from identification with communities excluded from the promises of the nation. These anthems are connected to one another through histories of struggle and political techniques more so than through sonic methods or composition; they are sounded and performed differently but all fall along a continuum of Black political practice theorized by Cedric Robinson as the Black Radical Tradition. Their tie to a history of dissent makes their articulations all the more dangerous within the hostile societies of their birth and employment. The surveillance techniques of the state condone the patrolling of all methods of speech, and music is a conspicuous avenue of political thought that is carried on air, through throats and fingers, and into the ears of the listening “counterintelligence” agencies. This sound, while detectable and traceable, cannot be contained or wholly stopped, making its dissemination more fluid and its impact that much more powerful than the written word. While the written compositions and organizations and, later, their performers and performances often were banned and outlawed, the sounds and utterances produced in their name would not be silenced. As Harry Belafonte famously argued, “You can cage the singer but not the song.”

Music is at the center of this project for this flight but first and foremost because it creates collective engagement in performance and contributes to a dense Black performance history that continually configures Black citizenship through shared ambitions and intersectional identities. Without dismissing the urgent reminder offered by literary scholar Brent Edwards that “space is privileged and richly varied” in diaspora, it is important to consider the “reciprocal relationship[s]” of social theorist Paul Gilroy’s description that within diaspora “can serve as an ideal communicative situation even when the original makers of the music and its eventual consumers are separated in time and space.”
Black anthems exercise their power across and between national borders, languages, and cultures precisely because they are dialogic without requiring a literate tradition; while absolutely crucial, the compositions as material evidence are not the primary texts within my analysis here—they are instead their performances, those interpretations that tell us who the performers and audiences were and why they were on stage, in the room, auditorium, or field at that moment on that day. Nina Simone’s performances of “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” drew people together and into conversation with each other; without exceptionalizing her as a singular figure, it is necessary to note that often it literally was her voice that put them in the same place at the same time. The power of these acts, then, is not simply as sonic art—as important as that is; it is also pedagogical and organizational in that these performances compelled reactive and proactive engagements and debate, all of which contributed to political alternatives in the present.

These anthems constitute differently configured diasporic formations that link people to one another through and beyond race into communities organized by imaginations of freedom from and an end to hierarchies of difference. Black anthems are both the rationale and vision for these imaginations. As manifestos based in political practice and mobilization, Black anthems are able to model a three-dimensional platform for communities in struggle on a global scale. Within and between their multiple iterations, they are composed of prominent artist-activists, social justice organizations, and large ground-level mobilizations by Black and allied communities who are brought into communion with one another not simply through the assumed knowledge of their racial kinship but instead through their daily choice to actively engage in resistance efforts. The diasporas for these anthems then are not assumed but chosen and speak to the lived experiences of communities under siege. While the conditions for each community and individual are particular, these songs reflect universal cadences of struggle that are dynamic and adaptable to different communities, locations, and issues. The myriad requests to reprint and translate “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” are but one example of these anthems’ reach and impact beyond their communities of origin. In this respect, the diasporas of political thought and performance that I discuss here are, to follow Gilroy, announced more by their “routes” than their “roots,”
yet precisely their foundations in Black traditions allow their passage domestically and abroad. Neither they nor the political scenarios that they inspired can be removed from the originary knowledges and experiences envoiced through these anthems.

These diasporas are held together not only by alternative and studied political visions and performance but also by alternative sensory engagements. The song in concert with its history and present mobilization develops the “anthemic event,” which privileges hearing over seeing, another grand departure from diasporas based in race and sight. To hear the struggles of others—versus the hearing of or seeing of them—requires a different level of engagement with the communities represented therein. The mechanics of listening are technological as well as biological and allow for these texts to be adopted in other national contexts where language and culture otherwise limit international communications. To hear Black anthems, whether live or on wax, is to be a part of the event itself; singing and listening, therefore, involve pronounced political stakes within the anthemic event. In those scenes, the performing body exhibits an acknowledgment of the project taking place and the relations that made it possible. The community of performance and its environment is therefore dynamic and begins to challenge narratives of the state as an equally incorporative, undifferentiated unifying entity and the exclusive infrastructure of global power. Black anthems construct an alternative constellation of citizenship—new imagined communities that challenge the “we” of the “melting pot” or democratic state, yet install new definitions of “we” in its place. Exposed here is a fundamental tension within their construction and use: Black anthems replicate certain functions of state propaganda, albeit toward different ends and with different actors—actors who, historically, are structurally powerless. Black anthems are the evidence of a cumulative project of identity formation and political agency mobilized through culture, which, when taken together, construct parallel movements of solidarity and influence.

Far from working in isolation, these anthems built off of the momentum of those before them. Politically, socially, and culturally they expanded previous paradigms and tactics, sometimes offering correctives to the preceding anthems. Through studied engagements with prior sounds and movements, these anthems were connected within a
complicated and dynamic history of liberation acts among the African descended. “Ethiopia” set the stage for the modern Black citizen-subject in song with the others following in step, highlighting shared concerns and actively challenging and adjusting the perspectives that no longer met the needs of the intended communities. There are important differences between the pieces—politically, compositionally, contextually—yet their shared efforts to mobilize ground them as a genre within the pantheon of Black musics. The political imaginaries of these Black composers and performers were grown in concert with a global South advancing new strategies and collectivities in their battles with an atrophic colonialism. In recognition of their majority status, these political actors conceived of and enacted a musical project that was guided by what Vijay Prashad describes as an “internationalist nationalism,” yet it still called upon a collective that was often, although not exclusively, organized by race. The knowledges and best practices developed within and between radical internationalism and Black cultural traditions were translated and transferred to global communities through these anthems, making this constellation of actors, listeners, and publics vocal, rights-holding “citizens of sound.”

The anthems represented in Anthem are not the only ones produced by the African descended; there are other sonic texts that fit my theorization of the genre, but the six analyzed here were chosen for their connections to one another and intimate relationships to various social movements. Each chapter contends with the histories, communities, and performances that made the song a force within twentieth century Black political cultures and mobilizations. These are the anthems. Chapter 1 focuses on “Ethiopia (Thou Land of Our Fathers),” the anthem of the UNIA. The UNIA under Marcus Garvey sets the stage for the use of anthems as modern mechanisms of global affiliation and community building within the African diaspora. The regulated and formalized performances of “Ethiopia” ritualized the anthem within the organization, which grew to include hundreds of thousands of members across the diaspora and spawned national chapters in locations like South Africa, Canada, and the chapter’s location of focus, Cuba. When one considers the multextual and performative nature of its nation-building agenda, the UNIA is wholly situated within the Black arts renaissance of the 1920s, the decade of the organization’s
height. “Ethiopia” provides the evidence of a highly organized cultural wing within the UNIA even while its composition exposes the conflicts embedded within the organization around gender, in particular. Similar tensions are held in “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” the canonized Negro National Hymn, anthem of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and focus of chapter 2. The UNIA and NAACP have been situated in Black literatures as opposites, contradictory in philosophy, reach, and practice. An examination of their anthems, however, draws the two organizations into close contact and highlights the shared impulse behind their differing agendas. J. Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” became the mouthpiece for the NAACP in a moment of increased international recognition for Black art through the Harlem Renaissance, the growth of communism, and the expansion of various empires through war making. These conditions encouraged exchange among and between communities of color, and as the Depression dawned, “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” became a tool within intercultural, international communications. A 1933 request to translate the anthem into Japanese manifests the ways in which politicized diasporas utilized sound as a tool of representation by sending blackness abroad in five-line staves.

The role of the solo artist in anthemic productions is introduced in chapter 3, which highlights the travels and refusals of Paul Robeson through his standard “Ol’ Man River.” Unlike those of chapters 1 and 2, his anthem was not formally adopted by a Black protest organization but instead was used by Robeson as a unifying text in multiple political struggles around the world. During the Depression, Robeson radically adjusted the text of the song—originally written for the musical Show Boat by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II—and used it as the foundation for his repertoire of world folk songs sung in more than thirty languages. Blackness and labor are brought into stark relief within his anthem, which, in combination with his undeterred political speech in support of decolonization, peace, and civil rights, made him the target of intense public scrutiny and investigation. His recordings of “Ol’ Man River” during the period of his passport revocation (1950–58) under McCarthyism announce his political project during the decade as his voice took flight in defiance of a growing surveillance state. The labor themes within Robeson’s performances and activism are carried
over into chapter 4, but they are analyzed at the local level as I trace the labor origins of the canonic “We Shall Overcome.” Birthed in political performance during a tobacco strike in 1945, this anthem has suffered from inaccuracies and misrepresentation in the literature regarding both its organizational affiliation and its performers. Black women workers within an interracial Charleston local of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) were the leaders of the strike and literally composed and paced the pickets through their performances of the revised spiritual. Their defiance of societal, industry, and city segregation and creative mobilizations of Black cultural traditions announced the techniques of political protest that would organize untold numbers of the disenfranchised over the next two decades. The success of this job action was recognized first in the sounds that it produced—an anthem that would be carried to the hills of Tennessee, out into the Civil Rights Movement, and eventually to a world in coordinated struggle.

Black women’s role in the long Civil Rights Movement is further interrogated in chapter 5 through its transition into the Black Power Movement. Nina Simone’s voice bridged this change in “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” a genre-bending piece inspired by her late mentor, Lorraine Hansberry. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) anthem grew from a diverse repertoire of civil rights and feminist anthems produced by Simone throughout the decade, which, when read in combination, signal her political awakening and evolution in domestic and world affairs. Her political conversion was but one of her changes over the decade as her queer voice rose up to speak and sing on issues including women’s rights and colonialism. Her engagement with a world corps of Black musics led her into conversation with figures such as South African songstress Miriam Makeba, whose delivery of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” announced the liberation of a number of African nations during the high tide of continental decolonization. Before its use as a Pan-African text, the song began its life as the anthem of the embattled ANC, the organizational focus of chapter 6. The multilingual composition of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” facilitated its broad usage and adoption throughout the 1960s and 70s in Africa and its performance by the Amandla cultural ensemble of the ANC in exile amassed a broad range of supporters and sympathizers worldwide, who began to apply the pressure necessary to topple the apartheid
regime. The anthem is a continental experiment in resistance and solidarity that is reformed and tamed in the postdemocracy moment in South Africa, signaling the final stages of twentieth-century Black resistance through song.

The resonance of these anthems in the post–Civil Rights decades is discussed in the Conclusion, which also examines the last Black anthem of the twentieth century—Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power.” The move to hip-hop at the end of the century brings the politico-performative and compositional aesthetics of Black music full circle and signals a complicated, albeit possible, future for the anthem genre beyond the organized mass mobilizations that once characterized Black social movements. Although most of the organizations discussed within *Anthem* have faded from public view, their historical legacy is still heard through excerpts, remix, or code. As melodically organized political speech in performance, Black anthems continue to sound struggles over identity, power, and representation within a contemporary world order structured by legacies of slavery, genocide, and Western domination. Although it has limits, music, as a three-dimensional document, practice, and experience, still exists as a method for new political performances and futures. It is my hope that *Anthem* will assist in compelling the new sounds that inspire and mobilize the making of “a world in which it will be safe to be different.”

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