

Amiri baraka and ralph ellison essay samples

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Jazz and Blues are the most important elements of jazz music and Amiri Baraka and Ralph Ellison delve into the subject with considerable aplomb and panache. Baraka describes jazz as an expression of culture at its most 'unself', therefore showing the larger consciousness of a self. He describes jazz as seeking another place apart from its middle-class origins. If jazz music can be described as black music, both are intrinsically separate, since the temptations for the middle class Negro include those of branching out into society.

In the reading, Baraka also discusses the breakdown of Black cultural tradition, describing it as the destruction of the most formal art and social traditions which also includes the breakdown of the Black pre-American religious forms. He compares this loss to the West's loss of religiosity. Thus, although African American music has a background in church, the element of devotion is no longer there.

In 'Blues People', Ellison describes the current status of Negro American music especially in the context of the Freedom Movement that clamours for more civil rights for blacks. He describes the main aim of the music, as 'straining for a more active kind of militancy'. This is, to say the least, quite distracting. Interestingly, there is a comparison between the Negro as a slave and as an American, with music covering this important journey. Essentially, Ellison is at pains to point out that jazz music has sociological connotations that cannot be divorced from reality.

Both readings are important sociological documents that assist us to understand the moral dilemma that often affects black music and its main message.