LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK

-MR.GAME
have always understood the genius of Wynton Marsalis in the full light of a particular genealogy of African American letters. I will leave it to others to describe his musical influences, but the way he thinks and talks about American culture and Black folks’ central place in it bears the markings of writers like Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, and Stanley Crouch. These complicated men offer searing commentary on the contradictions of American democracy, especially when it comes to race, but all hold an unshakable faith in its ideals—”with its image of hope, fraternity and self-realization,” as Ellison put it. For each of them, jazz embodies the spirit of this place, at once critique and aspiration, constraint and individuality. Their is not a naive embrace, and they have shaped the voice and sound of Marsalis. One can hear echoes of them in the depth of Marsalis’s understanding of Black vernacular culture when he talks about American life and how that becomes the raw stuff for his art. Listening to his vast body of work, you can grasp his sophisticated use of symbol and myth as he explores the sinewy features of American history and its beautiful and terrible underside. Marsalis composes and blows with his trumpet those insights with a mastery of craft and passion rarely seen. He has dedicated his life to this artform, and he has fought for its continued relevance to our national self-understanding, no matter who listens to the music.

The Ever Fonky Lowdown reveals some fundamental truths about the American project. Through the voice of the album’s narrator, Mr. Game—a character who is a slick combination of politician, hustler, and snake oil salesman who cajoles and evangelizes—Wynton Marsalis’s jazz exposes the ugly truths of American life. Mr. Game insists that we fulfill our obligation as members of this democracy by confronting honesty, and without the need of illusion, the hard reality of who we actually are. He does not speak on the lower frequencies to reveal the messiness and beauty of American democratic life (sentimentality is only a weapon in his hands); instead, he provides a kind of scandalous wisdom about how the whole game of American democracy works. It’s funny, and it is lowdown.

This jazz music has to be played in these times when America’s myths and legends crumble all around us.

Ellison, Murray, and Crouch often invoked jazz as an art metaphor for American democracy. A way of ordering chaos, the music illustrates the freedom evidenced in improvisation and in the consent to the ensemble necessary for its expression. In America, like jazz, there is a fierce individuality within community, but that community is shot through with evils that all too often cut short dreams and promises. With The Ever Fonky Lowdown, Marsalis uses jazz not to illustrate democratic virtues, but to disclose America’s dark underside. The irony of the artform that best illustrates democracy gives way to the bitter irony that the same music exposes the grand lie of the American ideology. Dream and buy into the promise of America and witness it all become a midden dumped at your feet.

Mr. Game offers an account of America rooted in power, leisure, and consumption that knows no boundaries and promotes itself as the greatest gift to humankind: America is the greatest show on earth, with its carnival barkers who keep our eyes on the so-called prize while the winners rob us blind. He reveals how Black folk have been caught up in it all, how the horrors of slavery shaped the country and how our sounds and musings have come to make this ghastly place swing. In Mr. Game’s hands, or Wynton Marsalis’s, jazz exposes the ugly truths of American life. He wants us to see it clearly, the Apostle Paul be damned.

As you listen to the music and take in what Mr. Game says, one cannot help but feel a sense of pervasive sadness here. (The sadness may very well be my own, and it colors the music and his words a deep shade of blue.) Marsalis has seen a lot over his many years. His, one might say, is an earned insight into this particular American calamity. He does not seem angry or bitter. He has been saying something like this for decades. But, if I am right about The Ever Fonky Lowdown, there is something different here: he seems resigned not so much to his fate, but to the fact that America is what it is. That we are who we are. And no matter what we say or how we fight—I love the glimmer of hope he offers with the example of Fannie Lou Hamer—the power of the American music illustrates the freedom evidenced in improvisation and in the consent to the ensemble necessary for its expression. In America, like jazz, there is a fierce individuality within community, but that community is shot through with evils that all too often cut short dreams and promises. With The Ever Fonky Lowdown, Marsalis uses jazz not to illustrate democratic virtues, but to disclose America’s dark underside. The irony of the artform that best illustrates democracy gives way to the bitter irony that the same music exposes the grand lie of the American ideology. Dream and buy into the promise of America and witness it all become a midden dumped at your feet.

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Democracy requires something more of us than simply taking the bribe of the likes of Mr. Game. For it to work, we have to be capable of critical reflection and have a kind of moral sense that allows us to step outside of ourselves and recognize the worth and needs of our fellows as equal to our own. But, as Marsalis put the point to me, it may be more a question of, “Are we even up to democracy?” Understanding that possibility fully may very well be the ever funky lowdown! It certainly sent me to my liquor cabinet.

This jazz music has to be played in these times when America’s myths and legends crumble all around us. A generation has come of age amid calamity: 9/11, unending war, devastating hurricanes, mass shootings, economic collapse, and global pandemics. They do not need sweet stories or music that affirm the inherent goodness of this place or encourage them to stick their heads in the sand. They need truths, straight no chaser. Beauty can be found there. The Ever Fonky Lowdown is unvarnished truth, and it is beautiful music.

It may be the case that we are not up to what democracy demands. No matter. We must keep trying to live up to what genuine democracy requires of us. That struggle is worth it. In fact, the struggle itself might be the thing of ultimate value. I suspect that is why, in part, Marsalis keeps playing. “When we sit down to play,” he once told me, “we make [tangible our] belief.” He keeps playing, because he believes we can be otherwise. We keep fighting for the same reason even as Mr. Game tries to convince us to join his side.

EDDIE S. GLAUDE
Princeton University
March 25, 2020

[Signature]
Mr. Game:

Mr. Game, here at your everlasting service. I’m here for your edification, elucidation and your education. Here’s the situation.

I run a game of numbers, though I’m not a numbers man. I inspire and sell confidence. Don’t laugh—confidence determines the direction of the markets. And there’s nothing in the world more important than money, especially if it’s yours.

We are here tonight, but this is an international hustle, baby. It has played out many times across time and space and is not specific to any language or race. It takes on different flavors according to people’s taste, but always ends up in the same old place.

Since we here like to talk about freedom, that subject will set tonight’s pace.

I want you to sit back and hear me out. What I show you will eliminate all doubt. I’m a gourmet chef and a short order cook, the author of a best-selling book called, *Leap Before You Look*. For the first time, tonight, I’m going to give you the opportunity to buy into the method for pursuing what we all call ‘democratic freedoms’—for yourself and for resolving nasty stressful conflicts with others.

This game tests your aptitude for accepting the revelations and democratic opportunities I will make available. If you embrace these concepts and emerge with your sanity, vanity, and humanity intact, you will be awarded some very liberating prizes. You all are so great. I’m sure there will be many winners here tonight. Lest you think I’m a happy rhyming fool, this is a game that took Solomon to school. I’m your host but no TV star. Though we play, the subject is war, but the point is power! Pure power and only power!

It starts with a predilection for absolute slaughter, becomes a call for order. It ends with the opportunity for greatness, wealth and fame for all time. Beat them, make them work to increase yours; defile and control their sexuality; ruin their experiencing of life and birth them into shame for what was done to them (in the name of a righteous God); redefine their place in history; teach them that they deserved all that was done to them; corrupt their children by rewarding them for their aptitude in regurgitating their pathology according to your narrative; and finally, sit right down and entertain yourself with their mocking and shaming themselves by singing and dancing about it. Well... that’s just too much fun to go undone.

There ‘tis. It’s the rebound after the beat down, the hump on the brown round, and the ‘green you-lost’, I found. It’s Ever Fonky and it’s all the way Lowdown.

Did I tell you that my number one hustle is winning? I am a winner, and everyone loves a winner. Even the losers of a very bitterly fought war will try to join the winners. And y’all are all winners. You are the greatest people in the world. And we, together, are the best ever.

All compositions and libretto written by Wynton Marsalis
Based on decades of conversations with my brother Ellis.
For my mother and father, Delores and Ellis.
—WM

PART ONE

THE EVER FONKY LOWDOWN

☞ PART ONE ☜

5
WE ARE THE GREATEST
Oh, we are the greatest The world has ever seen And we are the greatest That there has ever been Oh, I am the greatest No, you are the greatest No, we are the greatest And we are the best of the best
If you’re not with us Then you’re back in the pack with the rest Oh, we are the greatest, everybody knows You are degraded, that’s just how it goes I, me, mine, myself Me, I, mine, myself Mine, me, myself, I mean We are the greatest in the world We are the best that’s ever been We know that you know That we know that we’re number one We see that you see That we see that we’ve just begun Let’s talk about I, me, mine, myself We, our, us, ourselves We are number one Our crimes are much better Our water is wetter Our lies are much truer Our sorrows are bluer
Mr. Game:
Yes, you have to believe in yourself to be successful. I see you have accepted that concept quite well.
Too much negativity and reflection are like all vegetables and no cake. Follow me while I explain what this is gonna take. I’m Mr. Game. Success is my middle name. I became famous for my financial twerking that showed folks how to make money, without even the money working. We could go on and on about me, but we have a lot of stuff to do and tonight’s proceedings are all about you. Believe me, O, Glorious People! You are great and we are sooo fantastic. But have you noticed a growing population of ‘others’ who look suspicious? They seem to be everywhere. Who are they? Count them, I think they may soon outnumber us.

THEY/LET’S CALL THEM THIS
They are over here They are over there They are everywhere What’s that in her hair?
What are their children playing? What’s that baby saying? Can we ask them?
They are over here They are over there They are everywhere Let’s call them this Let’s call them that Or something funny Maybe this and that
Where do they live? What do they eat? What do they talk about when they meet? What do they think? What’s with their crazy, noisy, silly chatter?
Let me ask I wouldn’t broach it Now’s the perfect time To approach them
Don’t look for trouble I want to meet them

Mr. Game:
Yes, yes, well now, there’s quite a few of them. We must keep an eye on them. They may want to challenge our greatness. How are they different from us? How many are there again? Hmmm... I think that’s a lot. They may want to take our things.
O, Glorious People! The world is divided into haves and have nots, strong and weak. It is a struggle between right and wrong, a battle for supremacy. Are we not winners and are we not the greatest? Do those people accept that? With God as my witness. We need to watch them!! Beware. They’re going to cause problems.
I don't like tall people
I don't like small people
I don't like nobody at all
That's why I'm gonna take
As much as I can confiscate
I can't stand whities
I can't stand blackies
I don't have to choose
I don't like Muslims
And I don't like Jews
I don't like people who walk
I don't like people who talk
I can't stand people who can
When they stand like they stand
I don't like
I don't like
I don't like
I don't like nobody but myself

Mr. Game:
I'm a preacher and a teacher, a soul-reacher and a defense-breacher. As I feared, there are about to be more of them than us. They're like rabbits. Are we going to let them sit there breeding away our freedom? We are winners. We can't have them competing with us, because competition is an act of aggression.

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I don't like
I don't like
I don't like nobody but myself

Mr. Game:
Yes! We are truly something the world has never seen. These people are killing each other and jailing their opposition leaders. We can't abide this. They torture people, they steal from each other, live in chaos and soon... that chaos will be here!! We have to liberate these people, extend our dominion and increase our wealth, it's a win, win, win for us. And in this game, winning is the only thing.

THE DRUMS OF WAR
It sound like the drums of war
But it's actually the stealing of money
It sound like the drums of war
But it's actually the stealing of money

THE EVER FONKY LOWDOWN
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But it’s actually the stealing of money
It sound like the drums of war
But it’s actually the stealing of money
It sound like the drums of war
But it's actually the stealing of money

It sound like the drums of war
But it's actually the stealing of money
It sound like the drums of war
Stealing of money it's the stealing of money

It's the stealing of money
It's the stealing of money
It's the stealing of money

Where did our money go?
No, no, no, no one knows
Where did our money go?

It sound like the drums of war
But it's actually the stealing of money
It sound like the drums of war
But it's really the stealing of money

Mr. Game:
To fulfill the mandates of our democracy, O, Glorious People, we’ve set aside a specific time and space for you to voice your uncertainties and to consult with your leaders. These are very serious actions we have taken.
I know I must fight. I know I must fight.
I know I must fight. I know I must fight.
I know I must fight. I know I must fight.
I know I must fight. I know I must fight.

It may sound like the drums of war
But it’s actually the stealing of money.
It sound like the drums of war
But it’s actually the stealing of money.
It sound like the drums of war
But it’s actually the stealing of money.
It sound like the drums of war
But it’s actually the stealing of money.

Won’t you tell me?
Won’t you tell me?
Won’t you tell me?
Won’t you tell me?
Won’t you tell me?

Mr. Game:
We have handled these people very honorably and executed this war heroically. We lost very few people.

Innocent Bystander:
Who is we?

Mr. Game:
“We” is participants. This is your will, O, Glorious People!

WHAT WOULD THE SAVIOR THINK?
★ Solo: Marcus Printup trumpet ★
What would the Savior think?
(Am I not a brother and a sister, too?)
What would the Savior think?
(Remember the golden rule)
What would the Savior think?

Hallelu—
Hallelujah
What would our Lord have done?
See the world anew. Create the right
Instead of avenging the wrong.
Love each other.

What would the Savior think?
What would the Savior think?
Hmmmhhhh…

Mr. Game:
That’s so naive, it makes me want to puke. Too much thinking and praying will give you a headache. Winners don’t reflect, we celebrate. We don’t have time for all this Savior nonsense and questioning whether you’re with us. You should have questioned who we were before their innocents became collateral damage. There is only one savior: Power!!... and money is his lone disciple. You may question our conquests but they are your prosperity. Why, all across our landscape today, you see the result of past glories against others. You see them destitute and half insane, not working or working in service to us. You must agree, that’s far better than us serving them. You see, trust me, you are thinking about right and wrong and all that Savior nonsense. Everything is relative.

Some for me, some for you,
Some for you, some for me, some for me, none for you,
Some for me, some for me, some for me,
None for you, none for you, none for you.
THE EVER FONKY LOWDOWN IN 5
★ Solo: Dan Block
- tenor saxophone

It’s the Ever Fonky Lowdown
It’s the dirty, lowdown smack-down
It’s the smack-down, It’s the crack-down
It’s the fonky, fonky back-down
It’s the ever-dirty showdown

It’s a lowdown, dirty smack-down
It’s a fonky, fonky back-down
It’s the Ever Fonky Lowdown
Oh, can’t you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)
Oh, can you
(Ever Fonky Lowdown)

If they believed in God, and if God was on their side, they wouldn’t have lost. O, Glorious People! Our people were heroic in battle, as always. Let me find the right words, so the official records and textbooks will show that the good are celebrated and the bad are rightly punished. This act solidifies our bond. We are truly a community fighting for freedom. Do you agree to the wealth these actions have brought to us? Well, don’t ask ‘who is we?’ Enjoy the spoils of war. Even if it’s only the acquired air of superiority that comes with identifying with winners, you got something for nothing, something for nothing. And there’s always more.

I’m a seer and a mind freer. Cash is my middle name, but I’m called Mr. Game. It all happened just as I said.

When the books are read about the dragons we slayed, and all our golden trophies are displayed, the world will gape at the fortunes some of us have made. The memory of our greatness will last and last, but we still have to keep moving fast, fast, fast. We have won the day but must also master the night. Don’t worry about your money, it’s gon’ be right. We will increase your green under the cloak of night when the amateurs sleep. What I earn, we get to keep. I work for you like a Grey Ghost Raider, trust me baby, I’m a night trader.

Always remember: The speed of consumption far outruns the pace of corruption. I have to stay ahead of your appetite.

Mr. Game:
Ah, yes, we are all in this together. O, Glorious People. The war was executed with such professionalism, the governing body has granted me the privilege of writing the official record. We all know what happened: they attacked us... we defended ourselves. They deserved everything they got, they abused their own people, and they were living in filth too, with a bunch of unkempt children.

Mr. Game:
Let me teach the children: we beat other people; therefore we are better than them. Group thinking baby, we are the greatest nation in the world, we are right and they are wrong; the world is black and white and of course, because we won, God is on our side. And the Ever Fonky becomes deep down skonky when you see the terms of surrender for the defeated. Remember, O, Glorious People! They, too, want to be winners. That’s right. When we hear songs celebrating our victory pouring from the mouths of the very people we defeated, we know that they have made peace with our supremacy.

NIGHT TRADER
★ Solos: Doug Wamble guitar, Ted Nash alto saxophone, Wynton Marsalis trumpet, Elliot Mason trombone

Sleight of hand by trade
Sign a bill, don’t even read the bill
I sign a bill, don’t even read a bill

Enforce a law, a law I never saw
I enforce a law,
A law I never even saw
Put ‘em in jail
Did they commit a crime
Put ‘em away for a long, long time
I’m a night trader, baby

I’m a night trader, sleight of hand by trade
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader

Sell you a home, I’ll give you a loan
Sell you a loan, I’ll give you a home
Sell you a home, I’ll give you a loan
Give you a loan that’ll take your home

Gimme some stock on private prisons
Don’t you worry, we’ll get good bids
I’m a judge—sending kids
Night trader, baby, I’m a night trader

Mr. Game:
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader

Sign a bill, don’t even read a bill
Enforce a law, I never studied law
Who cares if they committed the crime
There’s money to make, give ‘em some time

There’s no time for all this
“Who struck John?”
Time is money, I’m moving on
Night trader, baby
Sleight of hand by trade

I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader
I’m a night trader

GI”
O, Glorious People!

Let me take you back to the schoolyard: Most kids just give in and follow the bully, but a few back away threatening some type of retaliation. Whether subservient or resistant, each will adjust their philosophy to accommodate defeat. That’s the illusion of choice. Haha, the old binary hustle. Tutsi versus Huta, God-fearing versus heathens, Democrats versus Republicans.

Yes, there are two sides to every coin, but it’s still the same coin.

Losers have two choices: entertain us by playing out our vision of them as meek, emasculated jesters... or excite us, playing out our vision of them as dangerous captured savages. Well, it’s natural to the defeated, all of that bowing and scraping, but it’s also okay to let a little pressure out of the system and listen to the most aggressive ones rear and shout insults about what they think we’ve done to them... and so on. I love the anguished fiery testimonials, I love them owning the bad names we called them. I just can’t figure out why they think all of that noise and blaming inspires guilt or shame—it’s actually therapeutic for me. Tell us again. What did we do to you?

MR. GOOD TIME MAN

Do you remember
Good and glory days
When slappy, happy minstrels
Traveled’ cross the land
Bringing such joy
And cheer with every song

And when they danced
The buck and wing
We knew they missed
The old plantation
And our hearts did burst with sorrow
At the telling of a tale from old Dixie

Mr. Good time man
Make us feel everything’s all right
Oh, let me smile your blues away
I’m ready

Yet there’s another type of fellow
And he turns my legs to Jello
When he brags about the violence
And the crimes he has committed
He is such a dashing fellow
All bedecked in golden chains
And though the years have passed
The story is the same

Oh, can I buy a ghetto song
So I can dance and sing along
We’ll share a rhyme
While you do time
I’m ready

And, so, the Janus headed minstrel
That has filled our lives with glee forever
Whether he be happy grinning
Or an angry lion spinning
Either way I love the ghetto
And the old plantation cause
The good ol’ time attracting
Character detracting stories
And the acting is for me
Oh, won’t you play
Mister good time man
Oh, can you bust a gangsta rhyme
So we can have you both on hand

Oh, mister good time man
Oh, mister bad, bad man
Smile, mister bad man
Smile, mister good time
Scowl, mister bad man
Smile, mister good time
Show us your grill

Mr. Game:
Yes. There’s only one more step to complete the dispositional portion of this game. You must understand and embody the easy attitude of entitlement that comes with freedom and wealth. Our riches affirm that we are the greatest of the world.
Everyone knows it. That’s why they want to be us.

Shame is for losers or for those who have done something wrong. We only did to them what they would have done to us, if they could. Don’t think about it, just follow the stories in all the books, movies, and everything else. We are number one.
If you’re not us, you’re them. They will complain, but don’t look back, don’t look around, history is now. Can you accept this?
I knew you would.
It’s the Ever Fonky Lowdown.

Mr. Game:
That’s a ridiculous plea. This is how it all seems to me.

Mr. Game:
Somebody’s got to rule. It might as well be us.

I WANTS MY ICE CREAM

I wants my ice cream
So good to me
I loves my ice cream
Oh, can’t you see

Oh, yes I see you
Sleeping in those streets
It makes me wonder
What a poor man eats
I likes my ice cream
Would you like a lick?
Oh, now I’m playin’
Just a dirty trick
I see you eyeing
My brand new shoes
But you can’t have none
‘Cause I’m on my phone

Mr. Game:
It’s the Ever Fonky Lowdown

THE EVER FONKY LOWDOWN IN 6

Solo: Dan Mimmer piano

I hear you, brother
I feel your pain
I wants my ice cream
That’s my refrain

Ain’t got no money
Even if I could
I wants my ice cream

Don’t think I would
What’s all this hollerin’
And stumblin’ down the street?
Can’t you be quiet?
I’m trying to eat

I see you eyeing
My ice cream cone
But you can’t have none
‘Cause I’m on my phone

THE EVER FONKY LOWDOWN IN 6

Solo: Doug Wamble guitar and vocals, Marcus Printup trumpet

My brother
My sister
Why do you keep don’t it to me?

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

My sister
My brother
Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why?
Oh, why do you treat me so bad?

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

Oh, tell me why
Why-y
Why-y-y tell me, won’t you, oh why-y

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

My sister
My brother
Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why?
Oh, why do you treat me so bad?

BECAUSE I WANT TO,
BECAUSE I LIKE TO,
BECAUSE I CAN

Solos: Doug Wamble guitar and vocals, Marcus Printup trumpet

Mr. Game:
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I loves my ice cream
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Somebody’s got to rule. It might as well be us.

Mr. Game:
That’s a ridiculous plea. This is how it all seems to me.

BECAUSE I WANT TO,
BECAUSE I LIKE TO,
BECAUSE I CAN

Solos: Doug Wamble guitar and vocals, Marcus Printup trumpet

My brother
My sister
Why do you keep don’t it to me?

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

My sister
My brother
Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why?
Oh, why do you treat me so bad?

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

Oh, tell me why
Why-y
Why-y-y tell me, won’t you, oh why-y

Because I want to
Because I like to
Because I can

Mr. Game:
That’s a ridiculous plea. This is how it all seems to me.

Mr. Game:
Somebody’s got to rule. It might as well be us.

I WANTS MY ICE CREAM

I wants my ice cream
So good to me
I loves my ice cream
Oh, can’t you see

Oh, yes I see you
Sleeping in those streets
It makes me wonder
What a poor man eats
I likes my ice cream
Would you like a lick?
Oh, now I’m playin’
Just a dirty trick
I see you eyeing
My brand new shoes
But you can’t have none
‘Cause I’m on my phone

Mr. Game:
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My brand new shoes
But you can’t have none
‘Cause I’m on my phone

Mr. Game:
Somebody’s got to rule. It might as well be us.
It’s the ever fonky fake down
It’s the ever fonky breakdown
Why can’t you see
What it could be
‘Bout you and me

It’s the ever fonky takedown
It’s the ever fonky shake down
It’s the ever fonky shake down
It’s the fonky, fonky break down
Of the fonky, fonky brown round

Across time, across space
Across the whole human race
Across time, across space
Across the whole human race
Across time, across space

REPRISE: WHAT
WOULD THE
SAVIOR THINK?

The Homeless:
But what would the Savior think?
What would the Savior think?
(The word is the will of God,
Not the will of the people)

Mr. Game:
Mr. Game, back for your international delight. Though our game
has been played across time and space, I give out prizes of value
to only this time and place. You will receive five gifts of various
sizes, each enlivened by hand-picked surprises which further
appraises you of what was earned and learned from our handling
of ‘others’ and their brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. What
we did to them or for them taught us how to achieve prosperity
and order.

Each prize is accompanied with a clear explanation. Generally, I
give some local history. Then, I tell you exactly what’s happening
(that’s called the breakdown). Explain how our choices worked
out over time (that’s the hand me down) and finally, we look
underneath the sheets where the big dog eats (that’s the
lowdown).

FIRST PRIZE:
Here’s some historical fact.
These people weren’t doing anything productive and our lives
gave them purpose. To serve us. We gave them separate living
quarters and encouraged them to pursue that same type of
housing after we freed them.

ISMS, SCHISMS

What you do is what you will do and that you do makes it true.
Try as we might, most have proven to be beyond rehabilitation.
Look around. You see them hanging around always involved in
some type of mayhem and madness.

Here’s the breakdown:
Nothing is more important than living in a comfortable
environment. Just seeing them can bring up fear and bad
feelings. We’ve got to keep them largely out of sight and mind.
They are, however, very good at games and at playing things.

Here’s the hand me down:
O, Mighty People! We must be inhospitable to them and
to any group of outsiders who come here disrespecting our flag
and our beliefs.

Here’s the lowdown:
Keep them down. Keep them away. Let no wound be too small
to inflict. Quietly make sure they are slowly strangled by all of the
systems across this mighty nation.

Your first prize, great and glorious people, is the freedom of
segregation, segmentation and homogenization. Everywhere
you look, you will only see yourself. Congratulations!!
Schisms, isms
Schisms, isms
Schisms, isms
I can't see
Schisms, isms
Schisms, isms
Schisms, isms
All day long
Isms, schisms
Isms, schisms
Isms, schisms
Loud and strong

We don't want the aggravation
Does not matter what they know
If I see one anywhere around my place
Our police may shoot them dead
And win the case

We've got racism, sexism, textism—wow
Leftism, rightism—hit me now
Classism, snobism, fakism—true
Malism, hoodism—love them too
Fakery, snakery, never-awakery
Bribary, takery—what you say?
Racism, ageism, racism, sexism
Racism, classism—every day

I'm just happy
In these run-down places
And our segregated schools
If they see us anywhere
Around their homes
Our police will beat them back
Until they're gone

Classism, snobism, fakism—true
Malism, hoodism—can you see?
Racism, ageism, racism, sexism
Racism, classism—what you say?

I'm just happy
In these run-down places
Does not matter what they know
If they see us anywhere
Around their homes
Our police will beat them back
Where we belong
Mr. Game:
Each of our five prizes comes naturally from the last. The battles we’ve won over these last years to segregate ourselves have led to purity in education, housing and employment. Just look around. All of that winning is addictive, but if you don’t fight, you can’t win. When you beat one group of others, you must use that inspiration to go on to the next and the next, until you work through all the groups that displease you.

SECOND PRIZE:
You will enjoy endless campaigns: old versus young, smart versus dumb, fat versus skinny, Democrats versus Republican. Finally, you will work your way all the way up to the most sacred battleground: your own home. For drama and intensity, nothing surpasses a passionate, extended domestic battle. Don’t forget the binary narrative: others are wrong and you are right. It’s a wonderful way of understanding that keeps you on the battlefield.

Here’s a snapshot from our history: We broke their families up for centuries and consistently destroyed the bond between their men and women. However, they were very productive for us as workers, as stock and as property. It was gloriously efficient and effective. We learned to value human beings economically. With the passage of time, the accurate valuation of people is just in our DNA, and their home life has still not recovered.

Let me free you from old thinking. Families are no longer what they were. Kids are disrespectful. Men and women at each other’s throats all the time.

Let’s consider, if you will, the poetic demands and uncertain terrains of romance. Think about all of the time it takes to develop a relationship with another person. Now, add the investment required to properly raise a child. You see, a traditional family just takes too much damned time and effort. The modern family is mobile and you need that mobility to make more money.

O, Mighty People! Let me explain: life is just a big transaction. Look around. It costs to be born, it costs to die, it costs when you get sick, it costs ‘in case’ you get sick and everything in between is bills and taxes. Try paying for some food with the depth of your humanity. Nothing is more important than money.

Here’s the breakdown:
A winner buys the life he or she wants to live! (Everyone else will fall in line based on their payout).

Here’s the hand me down:
Romance interferes with fighting. When the other is the enemy and everything becomes a transaction, intimacy is too nuanced. Who has time for love when the most important victory is yet to be won?

Here’s the lowdown:
Now you are free to purchase all the personal space you want. If you get lonely, just swipe a picture on an app, or buy a robot. Your prize is freedom from the rigamarole of romance and escalation of the domestic war in the court of transaction.

WHERE HAS THE LOVE GONE?

O, Glorious People! All this freedom must have a purpose. What greater purpose than selling? What better to sell than perfectly...
crafted entertainment products with a little sexual electricity (from the world of taboo) targeted at everyone in your home.

The only thing that feels better than selling is being liberated to give full expression to the cathartic euphoria of buying. It’s powerful and it feels so good. The real world will be delivered to your home, for a nominal monthly fee, when everyone is together... or at any time on your mobile device. Our hard-fought freedoms have allowed us to make available all of the things you were unjustly denied in the past.

Folks! We’re going full throttle, a candescent cocktail of freedom tailored to excite the group it targets. Look around. The kids love it! Choice and culture!

Here’s the breakdown: Give the people what they want. Shake your money maker. Don’t sit on it, sell it!!

Here’s the hand me down: Trash piles up if no one takes the garbage out. That’s why we pay people to clean. Everything is for sale—even a community. Like an old New Orleans auction house.

We used to sell and buy them as a community so’s all the mommas and daddies and children and all the relatives could be bought and sold in a very grand public spectacle. You know, selling and buying is in our DNA.

What you do is what you will do and that you do makes it true.

Here’s the lowdown: Don’t let other people exploit you. Own your own identity. We all have something worth selling. This prize gives you permission to sell whatever you have to whoever is willing to pay for it. Forget about shame.

Your prize is prime time pornography and the commodification of community.

Consider this 'bout the filth we love
Consider this from a view above
We like it
We love it
We buy it
We sell it
We believe it
We achieved it
We live it
And we just got to have got to have
What we need what we want now
We love it
We love it
We love it
We love it
We love it
We love it
Everything is for sale
Everything is for sale
Everything is for sale
Everything is for sale
Everything is for sale
Everything is for sale
Consider this 'bout the filth we make
Consider this 'bout the filth we take
Oh, we won’t see
The reality
Oh, we won’t see
The reality

Mr. Game:
Our greatness has created jealous enemies everywhere. There are menaces within and without. We have a wide-open country with very, very porous borders. O, Glorious People! We intend to protect every square inch of our homeland... but we can’t do it without your help, folks.

FOURTH PRIZE
We need you to register all pertinent personal, medical and financial information; to obtain the standard identification card which allows you to get in and out of public spaces; and please!! Keep your phone with you at all times, or get an implant. It’s for your safety! We already have access to your spending habits, entertainment preferences, daily routines, and the tendencies of your most frequently called friends. These last bits of information will enable us to completely protect you.

Here’s some history:
When we owned them, we would issue papers that accounted for them. For the very few who were able to ascend from their God given position, we issued freedom papers. If you didn’t have those papers, you weren’t free. We really kept track of those people because you couldn’t have them out spreading public mischief and mayhem.

Sometimes, to avoid work, they ran away. We posted the most beautiful descriptions of their person complete with dispositional observations. These advertisements allowed our citizens North and South to repatriate them back to their owners. We all participated and were very successful. When we all come together, success is guaranteed.

If it was important to account for a runaway, you can imagine, O, Glorious People! You are far too important to go uncounted. Register now so we can protect you!
Folks, these are troubled times. Corruption is all around us in the form of deception. Open your eyes: doctors addicting you to drugs they’re paid to prescribe, heads of stock exchanges running Ponzi schemes, priests molesting kids, citizens supporting criminals over our officers, I could go on and on. Let’s not even mention the minorities and the terrorists, Lord save us!! Look around at all the public violence. You cannot have enough surveillance and security. Our technological devices are far more trustworthy than the judgment of a person, a camera does not lie.

Here’s the breakdown:
You are the only one you can trust.
Anyone could be doing anything at any time. “Be afraid—Be prepared.”

Here’s the hand me down:
Surveillance equipment is steadily improving. Soon, we will be able to surreptitiously record every interaction, in every home, so that each accusation can be supported or contested with accurate documentation. Be amongst the first to participate.

Here’s the lowdown:
It’s important to know more than what everyone is doing.
We need to know what’s on their minds. Privacy is an enemy of freedom.

This wonderful and timely prize grants you: Freedom through constant surveillance and relentless security.
Though not believers in our winning ways and traditions, they are formidable persons of courage, clarity and charity. These battlers challenge us to stay in winning form. I respect 'em.

If you can survive exposure to this freedom fighter by maintaining your defense of the freedoms we have secured for ourselves across time, you will receive the final and greatest prize. If you waver, however, you could lose everything.

This particular wildcard is a lady, and I mention her now, because I'm confident in your confidence. Hear me, O, Glorious Ones! All the other wildcards who have tried to defeat us, have failed: Harriet Tubman, saved hundreds but tens of thousands remained slaves, Lincoln Steffens uncovered corruption in our politics and won awards for it. But has the corruption ever slowed down? Hell, even Jesus failed in front of the people, they chose Barabbas.

Oh, Judicious People! You want and deserve to be free to do what you want to do. Nobody wants to hear no mouthy preaching about whether we can see what's wrong or not. We want the things that make us feel good! Money!! That's our stuff. Forget all the judgement, we're not interested in sharing our resources with others we can't stand.

Some history:
Real freedom fighters come from a long way off. They bring a lot of history with them. We had the enslaved well in hand or under our thumb, everything designed to keep them deaf, mute and dumb. It was illegal for them to read but not to breed, to write but not to fight, to say but not to pray. Somehow, they all got a hold of words from our Bible and created songs of survival, disguised as prayers, they applied our sacred learning to their wretched affairs.

Here's the breakdown and the hand me down:

All this singing about salvation was not good for their spirit. We had to encourage music that was more real to their condition and pull the old bones and tambo out. As was their way, they began to self-deprecate and the popularity of their music began to appreciate. As it was then, so it is today.

Mr. Game:

O, Glorious People! I know you love these prizes because you live them.

This is the Ever Fonky Lowdown and you are getting rewarded for being winners. Big winners!

Mr. Game:

I can't just give away this final prize so easily. There's one more test to determine if you are indeed the best of the best. It's my wildcard. Unpredictable and capable of catapulting you to the top of the food chain or thrusting you down to the dungeon in chains, the wildcard fights against our understanding of freedom and is called a "freedom fighter."

I GOT A NAGGING FEELING

I got a naggin' feelin'
Deep down in my soul
I said I got a tale to tell
Can't rest 'til it's told

Gonna lift up that heavy feelin'
Let that light shine inside
Oh, this life don't bother me
Soon I will be free

I was a bitty baby
On my mamma's knee
When Jesus angel told me
I was meant to be
Mr. Game:
From this absolute din came a feeling of hope. As time passed, that hope became belief which eventually became action in the person of a freedom fighter. She was determined to remake the world according to the dreams and struggles of her ancestors. Even though it was a failing cause, this particular woman was remarkable. I’m talking about someone who came from the absolute bottom of our society and grew up picking cotton as the eldest of twenty kids.

As a youngster, she was a voracious reader. She learned to understand and believe in our system. In the same way that the enslaved had twisted our religious intentions to serve their purposes, she figured out how to use our system to fight for her people’s version of freedom.

Here’s the breakdown:
She believed she could defeat democracy as we mean it to be and was willing to try.

Here’s the hand me down:
People of now don’t have the time to jeopardize their health on no poor person’s dream. Why risk life and limb when you can just get online, and anonymously express your mind or open your heart to friends and neighbors in less than 280 characters?

Here’s the lowdown:
She was unwavering in the execution of her duty, refused to be silenced, followed the word and held to it. Her name was Fannie Lou Hamer.

THE BALLAD OF FANNIE LOU: PART 2
★ Solos: Camille Thurman vocals, Ashley Pezzotti vocals, Christie Dashiell vocals ★

Fannie Lou was born
In a fertile land
Oh, Fannie Lou came up
Workin’ harder than any man
And when they dropped down
Fannie, Fannie she would stand

She could see
‘Round Saturn’s rings
And she heard
Songs that the angels sing
When she spoke
Every word had wings

Fannie, Fannie
Oh, sweet Fannie Lou

I’m a Southern boy
From a Southern town
I used to see Fannie
Well she used to be around
Boy, she was something
Something touch you
Way deep down

Oh, Fannie Lou
With your eyes so clear
Voice so strong
It drew the people near
Fannie, Fannie
Oh, sweet Fannie Lou

In a Southern style
They beat Fannie blue
And they did things to her
As it was their Southern way to do
That didn’t stop Fannie
From doin’ what she was here to do
On freedom farm
People pickin’ poke
Fannie Lou

She liked to laugh and joke
What she did
Cause folks to count their vote

Fannie, Fannie
Fannie, Fannie
Fannie Lou, Fannie Lou
Fannie, Fannie
What they do to you
Oh, Fannie, Fannie
Fannie, Fannie Lou
Mr. Game:

Yes Fannie Lou! She was truly something. Too bad she was on the losing side. We invented freedom. We’re not about to fight against the freedoms we abundantly enjoy because somebody with no money is uncomfortable! And when the people get behind something, it’s a done deal. Who wants to face public ridicule and humiliation for defending a position that gives them less than what they have?

Here’s the breakdown:

You almost never have to kill a freedom fighter; just let memories of them die. There’s no need to bury information no one cares about. Put it on the front page of the paper. They’ll be wrapping fish in it the next day. Put a game on and everybody loses their mind.

The hand me down:

You have done well in this game. You overcame Fannie Lou’s overtures to the point of forgetting her very name. This is a great moment for our way of life. We should reflect in honor of her sacrifice.

Mr. Game:

...Well, that was that.

O, Glorious People!

This is your last prize and it’s the best one. Now we’re really about to have some fun.

When you act against your best interest to attack a remote enemy with no power to do you any harm; when you’re ecstatic about identifying yourself as a winner even though you never get a single spoil; when you are happy to accept far less than your participation could have earned and honored to be rewarded for the achievement of staying home, congratulations! You’ve won one game of the Ever Fonky Lowdown... and you’re the donkey.

O, Glorious People, My People, Our People, The People, hear me, this game was never about “them.” It’s been about you... and all of what has been sold to you. I’m talking about the machine, the system, the grind, the chart from birth to the grave. It’s all figured out for you. One hustle after another designed to analyze, paralyze, bind and blind you. O, can’t you see? Corrupt laws, endless litigation over trivia, ridiculous rules, bureaucratic incompetence; pay to live, pay to die, pay to get married, pay to divorce, pay for school, pay for the hospital, pay pay pay, ha ha! Insane government wasting and stealing piles of your money that you can’t even and don’t even want to trace, endorsing tribal policies that violate your self-interest as you all swallow the fake binary narrative of Democrat vs Republican, white vs black, man versus woman, haha. Fools!! Games, games, games!

Here’s some history:

Did you know that over 700,000 people died in the American Civil War... “Us and Them”?
Here’s the breakdown:

Leave everything up to us and we’ll make sure you never have to do anything except pay. And while you hate each other and fight against a never-ending “them”, we will remain us. Who is us? Haha, we are you when you get the opportunity to be.

Here’s the hand me down:
The Savior and all of these freedom fighters continue to get it wrong. You don’t actually want to grapple with more than two choices. You don’t want to sacrifice anything meaningful for your fellow citizens. You want to live in a fantasy world in which you may perhaps see others suffer, but from far enough away to change the page at a click. Be honest with yourself, you don’t actually want real freedom because, if it’s turned loose, it might just go anywhere. Why should your freedom be given to anyone? You fought for it. And we beat people, we are winners. Why should a winner give anything to a loser? They lost.

That’s why you repeatedly choose those who will jam the human soul into the cold, cold ground, drag it around like a jagged plough, pull it up and thrust it even further down, and up and down again deeper if it make a single solitary sound. Yeah... you really just want to be entertained by games, games!! This is a game, gotdammit!! The game of games. You think paying for a football stadium cost you? Winning the Ever Fonky Lowdown cost you your humanity, but every day, millions are dying just to get a place in line to pay the price of admission.

This is an international hustle, baby. It has played out many times across time and space and is not specific to any language or race. It takes on different flavors according to people’s taste, but always ends up in the same old place.

I’m your host, by the name of Game, MISTER Game, a player, a soothsayer and a dragon slayer, I’m a night trader and a soul raider. I steps with lightning, walks with thunder, climbs the wall, puts the dead on the wonder, following me was your biggest blunder. I don’t recognize any “us” or “them”, him, her or you. When you see me coming, all I know is what I’m gonna do. I’m gon’ get paid, and somebody’s gonna get played. That’s just how my money is made!!

Oh, can you see
Oh, can you see
It’s the Ever Fonky Lowdown
It’s the lowdown fonky throw-down

I hear you brother
I feel your pain
I loves my ice cream
That’s my refrain

What’s all this bullerin’
And stumblin’ down the street?
Can’t you be quiet?
I’m trying to eat

REPRISE: I WANTS MY ICE CREAM

I see you eyeing
My ice cream cone
But you can’t have none
’Cause I’m on my phone
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA
WITH WYNTON MARSALIS
2019–20 Concert Season

REEDS
Sherman Irby – alto saxophone, clarinet, flute, and piccolo
Ted Nash – alto saxophone, clarinet, flute, and piccolo
Victor Goines – tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet, and clarinet
1Walter Blanding – tenor saxophone
2Dan Block – tenor and soprano saxophones and clarinet
Paul Nedzela – baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, and clarinet

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TRUMPETS
Ryan Kisor
Marcus Printup
Kenny Rampton
Wynton Marsalis

Wendell Pierce – narrator
Camille Thurman – vocals
Ashley Pezzotti – vocals
Christie Dashiell – vocals
Bobby Allende – congas
Ricky “Dirty Red” Gordon – percussion

THE RHYTHM SECTION
Doug Wamble – guitar and vocals
Dan Nimmer – piano
Carlos Henriquez – bass
Jason Marsalis – drums and tambourine

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ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCES
Sam Chess – trombone (track 7)
Adam Binbaum – piano (tracks 7, 35, 42, 51)
Charles Goold – drums (track 35)

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TROMBONE
Vincent Gardner – trombone and sousaphone
Christopher Crenshaw – trombone and vocals
Eliot Mason

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