



Whiteness and the Problem of Colourblind Listening: Revisiting Leonard Feather's 1951 Blindfold Test with Roy Eldridge

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Abstract

'I couldn't tell who was colored and who was white', admitted the African American trumpet player Roy Eldridge after being submitted to a so-called blindfold test by the white critic Leonard Feather in 1951. Feather was happy that the blindfold test duped a prominent Black musician, because it proved his point about the fundamental colourblindness of music and listening. Through close reading of the source material, this article provides the full context for this infamous case and shows how the blindfold test was a product of transnational discourses of colourblindness, primitivism, 'reverse racism', and technological mediation. Building on current research in racialized practices of listening in musicology and sound studies, and mobilizing interventions from critical race studies, the article contends that acousmatic techniques of listening often promote a colourblind ideology invested in whiteness, which remains hegemonic in music culture.

Flipping to one of the middle pages in the 13 July issue of *Down Beat* magazine in 1951, readers would find yet another of the journalist Leonard Feather's so-called blindfold tests, where he played records to musicians who then had to identify and assess them without knowing what was being played for them – they were, as it were, listening 'blindfolded' to the music. Under the headline 'Little Jazz Goes Color Blind', the article was an interview with the trumpet player Roy Eldridge (nicknamed 'Little Jazz') who had, according to Feather's introduction, 'claimed [that] he could distinguish a white musician from a Negro simply by listening to his style'.¹ Framing this interview specifically around race, Feather wrote that the blindfold test was 'a challenge to [Eldridge's] ability to separate musicians along racial lines, as opposed to [Feather's] theory that, in the words of an old blues, "you can't tell the difference when the sun goes down"'.² Mobilizing a quintessential marker of Blackness – the blues – in an argument against an African American musician, not only shows Feather's rhetorical flair but also the problematic audacity of his colourblind ideology, as

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1 Leonard Feather, "'Little Jazz Goes Color Blind'", 'The Blindfold Test, interview with Roy Eldridge', *Down Beat*, 13 July 1951, 12.

2 Feather, "'Little Jazz Goes Color Blind'".

he revelled in Eldridge's eventual failure to correctly identify the race of several of the musicians.

The blindfold test with Eldridge has become infamous. It is referenced in both popular discourse and scholarly literature. Jazz historians Guthrie Ramsey and Ingrid Monson have used the article to exemplify discussions of race in US jazz life.³ Monson critiques the blindfold test for being part of a discourse that claimed that 'the ability to swing and play the blues could be divorced from any necessary connection to blackness and African Americans'.⁴ The larger point, for Monson, 'is that regardless of how well a white American or other non-African American may master the sonic parameters of African American musical style, as long as a racially stratified social structure exists, she or he will have a different social relationship to the music than will an African American'.⁵ Ramsey also focuses on positionality and identity when bringing up the blindfold test, and implicitly suggests that white writers such as Monson (or myself, for that matter) are inheritors of the institutionalized whiteness that has characterized jazz criticism and scholarship.⁶

Appearing as both proof of music's colourblindness and as anecdotal evidence of the misguided racial politics of white jazz critics, this encounter between Feather and Eldridge has thus become one of the myths of jazz history – personally, I remember first being told about the blindfold test during music classes in high school. The July 1951 blindfold test itself, however, remains under-examined. For instance, in the musicological scholarship that references the blindfold test, the two pages that Monson affords it is by far the longest treatment (Ramsey gives it a paragraph; Radano and McMullen each place it in a footnote); and none of the scholarly literature cites any other sources than Feather's article from 13 July 1951. There is nothing wrong with using the blindfold test as an example in a wider critique of US race relations and music; and my own critique in this article should be read as an extension of the work of scholars such as Ramsey and Monson. However, the brevity of previous references to the blindfold test risks making de-historicized Black-and-white stock characters out of Feather and Eldridge. So, this article has two aims. First, I will provide a close reading and fuller history of this particular case, incorporating a wider set of source materials, showing that the fateful blindfold test was not just a singular article but was, in fact, a part of a longer debate about race and music with Eldridge and Feather as key players. Second, I expand on

3 Other jazz scholars have touched upon the case in passing or in notes: Jürgen Grandt, *Kinds of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 78; Tracy McMullen, 'Corpo-Realities: Keepin' It Real in "Music and Embodiment" Scholarship', *Current Musicology* 82 (2006), 74; and Ronald Radano, 'The Sound of Racial Feeling', *Dædalus* 142/4 (2013), 133–4. John Chilton discusses the case from a biographical point of view in *Roy Eldridge: Little Jazz Giant* (London: Continuum, 2002), 185–9. Henry Louis Gates, Jr has used the case anecdotally as a starting point for a discussion of cultural appropriation, in "'Authenticity", or the Lesson of Little Tree', *New York Times*, 24 November 1991.

4 Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80.

5 Ingrid Monson, 'Jazz as Political and Musical Practice', in *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society*, ed. Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettle (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 33.

6 Guthrie Ramsey, Jr, 'Who Matters: The New and Improved White Jazz Literati: A Review Essay', *American Music* 17/2 (1999), 206.

previous musicological critiques, by putting this oft-cited example into conversation with recent scholarship on topics of racial formation in sound studies that have investigated what Jennifer Stoever terms the *sonic colourline* and how Nina Sun Eidsheim presents what she calls the *acousmatic question* (when a listener is confronted by a recording and asks 'who is this?') as a key moment in racialized sonic identification.⁷ Following on this interdisciplinary research, I also go beyond the jazz historiographical framework in which the blindfold test is most often considered, and draw upon critical race studies to interrogate the ways in which colourblind ideology upholds white cultural hegemony. My broader history of the blindfold test shows how Feather was policing the sonic colourline, even as he was doing so from a putatively anti-racist, colourblind perspective. I argue that Feather's framing of Eldridge's blindfold test illustrates a colourblind technique of listening that rests on whiteness.

Leonard Feather and the 1951 blindfold test

White male European critics such as Feather found themselves drawn to the United States, to a music culture which they did not truly belong to. They had to negotiate their reverence for US culture in general and African American music specifically while wrestling with their own identities.⁸ For Feather, his own integration into the US jazz world was mirrored by a commitment to anti-segregation, interracialism, and colourblindness.

Feather came from a well-off Jewish family in London and had emigrated to the United States in the 1930s in order to pursue his jazz dreams.⁹ In a remarkably diverse career, he worked in almost every possible function of a cultural intermediary in the jazz world – composer, record producer, manager (including a brief stint for Duke Ellington), and union organizer – but it was his work as a journalist, editor, radio broadcaster, and author that would make him most famous. Other than his contributions to US publications, Feather served as a correspondent for the British magazine *Melody Maker* and the Swedish *Estrad*.¹⁰ Feather was also accepted by the African American press and was the first white jazz writer for the Black paper *New York Amsterdam News*. Feather would sometimes stress the similarities rather than differences he shared with African Americans, whether positioning himself as a composer and producer of Black music or as a Jewish immigrant. In 1940s and 1950s, Feather was a vocal and important white ally to Black musicians, constantly documenting

7 Jennifer Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race & the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, & Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 1–37.

8 As such, their positioning vis-à-vis a cultural 'other' was parallel to that of the white male US jazz journalists facing what Steven B. Elworth, who I am paraphrasing here, calls an 'intellectual conundrum' of jazz, aesthetics, and race, in 'Jazz in Crisis, 1948–58: Ideology and Representation', *Jazz among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 64–5.

9 On Feather's biography and criticism, see John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 19–59; and Christopher Robinson, 'Firing the Canon: Multiple Insularities in Jazz Criticism' (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2014), 91–140.

10 On Feather's connection to Sweden, see Mischa van Kan, 'Swingin' Swedes: The Transnational Exchange of Swedish Jazz in the US', PhD diss., University of Gothenburg (2017), 109–16.

the grim details of Jim Crow white supremacy in his articles and trying to break down the colourline through his work as a journalist, producer, promoter, activist, and organizer.

Feather was also a strong advocate for female musicians. In an argument that runs parallel to my critique of his approach to race, Christopher Robinson has written about Feather's promotion of female artists, showing that even as he attempted to challenge gender bias, he did so from a 'paternal position'. Similar to the colourblind approach, he believed, in Robinson's words, that 'gender is inaudible'.¹¹ Indeed, as early as 1937, in an article for *Melody Maker*, Feather had explicitly proposed the blindfold test as a means to prove a gender-blind ideology; and as the subject of the very first published blindfold test, in *Metronome* in 1946, Feather chose a woman, pianist Mary Lou Williams.¹² Such examples going back to the genesis of the concept reveal that Feather had always envisioned the blindfold tests as a venue for an underlying critique of music's social boundaries. Of course, an overview of the hundreds of interviews Feather conducted for the column over the decades also reveal that Eldridge's 1951 test was the moment where such underlying critique was brought most explicitly to the surface. In this sense the article perhaps deserves the notoriety it has enjoyed ever since.

In presenting his critique of gendered and racial barriers, Feather was a progressive thinker, but not a radical. In this way, he was similar to critical race scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant's description of 'early [civil rights] movement leaders [who] were also assimilation-oriented and individualistic to a degree that appears a bit embarrassing today, but made more sense in the repressive and racial climate of the time. They were moderates who sought to end "race-thinking" and ensure "equality" to each individual.'¹³ Although it is always difficult to judge the past by the standards of the present, I follow Omi and Winant's line of enquiry in order to expose the ways in which Feather's intentions may be deserving of our critique. Here, I am also attempting to follow Eldridge's contemporaneous critique of Feather. So, while we should not diminish Feather's wide-reaching efforts, we can also point out that the ideas that drove Feather were not anti-racist, as we would understand it today, but rather the result of a liberal ideology of colourblindness fixated on assimilation and integration.¹⁴ In both practical and ideological terms, Feather's main target was segregation; to the point where, as Gennari writes, 'one has to wonder whether interracialism as an end in itself became an *idée fixe* that undermined the objectivity Feather was so keen to claim for himself.'¹⁵ As should be clear, Feather's colourblind ideology did not mean that he avoided the topic of race. Indeed, Feather included a whole chapter on 'Jazz and Race' in *The Book*

11 Robinson, 'Firing the Canon', 109–29.

12 Leonard Feather, 'The Blindfold Test. Interview with Mary Lou Williams', *Metronome* 62/9, September 1946, 24.

13 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 161–2.

14 This historical observation is also tied to my theoretical approach to the study of racism, which does not locate it primarily in individual psychological dispositions, but rather, following Bonilla-Silva, 'is based in a materialist interpretation of racial matters and this sees the views of actors as corresponding to their systemic location . . . Whether actors express "resentment" or "hostility" toward minorities is largely irrelevant for the maintenance of white privilege.' Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 7.

15 Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 56.

of *Jazz* (1957);¹⁶ although, as Scott DeVeaux argues, by confining his discussion of race to a single chapter, Feather's point is 'not to connect the expressive power of music to oppressive social conditions, but to exorcise them so that the rest of the book may safely be devoted to the development of musical language'.¹⁷ Similarly, Feather's interest in colourblind listening was not a rejection of the fact that the issue of race mattered to musicians; rather, it was a rejection of the idea that it mattered to the music itself (the latter being itself an ideological concept). Furthermore, the question of race was the central issue in his 1951 blindfold test with Roy Eldridge.

The records on the blindfold test

By 1951, Leonard Feather had served many roles in US jazz life but had most prominently secured his place as a superstar journalist, serving as one of the editors for *Down Beat*. In editorials for the magazine as well as general articles and interviews, Feather covered issues of racial discrimination and celebrated bands that combined Black and white musicians, as well as non-US (particularly European) musicians. This is also reflected in the recordings he played for Eldridge (quoted here as they were listed and annotated by Feather in the printed article):

1. George Shearing. *To Be or Not to Bop* (London). Shearing, piano; white English bass and drummer.
2. Chubby Jackson. *Flying the Coop* (New Jazz). Mixed band. Zoot Sims, tenor [sax]; Kai Winding and J. J. Johnson (alternating), trombone. Tony Aless, piano. Arr. Tiny Kahn.
3. Eddie Condon. *Rose Room* (Commodore). Maxie Kaminsky (white), trumpet; PeeWee Russell, clarinet; Benny Morton (colored), trombone; Joe Bushkin, piano; Sid Catlett (colored), drums; Bob Casey, bass.
4. Miles Davis. *Venus De Milo* (Capitol). Davis (colored), trumpet; Gerry Mulligan (white), baritone and arr.
5. Woody Herman. *More Moon* (Capitol). Bill Harris, trombone; Terry Gibbs, vlns; Gene Ammons (colored), tenor sax; no other tenor; Shelly Manne (white), drums.
6. Flip Phillips. *Bright Blues* (Mercury). Flip, tenor; Bill Harris, trombone; Harry Edison (colored), trumpet.
7. Billy Taylor quartet (colored). *All Ears* (Coral). Taylor, piano.
8. Bob Crosby. *For Dancers Only* (Decca). Eddie Miller, tenor.
9. Billy Strayhorn. *Tonk* (Mercer). Duke Ellington and Strayhorn, pianos.
10. Tadd Dameron. *Sid's Delight* (Capitol). Sahib Shehab [*sic*] (colored), alto; Fats Navarro (colored), trumpet; Kai Winding (white), trombone.¹⁸

¹⁶ Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz* (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), 39–53.

¹⁷ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 20.

¹⁸ Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

The selection was carefully curated. Let us consider the first track in some detail. Feather opened with the pianist George Shearing, one of the few white musicians who was widely recognized as having a distinctively innovative voice in the bebop idiom. Leading the test with this artist was, I suggest, significant for two reasons other than just Shearing's whiteness. First, Shearing was, like Feather, English and in this way he served as an avatar for Feather's own national identity. The two Englishmen were indeed closely linked, as it was Feather who had been instrumental in securing Shearing immigration into the United States¹⁹ and, upon Shearing's arrival, had written an article titled 'Even a Londoner Can Have a Natural Feeling for Jazz', an argument that runs parallel to the colourblind thesis in his blindfold test with Eldridge.²⁰

Second, and especially relevant for the question of colourblind listening, Shearing was visually impaired. Here, Shearing serves as part of what disability studies scholar David Bolt has termed the *metanarrative of blindness*, in which blind characters are used in service of an overriding narrative that seems to displace their agency and where blindness often represents something other than visual impairment.²¹ In this case, Shearing fits the trope of the blind genius, which has been especially attributed to pianists (Art Tatum, Ray Charles, Tete Montoliu, and Stevie Wonder, to name a few others).²² In the context of the blindfold test, this trope can fit together with the question of nationality, as George McKay suggests in a comparative reading of Feather's and Shearing's identities: 'I do not wish to equate the permanent condition of blindness . . . with a temporary game of blindfolding, and yet, though very different, British blindness may not have meant (only) lack of vision, but *a refusal to see in the American way*.'²³ By showcasing Shearing at the outset of the test, Feather was thus implicitly inserting his own identity in the musical selection while conflating questions of race and disability, privileging Englishness, whiteness, and ability. In Feather's metanarrative of blindness, Shearing's genius lay not only in his mastery of jazz, but also in the fact that he, via his blindness, overcame boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and race.

Shearing's mastery was, of course, also heard in the music. The theme of 'To Be or Not to Bop', composed by Shearing, and his improvised solo demonstrate all the hallmarks of the bebop style, pioneered by Black musicians such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s. It is an up-tempo tune (approx. 245 bpm), with a three-against-four polyrhythmic introduction (also used as the coda), tritone substitutions are often used in place of regular ii-V-I chord changes, the melody and solo lines use chromaticism prominently, and Shearing

19 George Shearing with Alyn Shipton, *Lullaby of Birdland: An Autobiography of George Shearing* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 92.

20 George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 118.

21 David Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-Reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

22 Benjamin Fraser, *Beyond Sketches of Spain: Tete Montoliu and the Construction of Iberian Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 109–39.

23 McKay, *Circular Breathing*, 119; italics in the original.

uses bebop scales (both major and dominant) in his solo. Actually, at times, Shearing's playing on this recording sounds like a piano version of Parker's soloing. His bebop vocabulary is so immaculate that he, among other things, repeatedly uses (in both the composed melody and in his solo) the rising triplet arpeggios preceded by an upper or lower neighbour note that the pioneering music theorist of jazz Thomas Owens's identified as Charlie Parker's signature 'favourite motive'.²⁴ Also, in an example of Shearing's distinction as a pianist, the second chorus of his solo features his famous *locked hands* style of improvising with block chords (which Eldridge commented on approvingly as being when the record 'gets going nicely') in highly chromatic passages. When pressed for an answer on racial identification, Eldridge thought that 'on this kind of playing it's hard to tell white from colored' and guessed that the pianist 'might be white', while the bassist and drummer were 'colored' (the entire trio were, in fact, white).²⁵

Depending exactly on how one categorizes the recordings, seven of the ten tracks on the blindfold test were with modern jazz players such as Shearing. It reflects Feather's preference for the most progressive jazz style of the 1940s and early 1950s, bebop. The implicit contrast is Eldridge, who was primarily associated with swing jazz. Feather's interest in bebop was not only a matter of taste, but also part of his wider project of jazz aesthetics and historiography, which he put forth in the 1949 book *Inside Bebop*, where he contrasts the swing audiences of the Savoy Ballroom with bebop, noting that 'by 1939, a few scattered attempts at real mixed bands began along 52nd Street [the location of the most famous bebop clubs]. The important thing was that musicians were getting to know each other; there was no longer a fence that kept white culture on one side and a Negro culture on the other.'²⁶ The jazz-historical moment in which the test took place is important as the blindfold test stands as an indicative case of what Steven Elworth refers to as the years of 'jazz in crisis' (i.e., the waning popular appeal of swing jazz, the rise of bebop as a counter-cultural Black art form, and the racial politics that each style represented).²⁷ The two protagonists in the blindfold test, Feather and Eldridge, come to represent different historical perspectives. Eldridge came to prominence during the Swing Era, when the jazz world was more shaped by segregation and when musical styles, sometimes reductively labelled *hot* and *sweet*, were respectively associated with Black and white musicians. By contrast, Feather represented modern jazz (especially bebop) as leading towards integration – not only between Black and white, but, as the example of Shearing shows, also between US musicians and non-US musicians.

The emphasis on integrated bands was clear in other selections for the blindfold test, which were also smartly chosen to trip up Eldridge: six bands out of the ten included in the article were racially mixed. And Feather slyly selected records where the individual stylistic

24 Thomas Owens, 'Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation, vol. 1' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974), 12, 17–18.

25 Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

26 Later editions of the book are titled *Inside Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1977 [1949]), 4.

27 Elworth, 'Jazz in Crisis'.

differences between Black and white musicians were negligible. For instance, he played a recording with the white trombonist Kai Winding (incidentally also, like Shearing, originally from Europe) on two different recordings, including 'Flying the Coop' where he played alongside the Black trombonist J. J. Johnson, with whom he famously shared a bebop style and sound that was sometimes virtually impossible to differentiate. Identification of the musicians on this track is further complicated by the fact that the two trombonists are trading fours – something Eldridge missed entirely, assuming that there was only one trombone soloist on the recording.

Eldridge's familiarity with jazz performers was, on the other hand, showcased by his instant recognition of several of the musicians on the records, that is, not their racial identity but singling them out by name. Eldridge, for instance, correctly identified track number 8 as a white band, name-checking the saxophonist, Eddie Miller. This record by the bandleader Bob Crosby exemplifies the so-called sweeter playing and arranging style associated with white big bands of the swing era, most famously the bands of Glenn Miller and the Dorsey Brothers or by Crosby's more celebrated brother, Bing.²⁸ So, Eldridge's inability to guess the racial identity of some of the performers did not stem from a lack of fine-grained musical sensitivity. Eldridge actually provided explanations for not being able to pass Feather's exam satisfactorily. For instance, Feather played 'Venus de Milo' with the cutting-edge Miles Davis band (later included on the canonical *Birth of the Cool* LP, 1957), to which Eldridge remarked that he could not racially identify them because 'most of these guys play with hardly any vibrato, and a sound without vibrato is an easier thing to capture than one with a distinctive vibrato'.²⁹ Thus, Eldridge offers a musical analysis of bebop (that boppers, especially in the then nascent cool jazz style, play with less vibrato than in previous jazz styles) and links this to the politics of appropriation. Setting aside the proposition that it is easier to imitate a sound without vibrato than with it, the statement highlights Eldridge's social analysis: he was not making an essentialist claim about the racially inherent sound of musicians; he was trying to criticize the ways in which white musicians have succeeded by 'capturing' sounds made by Black people.

In many cases Eldridge could not pick out the race of the musicians or got it wrong (also highlighted in Feather's annotations). For instance, Eldridge said of a piano duet between Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn: 'White or colored? It's impossible to tell'; and of a recording by the all-Black Billy Taylor Quartet that he 'couldn't tell who was colored and who was white. They could be Eskimos for all I know.'³⁰ At the end of the interview, he had to admit:

28 On the musical and discursive distinctions between hot and sweet jazz, see Andrew Berish, *Lonesome Roads and Streets of Dreams: Place, Mobility, and Race in Jazz of the 1930s and '40s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 32–72; and Elijah Wald, 'Louis Armstrong Loves Guy Lombardo', in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries*, ed. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

29 Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

30 Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

I guess I'll have to go along with you Leonard – you can't tell just from listening to records. But I still say that I could spot a white imitator of a colored musician immediately. A white musician trying to copy [Coleman] Hawkins, for instance. And in the same way I supposed I could recognize a colored cat trying to copy Bud Freeman. I can only talk about individual sounds that have made it, highly individual sounds. But you take a sound like [the white trombonist and big band leader] Tommy Dorsey gets – any good musician could get that. Okay, you win the argument!³¹

It is worth quoting Eldridge's afterthoughts in full since this remark has often been reduced to the last sentence or left out entirely in subsequent references to the blindfold test. Rather than a complete capitulation to Feather's universalizing colourblindness, the quote shows how Eldridge in fact identified the *particular* problems associated with Feather's method and ideology. For example, going back to the first track of the test, Eldridge commented that it was difficult to racially identify the musicians 'on this kind of playing', indicating that the question of race and colourblind listening was not generalizable to all kinds of music to the extent that Feather perhaps wished. The kind of playing in question, modern bebop, featured on multiple tracks on this blindfold test, exemplified the problem at hand, even if Eldridge had been overconfident in his ability to racially identify the musicians. The fact that Shearing, a white Englishman, was excelling musically in bebop, a style led by young African Americans, was in some ways a sign of the increasing integration in the jazz world around 1950. To Feather, racial identification equalled racial essentialism, which was the premise of the blindfold test. But that does not mean that racial politics had become an aesthetically moot point, as Feather implied (though, of course, Feather still thought race was a *socially* relevant question). Importantly, the racialized contrasts in style and the political economy of appropriation were even more stark in the style that Eldridge himself was more associated with, swing music, and in New Orleans revival jazz.³² Both of these subgenres were de-emphasised in Feather's selection of tracks, thus further exposing Eldridge. But by putting the spotlight on white imitators, Eldridge highlighted how Feather's narrow framing of racial issues as a matter mostly related to Jim Crow segregation policies, as well as his celebration of interracialism, seemed to overlook the problem of cultural appropriation. Furthermore, Eldridge clearly took issue with Feather's privileging of the recorded medium, prompting us to look critically at Feather's combination of the blindfold test and colourblind ideology. A review of the blindfold test's history reveals that the interview was not just a fanciful idea, sprung from Feather's mind, nor was it the *starting point* for an examination of current race politics in the jazz world. It was, in fact, the *end point* of a debate sparked by an interview with Eldridge that Feather had published in *Down Beat* two months earlier.³³

31 Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

32 Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs" and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942–1947)', in *Jazz among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

33 A review of *Down Beat* itself, plus other jazz magazines as well as the broader press, reveals that the 13 July blindfold test received no subsequent coverage. This includes the Black press, which did not pick up the story.

Roy Eldridge and the 1951 blindfold test

Jazz historiography mainly positions Roy Eldridge as a master of the swing style and a pivotal figure in the transition from swing music to bebop, in the late 1930s and early 1940s (though not a bebop player himself).³⁴ However, he was still a big name in the jazz world at the time Feather administered his blindfold test in 1951. There was also a cruel irony in the way Feather used interracial bands to confuse Eldridge in the blindfold test, for Eldridge was famous for being part of bands that crossed the colourline. During the late 1930s and 1940s he had played in bands lead by the white musicians Gene Krupa and Artie Shaw, as well as fronting his own Black bands at various times during this period. He was also a mainstay of the explicitly interracial bands in the Jazz at the Philharmonic tours, organized by the white producer and promoter Norman Granz whose efforts to desegregate jazz concerts parallels Feather's activism.³⁵ In 1950, Eldridge joined a group led by Benny Goodman for a tour of Europe. Goodman's presence in this story is important for his near-mythic status as a white integrator of jazz during the Swing Era; a time when he, according to historian Lewis Erenburg, 'was the most visible symbol of racial integration in the music business'.³⁶ As evidenced by Eldridge's own career and the fact that interracial bands have existed since the beginning of jazz, there was, by 1950, nothing spectacular about Eldridge's collaboration with a white musician like Goodman. However, Eldridge did come in a long line of Black musicians to play in Goodman's bands that were historically positioned as explicitly desegregated.³⁷ Eldridge was conscious of this history and proudly positioned himself within and against this legacy, stating that 'until that time [when I joined Gene Krupa's band in the early 1940s] no colored musician had worked with a white band except as a separate attraction, like Teddy [Wilson] and Lionel [Hampton] with Benny Goodman'.³⁸ Discourses and material realities of segregation and integration were also part of Eldridge's decision to stay in Paris after the rest of the Goodman band went back to the United States. Though he never relocated permanently, Eldridge voiced some of the same reasons for going to Europe as other African American colleagues who joined the jazz diaspora in a space less governed by racial segregation (though that did not necessarily mean that France, for example, was a colourblind space).³⁹

34 Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*; Juan Zagalaz, 'The Style of Roy Eldridge in 1938: Analytical Study of Two Improvisations on "Body and Soul"', *Jazz Research Journal* 14/1 (2021); Eldridge also figures prominently in seminal jazz scholarly volumes such as Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 450-63; and throughout DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop*.

35 Tad Hershorn, *Norman Granz: The Man Who Used Jazz for Justice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

36 Lewis Erenburg, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 82-3.

37 For a critique of Goodman's mythic position in narratives of white anti-racism, see Christi Jay Wells, "'Spinnin' the Webb": Representational Spaces, Mythic Narratives, and the 1937 Webb/Goodman Battle of Music', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14/2 (2020).

38 Leonard Feather, 'No More White Bands for Me, Says Little Jazz. Interview with Roy Eldridge', *Down Beat*, 18 May 1951, 13.

39 Rashida K. Braggs, *Jazz Diasporas: Race, Music, and Migration in Post-World War II Paris* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

Eldridge's performance history reaching back to the late 1930s and his more recent prolonged trip to Europe was thus already part of a discourse on race, specifically segregation and interracialism.

It was Eldridge's return stateside in 1951 that was the occasion of an interview that received top-billing in the 15 May issue of *Down Beat*. Under the headline 'No More White Bands for Me', Feather presented an interview with Eldridge in which the trumpeter compared his time in Europe with his traumatic experiences of discrimination when touring with Shaw's and Krupa's bands in the United States. In a harrowing account, Eldridge described the indignities of not being allowed into the same hotels, train cars, or bars as his white bandmates, and how racism made him physically and mentally ill, summarizing:

Man, when you're on the stage you're great, but as soon as you come off, you're nothing. It's not worth the glory, not worth the money, not worth anything. It was the trip to Europe that made me really realize that and make up my mind for good.⁴⁰

Eldridge described how the French jazz critic Charles Delaunay had made the suggestion that he spend extended time in Europe, eventually using Paris as a base from which he made tours to Germany, Scandinavia, and Tunisia. He recounted how his time in Europe 'was a wonderful year. During that whole time I was never once reminded that I was colored – the only exception was when there were some visiting Americans out to make trouble.'⁴¹ That made him conclude: 'As long as I'm in America, I'll never in my life work with a white band again!' (by which he meant that he would not work for a white bandleader).⁴² The debate about race that eventually ended with the blindfold test was thus not only about US race relations and Jim Crow segregation. Taking this additional source material into account, which has not been included in previous scholarly references to the blindfold test, we can also appreciate the blindfold test as part of a longer dialogue between Feather and Eldridge. Even if they appear as antagonists in the eventual blindfold test, the two of them were explicitly motivated by some of the same transatlantic experiences of race and jazz appreciation. More than the eventual blindfold test, it was *this* discussion that elicited the debate in *Down Beat* in 1951.

A month after the initial interview where Eldridge announced his decision to refrain from working under white bandleaders in the future, the African American singer and actress Lena Horne was the subject of a page-1 story in *Down Beat* (where another front-page story was about Jim Crow segregation). Horne was quoted saying that Eldridge was 'running away' from the problem and acknowledging the work of white allies such as Krupa and Goodman.⁴³ The same issue of the magazine, as well as the following one, also included short letters to the editor, responding to the interview with Eldridge. The same 13 July issue that included the infamous blindfold test also included an article by the white club owner Frank Holzfeind who had recently featured Eldridge at the Blue Note Club in

40 Feather, 'No More White Bands for Me', 13.

41 Feather, 'No More White Bands for Me', 13.

42 Feather, 'No More White Bands for Me', 1. For more on Eldridge's time in Europe, see Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*, 176–84.

43 Gem (pseud.), 'Can't Solve Problems by Running, Lena Tells Roy. Interview with Lena Horne', *Down Beat*, 15 June 1951, 1.

Chicago (and probably spoken with Eldridge on the matter then). Holzfeind took it upon himself to state that Eldridge was not 'a crusader' on 'a soap box', and wrote that 'because he is the great musician that he is, he is asked to play with the best – not because the best is getting big-hearted about the fact that a Negro should be given equal opportunities. These leaders would take a musician like Roy if he were any color.'⁴⁴ Despite its motivation, Holzfeind's article thus somewhat ironically comes across as supporting Feather's liberal colourblind agenda more than Eldridge's objections to white supremacy. Ostensibly about Eldridge, Holzfeind's and Feather's statements actually decentre Eldridge at the expense of their white authors' position as anti-racists.⁴⁵

My critique of Feather in the present article is then also an attempt to recoup some of Eldridge's way of listening. Though penned by Feather, the interviews compel us to position a musician such as Eldridge as a thinker at least as capable of the same kind of cultural sensitivity, transnational perspective, political intervention, and intellectualism that Feather at times pretended to.⁴⁶ The problem of this particular blindfold test emerged because Feather was unwilling to actually take Eldridge's premises seriously as a matter of listening. In the almost literally psychoanalytic setup of the test (Eldridge as the analysand on the couch, Feather as the analyst), Feather was seemingly trying to 'cure' Eldridge. However, Eldridge's objections were aimed at 'the white imitator of a colored musician', questioning the racialized political economy of jazz, and it was Feather that framed it in terms of problems of racial essentialism. I would suggest that Eldridge's arguments are better understood as part of the broader Black intellectual tradition of dialectical thinking that includes, among others, Du Bois's *double consciousness*, Baraka's the *changing same*, and Gilroy's *anti-anti-essentialism*.⁴⁷ Feather's essentialism was, by comparison, orthodox and his selection of recordings for the blindfold test was, in that sense, grounded in the sonic colourline, which racializes sound through constructed definitions of sonic whiteness and Blackness. This imagination of sound and visibility (which I explore further later) is especially problematic because, as Stoeber argues, 'American proponents of color blindness have been able to declare race invisible in the twenty-first century precisely because dominant listening practices grounded in antebellum slavery and shaped by segregation continue to render it audible.'⁴⁸ Contrary to Feather's insinuations, Eldridge was not policing the sonic colourline, he was arguing that blindfolded listening to recordings does not subvert the appropriation, copying, essentialism, and commodification that relies on the sonic colourline. Indeed, as

44 Frank Holzfeind, 'Roy Wasn't on a Soap Box, Says Club Op', *Down Beat*, 13 July 1951, 7.

45 For a critique of whiteness in anti-racism, see, for instance, Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism', *Borderlands E-Journal* 3/2 (2004); and George Yancy, *Look, a White* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

46 For more on Black musicians as cultural critics, see Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

47 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Norton, 1999 [1903]); LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1968); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

48 Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, 27–8.

my research has uncovered, in the history of the exchange between Feather and Eldridge, Feather's blindfold test comes across as a crass form of mockery when we consider that it was presented as a 'gotcha' at the end of a series of articles, which started with Eldridge's outrage and pain experienced at the hands of Jim Crow. Reading further into the pages of *Down Beat* and other mid-century jazz periodicals, we see that this was also because Eldridge was a foil for Feather's shadowboxing with other white critics in a debate over so-called reverse racism in transatlantic jazz discourse.

'Crow Jim': discourses of reverse racism in mid-century jazz

Halfway between Holzfeind's article on page 7 and Feather's blindfold test with Eldridge on page 12, one finds that issue's editorial promoting the idea that jazz is a force for democracy and mentioning that Leonard Feather had recently been contracted to broadcast for Voice of America in Europe.⁴⁹ Next to that, we find a letter-to-the-editor from the African American serviceman Jasper Haynes, writing about contrasting attitudes towards race in Europe and the United States. However, this piece was not a response to the articles surrounding Eldridge. Instead, it was critique of *Down Beat's* editorial from March of that year which stated that 'Crow Jim [is] as Bad as Jim Crow'.⁵⁰

'Crow Jim' was a critique of an essentializing fetishism of African American performers at the supposed expense of white musicians.⁵¹ This primitivist myth of Black authenticity was a discourse that was especially associated with French jazz critics and European audiences.⁵² Indeed, *Down Beat's* editorial was a critique of the French magazine *Jazz Hot's* best-of-the-year poll featuring predominantly Black musicians, supposedly refusing to acknowledge the fact 'that in any blindfold test on modern jazz soloists it would be impossible

49 The Cold War discourse of jazz as democracy thus runs parallel to ideas of musical colourblindness and relies on some of the same ideas of universalism and interracialism. For recent critiques of the idea of jazz as democracy, see Benjamin Givan, 'How Democratic is Jazz?' in *Finding Democracy in Music*, ed. Robert Adlington and Esteban Buch (London: Routledge, 2021); and Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 14–18.

50 'Crow Jim as Bad as Jim Crow. Editorial', *Down Beat*, 9 March 1951, 10.

51 Following Belew et al., I put the terms 'Crow Jim' and 'reverse discrimination/racism' in quotation marks. They write that 'because racism is a system of power, we see it as incorrect to refer to "racism" against white people in a white supremacist society. Such arguments often disguise racist policies.' Kathleen Belew with Khaled Beydoun, Adam Goodman, Carly Goodman, Emily Gorcenski, Nicole Hemmer, Cassie Miller, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Jessica Ordaz, and Croix Saffin, 'Thoughts on the *Associated Press Stylebook*', in *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, ed. Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021), xi.

52 This association is confirmed by the first use of the term that I can find in the US press, where Barry Ulanov took aim at European jazz festivals that supposedly hired according to 'the color line in reverse. Crow Jim.' Barry Ulanov, 'Crow Jim', *Metronome*, May 1949, 42. Feather continued the attack on French 'Crow Jim' attitudes, singling out the French critic Hugues Panassié, later in 1951, during an article series on European jazz, 'Jazz in Europe: France', *Down Beat*, 5 October 1951. See also Ted Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture* (Stanford, CA: Portable Stanford, 1988), 29–36; Tom Perchard, 'Tradition, Modernity and the Supernatural Swing: Re-reading "Primitivism" in Hugues Panassié's Writing on Jazz', *Popular Music* 30/1 (2011); and Daniel Stein, 'Negotiating Primitivist Modernisms: Louis Armstrong, Robert Goffin, and the Transatlantic Jazz Debate', *European Journal of American Studies* 6/2 (2011), 1–19.

to identify which men are white and which colored'.⁵³ Unsigned, but possibly penned by Feather, this editorial thus explicitly laid the groundwork for the connection between European jazz criticism, 'Crow Jim', accusations of 'reverse discrimination', colourblind ideology, the acousmatic question, and the blindfold test that would be realized in the interview with Eldridge four months later.⁵⁴

Suspecting an 'unrealized undercurrent of true jim crowism', Sgt Haynes, in his letter to the editor, wondered 'how any comparison can be made between the attitude of the southern vulgarian and that of the European continental . . . The one is a feeling of outright contempt and brutality to the point of barbarism, the other a feeling of truly civilized liberalism and receptivity.' Like Eldridge, he had lived in both Europe and the United States (stationed as part of the military, we can assume) and held 'that the white American public has a long way to go in matching the continental European outlook toward this unnecessarily over-worked idea of race'.⁵⁵ While still attesting to the lesser degree of discrimination in Europe, he thus refuses to view race as a transatlantic zero-sum game between Jim Crow and 'Crow Jim'. This elicited a rare editorial amendment from the magazine, acknowledging that there was no hope of civil equality 'without "race consciousness"'. Making a transatlantic distinction, the editor's note continued to point out that 'this effort toward an ideal America is to accept each man on his own worth; each musician primarily for his own music. This, it was pointed out in our editorial, many Europeans were not doing. They were excessively color-conscious, though in a different way.'⁵⁶ Such attacks on 'colour consciousness' were not unique to *Down Beat*.⁵⁷ As historians of twentieth-century United States have shown, this idea of 'reverse racism' was the immediate precursor to the ideology of colourblindness that would become hegemonic along the notion of a 'post-racial' US society from the 1970s onwards. Omi and Winant argue that 'colorblind racial ideology represented a step beyond "reverse discrimination" because it repudiated the concept of race itself'.⁵⁸ The pages of *Down Beat* in 1951 show an accelerated microcosm of this process, starting with editorials and debate on 'Crow Jim' in March and ending with proof of colourblind listening in the blindfold test in July. This also shows how someone like Feather was moving the focus from a squarely anti-segregationist stance to, in George Lipsitz's words, a 'colorblindness [that] pretends that racial recognition rather than racist rule is the problem

53 'Crow Jim as Bad as Jim Crow', 10.

54 Other than its content, my reason for inferring the authorship of Feather is that a similar article was published under his name in *Melody Maker* the previous year: Leonard Feather, 'Jim Crow versus "Crow Jim": An Inverted Form of Race Prejudice Is Becoming Evident among Jazz Fans', *Melody Maker*, 13 May 1951, 3.

55 Jasper M. Haynes, 'Crow Jim. Letter to the editor', *Down Beat*, 13 July 1951, 10.

56 Editor's note, *Down Beat*, 13 July 1951, 10.

57 This accusation of colour-consciousness was also latently present in the critique of Eldridge's statement that he would not work for white bandleaders, which was misrepresented as if he was planning to work with Black musicians exclusively. This is what Carbado and Gulati term the *associational pressure of colourblindness*, in which 'white-with-white and white-with-people-of-color associations are perceived as colorblind. However, people of color with people-of-color associations will likely be perceived as color conscious.' Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati, *Acting White? Rethinking Race in "Post-Racial" America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

58 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 220.

to be solved'.⁵⁹ Here, it should be acknowledged that in terms of both its progressive and its regressive politics, the colourblind ideology that Feather and *Down Beat* presented in the early 1950s was, in the general context of US society, ahead of its time, as it was not until the 1970s that the discourse of colourblindness gained hegemony.⁶⁰

Given the rarity of such editorial responses, *Down Beat's* reply to Sgt Haynes gains extra weight, even more so because it was directed at a self-identified Black reader. Such debates over race fit into a pattern of whites accusing racial and ethnic minorities (and in this case also European critics) of 'playing the race card'. I argue that *Down Beat's* and Feather's promotion (alongside other white musicians and critics) of 'Crow Jim' discourse is an early example of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes as the *colourblind racism* that became the hegemonic racial ideology in post-Civil Rights United States. Under this ideology 'whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding "racist." Shielded by color blindness, whites can . . . even claim to be the victims of "reverse racism."' ⁶¹ In a broader perspective of jazz historiography, the blindfold test is also the precursor to what Ingrid Monson has dubbed *white resentment narratives*, which complain that white musicians have been left out of jazz history or are considered to be less authentic than African Americans. Feather is one of the forefathers to writers who, in Monson's words, well into the twenty-first century 'make use of liberal, individualist ideology to argue for a colorblind or race-neutral perspective that views music itself above and beyond politics'.⁶² As supportive as Feather otherwise was of Black musicians, this talk of 'Crow Jim' combined with colourblind ideology worked in the blindfold test as an attack on Eldridge's listening skills. Through the blindfold test, Feather mobilized colourblindness as a shield to safeguard his own position as the adjudicator of 'correct' listening with more racial literacy than Eldridge, an African American man.

Colourblind audile technique and the acousmatic imagination

That it was this idea of European 'reverse racism' that Feather was taking aim at is clear from the introduction to his blindfold test with Eldridge:

When Roy Eldridge returned from a year in France, it seemed to me that some of the French Crow Jim attitude had rubbed off on him. Just as the French jazz fan or critic

59 George Lipsitz, 'The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White Supremacy', in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Harris, Daniel HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 24.

60 For a broader history and perspectives on the contemporary ramifications of colourblind ideology in the United States, see, among others, Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 211–44; Michael K. Brown et al., eds., *White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); David Theo Goldberg, *Are We All Postracial Yet?* (London: Polity Press, 2015); Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: Noonday Press, 1997); Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*; Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Harris, Daniel HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

61 Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 4.

62 Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 16.

arbitrarily invents such non-existent types as 'Black jazz', 'American white jazz', etc. Roy claimed he could distinguish a white musician from a Negro simply by listening to his style.⁶³

Feather's argument against 'Crow Jim' was ideological, but the blindfold tests themselves were equally ideological. To illustrate this, we can go back to the very first blindfold test (published in *Metronome* in 1946), which Feather opened with this programmatic statement:

Clearly, the best way to listen to music is without any advance information regarding the artists, the tune, composer or arranger. To allay all prejudices, to cut through all the vast variety of points of view in jazz, we propose to play a series of jazz records to a noted figure in the jazz world.⁶⁴

By charting a history of regimes of listening practices, the blindfold test acts as what Jonathan Sterne calls *audile technique*.⁶⁵ Colourblind listening is an audile technique regime.⁶⁶ As Jennifer Stoever has shown in her study of the sonic colourline, the use of acousmatic listening in relation to questions of race were not entirely new and have precursors in nineteenth-century US music culture.⁶⁷ But as Stoever also argues, sound appeared somewhat contradictory 'in the dominant discourse of race during the postwar era, a period that simultaneously marked the beginning of the modern conception of "color blindness" and the high-water mark of segregation'.⁶⁸ Feather's blindfold tests are but one example of how sound technology was used with new force in mid-twentieth-century cultural production to establish ideas and practices that would eventually lead to the wider hegemony of colourblind ideology in US

63 Feather, "Little Jazz Goes Color Blind".

64 Feather, 'The Blindfold Test. Interview with Mary Lou Williams'.

65 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 87–177.

66 Loren Kajikawa (albeit parenthetically) and Max Shulman suggest the neologism 'colourdeafness' as a complement to colourblindness within the realm of music. Loren Kajikawa, 'The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in US Schools and Departments of Music', in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 156; and Max Shulman, 'Tuning the Black Voice: Colour-Deafness and the American Negro Theatre's Radio Dramas', *Modern Drama* 59/5 (2016). I do, however, believe that framing the issue in terms of colourblindness is actually apt because these listening practices rest on the privileging of acousmatic sound. Colourdeafness – which we could define as the wilful inability to link racialized markers to sound – can certainly be problematic. I would also argue that as a practice it is less prevalent than colourblind listening, that is, even people invested in the ideology of colourblind listening are often quite willing to identify certain sounds and styles in terms of racial or ethnic belonging and will in fact sometimes use it as an argument in support of cultural appropriation. Lastly, I prefer the term here, because its invocation of the audiovisual litany (see later) is more directly applicable to the audile technique in the blindfold test.

67 One specific example is how white nineteenth-century US music critics advocated 'blind listening' for operagoers who wanted to listen more 'objectively' to female Black singers without their judgement being skewed by visible blackness. Carla Peterson, *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 124; Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 114–15.

68 Jennifer Stoever, 'Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwarz Remixes Postwar *Neuva York*', *Social Text* 28/1 (2010), 62.

society after the Civil Rights Era.⁶⁹ Stoever's description can also be applied to Feather's privileging of recorded music as 'a technology of the sonic color line, developing and circulating new acousmatic protocols of racialized sound and listening no longer dependent on immediate bodily presence'.⁷⁰ The blindfold test was one of these new acousmatic protocols.⁷¹ Similar to the sonic work of doctors, scientists, and engineers, Feather's blindfold tests present listening as a technical skill imbued with rationality and analytic thought – though many of the musicians interviewed would subvert this premise with some very subjective remarks. It also gives symbolic currency to the virtuosity of the audile technique associated with the record reviewer and music critic, such as Feather himself.⁷² The technique relied on an acousmatic imagination that presented sound technology as what Sterne calls a *vanishing mediator*.⁷³ In other words, Feather's investment in colourblind listening rested upon making his own whiteness invisible through his use of technology. This places Feather, in his own way, as yet another white intellectual critic, focused on the study of 'the music itself, that is, the recordings themselves. Indeed, Guthrie Ramsey puts it bluntly, 'at its worst, Feather's blindfolding created a kind of bogus interaction with a musical text that mirrors few musical (or any other) experiences in the real world'.⁷⁴ As such, the blindfold test is a specific rather than universal audile technique that may not match well with, for instance, Roy Eldridge's approach to listening to records. His insistence on listening for Blackness and white appropriation in music was not a concession to Jim Crow or Crow Jim, but was a protest against the colourblind epistemology based on recordings that Feather presented him with. Though, his struggle was, at least in that moment, futile.

As the preceding quote from Feather's first blindfold test shows, this technique has an ideological aim, which is underpinned by what Sterne has identified as the *audiovisual litany*, a discourse that relies on essentializing distinctions of hearing and vision.⁷⁵ Through the

69 For some prehistory to this moment, see Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 133–35. On recording technology, race, and the separation of sight and sound specifically in relation to jazz, see also Laurie Stras, 'White Face, Black Voice: Race, Gender, and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1/2 (2007); and Alyssa Mehnert, 'McKinney's Cotton Pickers and the "Unseen Audience": Constructing Blackness on Radio', *American Music* 37/2 (2019). To add to this genealogy, it is notable that the one dissenting opinion in Pessy vs Ferguson is one of the intellectual roots of US colourblind ideology, see Neil Gotanda, 'A Critique of "Our Constitution Is Color-Blind"', *Stanford Law Review* 44 (1991).

70 Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 26–7; for her discussion of radio and colourblindness, see chapters 4 and 5.

71 See also Rhoshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); and Viktoria Tkaczyk, Mara Mills, and Alexandra Hui, eds., *Testing Hearing: The Making of Modern Aurality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

72 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 93–5.

73 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 218. On race, sound technology, and unmarked signifiers, see Alex Blue V, "'Hear What You Want": Sonic Politics, Blackness, and Racism-Cancelling Headphones', *Current Musicology* 99–100 (2017), 90; and Gustavus Stadler, 'Whiteness and Sound Studies', *Sounding Out!*, 6 July 2015, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/07/06/on-whiteness-and-sound-studies/> (accessed 19 December 2023).

74 Ramsey, 'The New and Improved White Jazz Literati', 206.

75 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 15–19; and Jonathan Sterne, 'The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36 (2011).

blindfold tests, Feather misrepresents specific ideas around sound and vision, and claims that one audile technique is universally and normatively 'clearly the best'. Such a representation of the senses is, as Sterne puts it, a 'zero-sum game',⁷⁶ where Feather positions colourblind listening as a technique that is opposed to the discriminatory prejudices that he exclusively associates with vision (even though it was not yet explicitly racialized in the case of the first test). Aiming to disassociate the sound from its source and conceptualize the blindfold test, Feather centred the acousmatic situation in a manner similar to his contemporary, the *musique concrète* composer Pierre Schaeffer, who famously theorized and idealized a mode of *reduced listening*.⁷⁷ Drawing on the audiovisual litany, Feather promoted the *acousmatic imagination*, a term coined by the film theorist Vivian Sobchack which I develop and define as the privileging of acousmatic listening, and the technological and ideological separation of sight and sound, based on the ontological primacy afforded to recorded sound.⁷⁸ Rather than challenging the audiovisual litany and image-sound hierarchies, like Sterne and Sobchack advocate for, Feather's insistence on the sharp distinctions between sound and visibility are invested in his acousmatically imaginary distinctions between race as a visual fact and sonic fiction.

In this way Feather's acousmatic imagination also maintains a racialized segregation of sound and visibility in order to promote colourblindness. Omi and Winant argue that in processes of racialization 'there is a crucial and non-reducible *visual dimension* to the definition and understanding of racial categories'.⁷⁹ Feather was clearly trying to combat the racism he saw coming from ocular-centric white supremacy. But by appealing to the acousmatic imagination, he did not challenge the audiovisual litany that colourblind listening shares with white supremacist listening. Indeed, the acousmatic question, as theorized by Eidsheim, is the premise of all of Feather's blindfold tests – even those that are not specifically about race. By claiming that colourblind listening was possible qua acousmatic listening, Feather attempted to circumvent the problem of race altogether because he envisioned the acousmatic imagination as neutral. However, as Eidsheim argues, 'we actually *assign value* when we pose

76 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 16. Elsewhere Sterne concludes that 'the problem with the litany is that it elevates a set of cultural prenotions about the senses (prejudices, really) to the level of theory'. Jonathan Sterne, 'Sonic Imaginations', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), 9.

77 Pierre Schaeffer, *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017); for a scholarly account and critique of Schaeffer's concepts and his legacy, see Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). A slightly later, but an equally famous theorization is R. Murray Schafer's concept of *schizophonia*. See R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994 [1977]), 273.

78 Sobchack only uses the term *acousmatic imagination* once and without theorizing it, in Vivian Sobchack, 'When the Ear Dreams: Dolby Digital and the Imagination of Sound', *Film Quarterly* 58/4 (2005). Simon Atkinson also uses it briefly, without further elaboration, in Simon Atkinson, 'Editorial', *Organised Sound* 15/1 (2010). Characteristically this latter appearance of the term appears in reference to the *musique concrète* of Schaeffer. Sound film has characteristically been the art form that has spurred the most theorization of the acousmatic, with Michel Chion's discussion of the *acousmètre* (the non-diegetic, disembodied voice) being the most sustained in Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and his reframing of silent film as *deaf cinema* in Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); on the latter, see also, Rick Altman, 'Four and a Half Film Fallacies', in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992).

79 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 111.

and respond to the acousmatic question'.⁸⁰ Rather than answering the question, Feather took the acousmatic imagination as axiomatic of listening itself and did not see the value that he was assigning to listening in the process. Eldridge, on the other hand, seems to have been keenly aware of the values that both he and Feather were assigning to listening. Both seem to have been somewhat vexed by the fact that, as Eidsheim puts it, 'listening through the acousmatic question arises from the impossibility that the question will yield a firm answer'.⁸¹

Eldridge and Feather both sought firm answers when confronted by racial segregation in the mid-twentieth century. Each of them based their arguments and showed their value of sound when confronted with the acousmatic question, but with differing emphases. As Eldridge's afterthoughts to the blindfold test shows, he privileged the unique qualities of sound associated with particular performers and performances, especially valued in African American musical traditions. Conversely, he criticized white imitators of Black sound. Feather, on the other hand, emphasized the vanishing mediation of the record medium in a discourse of acousmatic imagination.

Whiteness and the possessive investment in colourblind listening

Sociologists have observed how most white people understand racism to be a form of prejudice, whereas for most people of colour it is systemic or institutionalized.⁸² Scholars of whiteness have often remarked on how white supremacy draws its power from its apparent invisibility.⁸³ Invisible, at least, to white people since, as Eldridge's refusal to work for white bandleaders show, people of colour have always been keenly aware of the power of whiteness.⁸⁴ Feather believed that he could eradicate prejudice via the acousmatic imagination, and indeed used that term ('prejudice') continually in his articles on 'Crow Jim'. Rather than do away with prejudice and race, though, the blindfold test just institutionalized it in a new colourblind framework, reinforcing what Lipsitz has famously called 'the possessive investment in whiteness'.⁸⁵ Monson frames the blindfold test exactly in terms of possession (though not using Lipsitz's terms), and writes that when Feather concluded that listening itself was colourblind, 'he was asking Eldridge to forfeit his claim to having a special connection to Black music by virtue of being raised as an African American. He was asking him to say that race and history don't matter; it had become everybody's music now.'⁸⁶ The claim to

80 Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 13.

81 Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 3.

82 Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 8.

83 Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1997]); and Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

84 For critiques of the idea on whiteness as an unmarked marker, see Ruth Frankenberg, 'The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness', in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

85 George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2018).

86 Monson, 'Jazz as Political and Cultural Practice', 33.

cultural possession that Feather took for himself, in the name of colourblind universalism, was based in his whiteness.

As Feather sought to erase race in a colourblind audile technique, he was blind to his own whiteness, inhabiting what Guthrie Ramsey has called *the invisible white critical T*.⁸⁷ This subjectivity of the white critic fits within a broader US discourse of twentieth-century expertise where, as the intellectual historian Susan Searls Giroux argues, the 'refusal to "see race" . . . is a celebrated marker of the professional expert's detachment and decorum, or is more militantly defended as a form of *realpolitik* waged against pernicious forms of identitarian distraction'.⁸⁸ Thus, someone like Feather mobilized technology, the acousmatic question, and colourblind listening against the Francophone critics that he accused of 'Crow Jim' identitarian and primitivist distraction and against African American musicians such as Eldridge who he saw as equally essentialist. More than a mere application of technology, though, Feather's audile technique is related to Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's critique of academic methods that, despite their best intentions, re-entrench whiteness as objective while condemning non-whites to positions of perpetual subjectivity.⁸⁹ When administering the blindfold test, Feather took on the de-racialized identity of a jazz scientist who simply recorded the results of an exam, as opposed to Eldridge's putatively subjective position. It is perhaps not coincidental that Feather's colourblind listening is historically coterminous with hi-fi culture for white, male, middle-class professionals, which, paraphrasing Stoever's study of tape recorders (like the ones Feather would have used) in the 1950s, protects the 'institutionalized standards of racialized sonic citizenship' that Eldridge was forced to concede to.⁹⁰ Likewise, the blindfold tests came to prominence around the same time as mid-century aesthetics associated with Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage, which Marie Thompson argues constitute a *white aurality* that continues to mar sound studies. It is not difficult to see the parallels to Feather in her description of 'the modernist virtue of scientific and traceless observation; entangled with formations of whiteness, masculinity and Eurocentricism, it pertains to a subjectless position from which the world is observed from everywhere and nowhere, and from which bias is "removed" through obfuscation'.⁹¹ This subjectless whiteness was a privileged persona of the critic that Feather pursued through his colourblind project. In the famous case of Eldridge's 'failed' exam, the successful invisibility of Feather's own

87 Guthrie Ramsey, Jr, 'Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade', *Musical Quarterly* 85/1 (2001), 40.

88 Susan Searls Giroux, 'The Age of Unreason: Race and the Drama of American Anti-Intellectualism', *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 29/1–2 (2009), 303.

89 Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, 'Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods', in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, eds. Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 17. This is related to Philip Ewell's recent similar musicological critique, 'Music Theory and the White Racial Frame', *Music Theory Online* 26/ 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mt0.26.2.4>. See also Tom Perchard, 'New Riffs on the Old Mind-Body Blues: "Black Rhythm," "White Logic," and Music Theory in the 21st-Century', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9/3 (2015).

90 Jennifer Stoever, 'Reproducing U.S. Citizenship in *Blackboard Jungle*: Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder', *American Quarterly* 63/3 (2011), 801.

91 Marie Thompson, 'Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies', *Parallax* 23/3 (2017), 272.

whiteness stood in marked contrast to Eldridge's nominal failure as a racialized Black person who could not recognize their own Black music.

The legacy of the blindfold test

Roy Eldridge never forgave Leonard Feather for, in his mind, blowing an issue out of proportion and putting him on the spot, later telling journalist Dan Morgenstern: 'Boy, that cat really hung me on the wall with that.'⁹² On the other hand, Feather did not have second thoughts and reprinted part of the fateful blindfold test under the heading 'Riddle of the Races' in his 1958 *New Encyclopedia Yearbook of Jazz*. In order to extend his point beyond Eldridge, he also included a quote from a blindfold test where Miles Davis misidentified the Black saxophonist Buddy Collette, saying 'I can't tell . . . All those white tenor players sound alike to me.'⁹³ For Feather, such statements confirmed his commitment to colourblind listening in the context of US jazz culture, but he would also explain how it was, at least in his own eyes, a product of his perspective as a European and a Jew, writing in the mid-1960s: 'The myth of race, a curious distortion of Hitler's theories, almost disappeared in jazz until the stirring of a chauvinistic theory that Negroes are the only real "blues people" caused an alarming rift.'⁹⁴ Here, voices of other critics echo in Feather's writing.

The first echo was a European one, associating any kind of 'race consciousness' with racism, as Feather attempts to criticize 'playing the race card' by 'playing the Nazi card', as it were. More specifically, Feather was still positioning himself against the primitivist myth and 'Crow Jim' that he found especially pronounced in French jazz criticism. Feather's reluctance to giving Black musicians primacy in jazz may also be a reaction to the increased anti-Americanism of the Cold War. As Mary Dudziak has shown, the foreign critique of US Jim Crow discrimination grew to considerable heights in the post-war period.⁹⁵ American observers were quick to see the connection (correctly) between the supposedly superior European appreciation of jazz and growing anti-Americanism, associated especially with left-leaning French critics.⁹⁶ From this point of view, the French attraction to Black jazz represented a fundamental anti-American misunderstanding of the United States, which was at odds with the liberal, colourblind ideals of both music and society that Feather saw embodied in jazz.⁹⁷ The legacy of such contested transatlantic discourses is with us today. Perhaps

92 Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*, 189.

93 Leonard Feather, *The New Encyclopedia Yearbook of Jazz* (New York: Horizon Press, 1958), 71–2; Davis's blindfold test originally appeared as Leonard Feather, 'More Miles. The Blindfold Test. Interview with Miles Davis', *Down Beat*, 7 August 1958, 29.

94 Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz* (New York: Horizon, 1965), 41.

95 Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 18–46.

96 David Strauss, 'French Critics and American Jazz', *American Quarterly* 17/3 (1965), 586–7.

97 Rather than seeing this as a contradiction, some recent scholarship has emphasized the dialectics of anti-Americanism and Americanization/phil-Americanism. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, 'Always Blame the Americans: Anti-Americanism in Europe in the Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review* 111/4 (2006); Egbert Klautke, 'Anti-Americanism in Twentieth-Century Europe', *The Historical Journal* 54/4 (2011).

ironically, given Feather's protests against French 'Crow Jim', contemporary European jazz discourses let the apparent contradiction of 'race consciousness' and colourblindness exist side-by-side. As William Kirk Bares argues, twenty-first-century European jazz ideology brings 'to the fore the competing visions of jazz universalism . . . as visions of jazz as American melting pot dazzle alongside stagings of jazz as European haute culture or jazz as African diasporic consciousness'. Bares critiques such visions of the music for putting forth a 'postpolitical' jazz universalism 'according to a logic of managed liberal-democratic multiculturalism' that is not dissimilar to Feather's mid-twentieth-century vision of interracialism and colourblindness in jazz.⁹⁸

The second echo in Feather's statement was a newer African American one, with reference to Amiri Baraka's (at the time still going by the name LeRoi Jones) *Blues People* (1963), in which Feather read a re-segregating of jazz into authentically Black and derivatively white forms. As the 1950s became the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement gained further momentum and Feather was increasingly confronted with African American musicians and critics, such as Baraka, who were explicitly political in their art and writings. In *Blues People*, Baraka asserted the fundamental Blackness of jazz and in contrast to Feather's interracial ideal heard bebop as an 'anti-assimilationist sound'.⁹⁹ As such, Feather also revealed that his politics were perhaps more caught up in the waning New Deal Order rather than standing in solidarity with Black political leaders of the late 1950s and 1960s. Martin Luther King, Jr's dream of a colourblind society had a different valence than Feather's, to say nothing of his response to Baraka's critique of hegemonic whiteness.¹⁰⁰ Building upon the ideology of colourblindness, Feather objected to a discourse centred on Baraka's blues people. Baraka for his part was happy to bring identity politics explicitly into the question of music criticism. In his now-famous essay 'Jazz and the White Critic' (published in *Down Beat*, the same publication that housed the blindfold tests), Baraka charged that class and race should be central concerns of jazz criticism, and that 'we have got to set up standards of judgment and aesthetic excellence that depend on our native knowledge and understanding of the underlying philosophies

98 William Kirk Bares, 'Transatlanticism as Dutch National Spectacle: Universalism and Postpolitics at the North Sea Jazz Festival', *American Music* 33/3 (2015), 347–8.

99 LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002 [1963]), 181. For a sympathetic critique of Baraka's interpretation of bebop, see DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 21–9. At the time of its publication, Ralph Ellison was the most prominent critic of Baraka's book. See James Smethurst, *Brick City Vanguard: Amiri Baraka, Black Music, Black Modernity* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 59–90; and Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 274–89.

100 In making this distinction I am also arguing that we should resist seeing (and celebrating) Feather's colourblindness as part of an initial, pre-1954 phase of what Jacquelyn Hall has called 'the long civil rights movement'. Jacquelyn Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past', *Journal of American History* 91 (2005). For a critique of the 'long civil rights movement'-historiography, see Steven Lawson, 'Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968', in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Danielle McGuire and John Dittmer (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011). Both historians do, however, agree that attempts to frame colourblindness and integration as a goal in itself are part of factually incorrect, right-wing revisionist histories of the Civil Rights Movement. For an argument against the wilful misunderstandings and appropriations of, specifically, King's ideas about colourblindness, see Ronald Turner, 'The Dangers of Misappropriation: Misusing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Legacy to Prove the Colorblind Thesis', *Michigan Journal of Race & Law* 2/1 (1996).

and local cultural references that produced blues and jazz in order to produce valid critical writing or commentary about it'.¹⁰¹ In Baraka, Feather quite rightly saw a figure similar to Eldridge who insisted on the primary Blackness of jazz. Conversely, Feather's biography and the full history of the motivations behind the Roy Eldridge blindfold test shows that jazz criticism was not only hegemonically white because the profession was made up of mainly white (male) Europeans and Americans. Jazz criticism was white because it centred white critics and their supposedly objective, normative listening position.

This case study also reveals that US debates about race and racism cannot be separated from transnational discourses and experiences of racialization. Eldridge's racial politics were influenced by his stay in Europe and Feather was a British journalist working in the United States. Even as Feather proposed the blindfold test as an acousmatic question that could somehow circumvent questions of racial identity, national belonging, and creative ownership, I have shown how the blindfold test was deeply implicated in transatlantic politics of race and critical authority. Feather's anti-racism was built on the idea of simply rejecting 'race consciousness', in which he did not differentiate strongly between US Jim Crow and European 'Crow Jim'. In this, one might be tempted to read his ideas as a distant forbearer of Paul Gilroy's arguments against *raciology* and *racial particularism*. It is, however, worth distinguishing between Gilroy's conceptualization of Black anti-anti-essentialism and his warning that 'deconstructing "races" is not the same thing as doing away with racism'.¹⁰² Feather might be regarded as an exponent of the former, but his colourblind ideology was at fault for the latter.

As noted, the legacy of this particular blindfold test lies not least in its anecdotal presence in both formal and casual jazz discourse to this day. More widely, the blindfold test format continues to enjoy widespread popularity and is still a regular feature in *Down Beat*. It has also been copied in multiple music publications and radio stations across the globe. Most prominently, Leonard Feather took the format with him, now titled 'Before & After', when he started publishing for *JazzTimes* in the late 1980s and the magazine has continued with the column after Feather's death; the British magazine *The Wire* publishes a version of the blindfold under the title 'Invisible Jukebox'; and blindfold tests have been conducted in front of live audiences at places such as the Monterey Jazz Festival and the North Sea Jazz Festival (sometimes with the collaboration of *Down Beat*). In these venues, the question of race is rarely explicitly at the fore. However, the acousmatic imagination and colourblind audile techniques have continually been leveraged in other places where race – not to mention other markers of identity – is a contested topic. From the 1940s onwards, radio was increasingly cast as a colourblind medium in the United States; often both exacerbating the racist stereotyping of Black voices and amplifying the hegemonic middle-class whiteness of US airwaves.¹⁰³ Colourblind ideology continues to be employed in the casting of voice actors for film, TV, and video games, and most spectacularly in a reality TV show such as *Love Is*

101 Jones [Amiri Baraka], 'Jazz and the White Critic', in *Black Music*, 20.

102 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 251.

103 Shulman, 'Tuning the Black Voice'; and Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 229–76. Shulman and Stoever also chronicle how a few African American performers were able to use radio's acousmatic sound to subvert the sonic colourline.

Blind.¹⁰⁴ And legal actors, from police officers to judges, continue to uphold white supremacy and settler colonialism through claims to their own colourblind inability to hear race.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the most contentious arena for colourblind listening today is music auditions. Almost direct equivalents to Feather's blindfold test, so-called blind (or better, 'anonymous') auditions conceal a performer (e.g., using a curtain) from the judges in an attempt to prevent bias. Infamous cases about the use (or lack) of anonymous auditions include the Black bassist Art Davis, who filed an unsuccessful discrimination lawsuit against the New York Philharmonic, and female trombonist Abbie Conant, who was selected as the first choice as principal trombonist for the Munich Philharmonic and subsequently subjected to sexism by the orchestra's conductor and received less pay than her male counterparts. Focusing mainly on gender equity, several social scientific studies have taken up the case of anonymous auditions, though importantly – perhaps because they come from outside the fields of musicology, critical race studies, or gender studies – none of those studies question the audiovisual litany or trouble the ideological implications of acousmatic listening.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in recent years it is feminist musicologists and musicians seeking greater race and gender equity who have questioned the use of anonymous auditions.¹⁰⁷ Following on from that, musicologist Will Cheng has critiqued the 'moral masquerades' of screened-off auditions that allows orchestras to claim that they are not engaged in discrimination. For Cheng, the main problem with anonymous auditions is that they seem to foreclose reflection from those administering the audition: 'Although screens and redactions of identity can level the playing field on a case-by-case basis, they concurrently generate complacency and conceit, and therefore aren't viable as long-term substitutes for continuous practices of self-critique and awareness.'¹⁰⁸ That it is within the world of Western art music that acousmatic listening is celebrated and used to foreclose critique is not accidental. Loren Kajikawa argues that 'through the use of colourblind language, classical music, like whiteness, manages to avoid becoming an object of scrutiny'.¹⁰⁹ Thus, these debates speak not only to the possible role colour- or gender-blind listening may play in affirmative action, but also cautions us that acousmatic listening in itself will not undo classist and racist hierarchies that support the white heteronormative ableist patriarchy. As the music industry and music education seeks to become more diverse, inclusive, equitable, and move beyond white hegemony, we can learn from past attempts at anti-racism such as Feather's – well-intentioned as it was – to question the

104 Philip Miletic, 'Avatar'n'Andy: The Colour Blind Ideology in Video Game Voice Acting', *The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 13/2 (2020); and Kendall Artz, 'Love is (Color)Blind: Constructing Race Non-Visually on Reality TV', *Popular Culture Studies Journal* 9/2 (2021).

105 Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 37–76.

106 Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, 'Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact on "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians', *American Economic Review* 90/4 (2000); and Chia-Jung Tsay, 'Sight over Sound in the Judgment of Music Performance', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110/36 (2013).

107 See, for instance, McMullen, 'Corpo-Realities'; and Afa Dworkin, 'Rethinking Blind Auditions. Interview with Jennifer Arnold, Jeri Lynne Johnson, Alex Laing, and Melissa White', *Symphony* (Spring 2021).

108 Will Cheng, *Loving Music till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 93.

109 Kajikawa, 'The Possessive Investment in Classical Music', 158.

assumptions of music, technology, and listening that are embedded in the audile techniques we privilege. In incorporating the full history of articles and commentary that led to the blindfold test with Roy Eldridge, I have attempted to go beyond an analysis of the case that stops at Leonard Feather's intentions or uses the blindfold test as an anecdote in a larger story. As Eldridge had made clear, his concern was about discrimination, violence, exploitation, and appropriation. Without this context, a reference to Feather's colourblind blindfold test can too easily be a way for – especially white – readers and listeners to distance themselves from a prominent liberal, but unwoke figure in jazz history and to disavow their own privilege and complicity in racialized hierarchies.

In closing, I want to make clear that I am not arguing that any blindfold test, specifically, or any invocation of the acousmatic imagination, more broadly, per definition is racist. Indeed, *Down Beat's* blindfold tests also presented Black musicians as voices of music criticism and Feather presented remarkably diversity compared with the rest of the magazine's coverage, with a not insignificant number of women and non-Americans among his interviewees. However, I am rejecting the idea that a hermeneutics of listening could reveal an a priori colourblind state of mind. Put more bluntly, I am reiterating the simple fact that acousmatic listening is a specific – not universal – audile technique. As a sonic and cultural practice, this coupling of technology, music, and colourblind politics is ideological and continues to place whiteness at the centre of listening.

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