

ON COMPILING A
SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
“THE WHITE NEGRO”

J A S O N M O S S E R

2017 MARKED THE SIXTY-YEAR ANNIVERSARY of the publication of Norman Mailer’s essay “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” announcing the emergence of his new existential hero, the “philosophical psychopath,” a Nietzschean *ubermensch* who re-evaluated all traditional American values to create his own system. Widely read and cited since the time of its initial publication in *Dissent*, the essay represents Mailer’s stated desire to lead a “revolution in the consciousness of our time” (*Advertisements* 17). Its impact has prompted John Leland to cite the essay in his book *Hip: The History* as central to that history. Beat Generation chronicler John Clellon Holmes called Mailer’s countercultural, philosophical foray into the nature of Hip and the hipster “a pioneer exploration of this New Consciousness, a document fully as important to this age as *Notes from Underground* was to the Europe of its time” (“Game” 87). At the same time, his friend and colleague James Baldwin wrote in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” that Mailer’s views on race were founded more on fantasy than on fact and called his fellow author’s hipness into serious question. From other contemporaries the essay provoked more strongly negative responses. Norman Podhoretz lumped Mailer together with the Beats as “Know-Nothing Bohemians” and castigated him for his suggestion that violence represented a legitimate response to the instinctual repression of his age, while Paul O’Neil entertained readers of *Life* magazine by ridiculing Mailer and the Beats as devotees of “the cult of the Pariah” (115), a gang of wannabe posers. Nevertheless, as the responses of African-American and Gender Studies

critics cited in this bibliography attest, “The White Negro” continues to assert its relevance and to antagonize its detractors.

Sixty years on, then, it seems appropriate to reflect on the decades of critical response to the essay since its publication, but compiling a bibliography of secondary works was a daunting task. If one enters the search terms “Mailer White Negro” in Google Scholar, for example, one finds, as of this date, 8, 870 hits. Given that tsunami of sources, I needed to be selective in order for the bibliography to be useful, so I settled on what I judged the top 200. My choices were guided primarily by the principle of representative perspectives, thematic points of departure from which the reader seeking more information might begin. “The White Negro” is a nexus for post-WWII political and cultural movements and concerns. A cursory survey of the titles will suggest these recurring themes, but I list the most prevalent among this vast range of responses—crossing historical eras, academic disciplines, and critical theories—that point to the continuing relevance of Mailer’s essay: the Beat Generation, Hip and the hipster; Existentialism; Gender, Masculinity, and Homosexuality; History and Politics; Jazz; Mailer as Novelist and His Contemporaries; Psychopathy and Sociopathy; Race and Ethnicity; and Violence.

I have cited only the first appearance of “The White Negro” in print, not reprints, though they are numerous. I tried to include all references by critics who have written consistently about Mailer over the years; accordingly, I also tried to include every reference to Mailer’s essay that has appeared in the pages of *The Mailer Review*. Included also are biographies and memoirs that reference the essay or least Mailer’s life while the essay was gestating in his consciousness, a time during which he was smoking lots of marijuana and writing a diary, the soon-to-be-published *Lipton’s Journal*, finally coming to fruition in a burst of creativity, a period Mailer recounts in *Advertisements for Myself*. That miscellany of Mailer’s writing includes his own meta-discursive “advertisements” on the “The White Negro,” pieces like “The Hip and the Square,” which originally appeared as a *Village Voice* column, as well as the published responses he elicited from Ned Polsky and Jean Malaquais, all of which I have included here. I cited a few supplemental primary texts like Mailer’s essays on Black Power during the sixties and Mailer’s *Esquire* piece “Brooklyn Minority Report: ‘She Thought the Russians Was Coming,’” documenting his meeting with real-life White Negroes, a group of juvenile delinquents photographed by Bruce Davidson. I also included Caroline

Bird's "Unlost Generation," the piece from which Mailer took his epigraph to the essay. Cited also are works by Mailer's friend and collaborator psychologist Robert Lindner, whose case study *Rebel Without a Cause* Mailer quotes in his essay, and Sheldon and Eleanor Gluecks' *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, which Mailer also cites.

A few editorial notes: As much as possible, I cited original publications, not reprints. Polsky's and Malaquais' reactions to "The White Negro" were originally published in the City Lights reprint of Mailer's essay, but without page numbers, so I cited instead their later inclusion in *Advertisement for Myself*. I have attempted to adhere to MLA 8th edition style, with the exception that I have omitted URLs and cited only the raw print information. I want to thank Georgia Gwinnett College librarians Robert Aaron, Kay Chatham, and David Minchew for their help in locating particularly elusive sources, and I especially want to thank J. Michael Lennon for his help not only in suggesting sources but in having compiled the collection *Norman Mailer: Works and Days*, an invaluable reference for primary texts.

WORKS CITED

- Baldwin, James. "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." *Esquire*, 55, no. 5 (1961), pp. 102–06. Print.
- Bird, Caroline. "Born 1930: The Unlost Generation." *Harper's Bazaar*, vol. 90, issue 2943, Feb. 1957, pp. 104+. Print
- Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanore T. Glueck. *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*. NY: Commonwealth Fund, 1950. Print
- Holmes, John Clellon. "The Game of the Name." *Passionate Opinions*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas, 1988, pp. 78–94. Print
- Leland, John. *Hip: The History*. NY: Harper Collins, 2004. Print
- Lennon, Michael J., and Donna Pedro Lennon. *Norman Mailer: Works and Days*. Shavertown, PA: Sligo Press, 2000. Print
- Lindner, Robert. *Rebel Without a Cause: The Story of a Criminal Psychopath*. NY: Grune and Stratton, 1944. Print
- Mailer, Norman. *Advertisements for Myself*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959. Print
- . "Brooklyn Minority Report: 'She Thought the Russians Was Coming.'" *Esquire*, (June 1960), pp. 129+. Print
- . "The Hip and the Square." *Village Voice* (Apr. 25), NY: NY, 1956, p. 5. Print
- . "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster." *Dissent* vol. 4, no. 3, 1957, pp. 276–293. Print
- Malaquais, Jean. "Reflections on Hip." *Advertisements for Myself*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959, pp. 359–362. Print

- O'Neil, Paul. "The Only Rebellion Around." *Life*, vol. 47, no. 22, (Nov. 30, 1959), pp. 115+. Print
- Podhoretz, Norman. "The Know-Nothing Bohemians." *Partisan Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, Spring 1958, pp. 305+. Print
- Polsky, Ned. "Reflections on Hip." *Advertisements for Myself*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959, pp. 365–369. Print