Chapter II

Unveiling an Enigmatic Black Musician's Socio-Cultural Identity and Politics Surrounding in *Coming Through Slaughter*
Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.

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(1928-2014)

An Afro-American Writer

In the last part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century America, especially in New Orleans city, only few menial options were left for the black community to earn and run their families. As a result, they failed to make their grade and pull off their poverty. So, the New Orleans black men put their utmost efforts to make their lives better by earning through different professions like pottery, driving and plantation. Due to such limited and insufficient legal options, the black men started involving themselves in the illegal activities like robberies and black women involved themselves in menial activities like prostitution. Playing music was the only silver lining as a respectable way to survive, though the black people were allowed to play their music only in some particular vicinities. Despite that, music like jazz became a most exhilarating profession for the Afro-American community in the city like New Orleans and other parts of America. In New Orleans city, heart of Louisiana, black people became very fond of the jazz music and several of them took it as their profession. The black musicians like Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Brock Mumford, Kid Ory and Buddy Bolden earned their livelihood from their music, especially from jazz music. In the novel Coming Through Slaughter (1976), Buddy Bolden, the first black jazz musician, is depicted as an illustrious figure in Afro-America’s music history mainly in the origin of ‘ragtime’, ‘jazz music’ and ‘blues music’ around the beginning of the twentieth century. Black musician Buddy Bolden has a wonderful contribution to the development and popularization of these sorts of music, exclusively ‘jazz’ and ‘blues’. Without locating the origin, significance and expansion of jazz and blues, it would be hardly possible to draw Bolden’s ‘socio-cultural identity’ and ‘politics surrounding’.

As far as ‘jazz’ is concerned, it embarked with its full contour in the early part of the 20th century in the hands of the African-American musicians like Buddy
Bolden in the Southern part of the United States, exclusively in New Orleans which is a part of Louisiana State. After a long struggle, ‘Jazz Preservation Act’ (1987) defined and certified jazz as a ‘high art’ and ‘culture’ of African-American communities. “Jazz could be celebrated as black musical culture” (Porter 77). So, it finally generated a little space for black “race, [their] national identity, and cultural value as key aspects in making jazz one of the nation’s most subsidized arts” (Jeff 1). “Jazz was attracting attention not only in the United States but in Europe as well” (Helm 53). Not only for Bolden, but also for Ondaatje “Jazz music, of a certain period, has always been central” (McCANN 2008). Recent musicologists and researchers claim that ‘jazz’ is a combined creation of both the African and American races with African music fused with certain European elements. But real stories lie somewhere else — the Negroes who were taken over forcefully from their native Africa to America, brought the jazz notes with them.

Sydney Bechet, twenty years younger to Buddy Bolden, judged and elucidated the term “jazz” vividly in his autobiography namely Treat It Gentle: An Autobiography (1961). He explicated it and traced its origin from the word “jass” which at [a] time was a local slang word for sex” (Giessen-Reitsme 2003). In African music history, ‘jazz’, sometimes called ‘jazz funeral’, completely goes to Dahomeans (people of Dahomey, later known as Benin) and Yoruba (a minority group of Nigeria and Benin) ethnic groups of West Africa. People of New Orleans called this particular music ‘Congo Square Music’ because the black slaves who came from Africa or were being forcefully fetched from Africa usually loved to play its musical rhythm in ‘Congo Square’ in the 19th century. Sometimes, jazz was called ‘work music’ because it was purely sung by the black African workers in work-field in order to entertain themselves. Conclusively, the highly debated ‘jazz’ mainly passes through double edges; on one hand, it stands for the contribution of Africans to American society and on the other hand, it wraps the history and the culture of black people.

The two basic characteristics of jazz music are — firstly, it is played fast with cornet, and secondly, it requires quick movement with dance. The black musicians used instruments like cornet, trumpet and brass in order to furnish a new form of music like their master Buddy Bolden. In Bolden’s time, the jazz music became much
familiar and well improvised in the U.S.A. with the use of ‘swing note’. The jazz music was played in most of the cultural events like church programs, memorial ceremonies, and other cultural activities. The Afro-American musicians readily started composing these materials in their notes and rhythm, as well as improvised them in new forms.

On the other hand, the ‘blues’ music also plays an important role with Bolden’s jazz music as both are called ‘intimate bedfellows’ (Gioia 20). So, the question arises — what is blues? How are blues and jazz interrelated to each other? It is important because both music are most significant in search of Buddy Bolden’s socio-cultural identity and politics surrounding it. ‘Blues’, a species of music and having a folk-origin like jazz, completely goes to African black community. It was made-up by an African American musician in the main province of America near Mississippi in the later part of the 19th century, but earned more popularity after 1920s, just before the flourishing of jazz. In *The History of Jazz* (1978), Gioia talked about a historian Samuel Charles who investigated and tried hard to find out the origin of ‘blues’. According to him, blues was originated from a tribal song of West Africa before pre-slave era, but such true story was veiled by white oppressors.

Blues is lyrical in tone, reflective in spirit and a secular vocal folk music. In West Africa, black people usually stringed this melancholic or gloomy music on the occasion of someone’s death as its lyrical quality expressed disappointment. Structurally it relies heavily on “tonic, dominant and subdominant” (Gioia 12) harmonies. The tone and intention of the “blues” viscerally refer to or transmit human feelings, especially those of the black people. Both ‘jazz’ and ‘blues’ have symbolic and paradoxical meaning revealed and are still revealing the innermost pain, desolation, depression, bereavement, oppression, hunger and desire of the oppressed black musicians. So,

The idiom ['blues'] offered a catharsis, an idealization of the individual’s plight, and, in some strange way, an uplifting sense of mastery over the melancholy circumstances recounted in the context of the blues song. In this
regard, the blues offers us a psychological enigma as profound as any posed by classical tragedy. (Ted Gioia 12)

Most of the time, “blues” is substituted for the word ‘tragedy.’ Later, Farley Jeff analyzed it in detail in his article “Jazz as a Black American Art Form: Definitions of the Jazz Preservation Act” (2010)—“For instance, many consider two of the most important aspects of jazz to be the blues aesthetic, which inevitably expresses racist oppression in America, and the democratic ethic, wherein each musician’s individual expression equally contributes to the whole” (Jeff 1).

Jazz has been seen as a way to showcase contributions of African Americans to American society, to highlight black history and affirm black culture. But for some African American musicians, the music called jazz is a reminder of an oppressive and racist society and restrictions on their artistic visions. (Gibb 2002)

Both the ‘blues’ and ‘jazz’ not only reveal the ‘teething troubles’ of African-American in America but also put across the state of depression and humiliation experienced by other minority communities in the hands of dominant group/s throughout the world. The white American musicians, counterpart of African-American musicians, always tried to tantalize, mimic and, most of the time made fun of the black culture, especially their ‘composition’. They also imposed limitations on their creative arts and gave the black people’s music a very low status, a second class residency.

Later ‘Jazz’ and ‘blues’ musicians, the followers of ‘Beat Movement’ (mid-1950-early-1960) who deemed with the feelings of alienation, despondency and aggravation, rejected acquisitiveness and revealed in-depth suffering of black people. According to a prominent member of Beat Movement, Jack Kerouac, an America’s jazz writer, a poet and novelist, the ‘Beat’ refers to the marginalized people of society, especially the black people who are beaten by their white masters. Later on, some of the other ‘blues’ and ‘jazz’ musicians joined the ‘Beat Movement’ as they
assumed that the music was just not a music but would be a new voice to divulge the clandestined world of these neglected people. The writers of 'blues' like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, and Toni Morrison created upheaval against deranged social norms through their writings, while Bolden did through his diminutive attempt of 'rhythm'. In this context, Ellison's essay "Richard Wright's Blues" (1945) reveals an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe which is expressed lyrically. In such context, his famous novel *Invisible Man* (1952), a 'blues novel', is also much pertinent and accepted. Like them, the writers of Black Art Movement (mid-1960-early 1970) also demanded a separate African identity by rejecting American identity and heritage through social changes as Bolden endeavoured to execute this by his music.

In the inclusion of 'jazz' and 'blues' in the city New Orleans, Bolden's name first drew closer in our mind. The centre of discussion in the novel *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976) is Charles Buddy Bolden, an elusive hero, who fluted his melody in the beginning of the 20th century in the New Orleans city. King Bolden, as nicknamed by audience belonged to a black community of the red-light district Storyville in the New Orleans city, a land of music where jazz music is still prevailing but sporadically. *Coming Through Slaughter*, the finest jazz novel, confers a vivid and pungent ambience of an Afro-American jazz pioneer Buddy Bolden's creativity and role of its surroundings in his obliteration. The novel is

Explicitly about Bolden's identity expressed in his music, but it is implicitly about his identity as a black man whose musical insistence on freedom thwarted by worsening racism in New Orleans at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ondaatje portrays Bolden, an American of African ancestry, as a tragic artist, a man whose musical genius isolate[d] him from friends and family, eventually leading to his insanity. (Deshaye 474)

Buddy who started playing cornet at the age of seventeen, grew up in a music-confined upbringing while brass band had reached in its peak position. It was generally leased for parties, picnics, and even in funeral ceremony too. In the course
of time, he became a musical parlance and eventually was embraced for his significant contribution in the world of jazz. Bolden sometimes moved from his birthplace to other nearby vicinities for better earnings, benefits and fame as his day’s jazz music was much better than the present day jazz music. In his time, environment was too favourable for the music, which easily captured the heart of common people of both the communities – white and black.

In his childhood, Buddy Bolden with his father visited the popular music spots of New Orleans including “Loepers Park, Orange Grove, Picnic Ground, Magnolia Garden, Oakland Park and Turness Hill” (Marquis 17). Sometimes he would flee alone to listen to the music squads. In his childhood, Bolden loved to hear the songs and chattering of different New Orleans’ street vendors, field workers and hawkers. These were called ‘ear-songs’: though unfortunately no recording was made to preserve them. Later, he developed the capability of fusion and improvisation of these heard songs with spiritual ones as the musicians and the slaves who usually lived in the countryside and in the plantations, brought different musical notes and sounds which easily attracted Buddy’s mind and, later he started shaping them according to his own prodigy and will.

Black Bolden is excluded from the emerging histories of jazz, an exclusion which is directly linked to his marginalized African-American community in New Orleans. The novel Coming Through Slaughter “explicitly signals its participation in a larger movement to bring women and people of [black] colour into historiographic significance” (Bachner 199-200). Ondaatje has tried to delimit the subjective history of the white by rewriting true history of oppressed black people like Buddy Bolden. Buddy Bolden, a paragon and an immortal name in the history of jazz music, is much comparable with Billy the Kid of Ondaatje’s another text Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Ondaatje transforms both the real characters to mythic dimensions. During the course of his novel, Ondaatje has tried to appropriate the legend of Bolden like Billy the Kid. Like Billy, Ondaatje has tried to stabilize Bolden’s true identity through varied means of materials in American society as well as throughout the world. Bolden, a cool and unsentimental tragic hero in the modern lingo, fought exclusively for his existence and identity in a white dominated society. The electrifying and
innovative jazz musician had strong feelings and regretful longings for his black community till he met his madness.

In addition to being a cornet player, a good husband, and an infamous man of the town, Bolden was a barber to his ‘Shaving Parlour’. He loved to drink with each and every customer, his guests and friends in the shop. He neither drank alone, which reveals his community sense, nor discriminated others, which reveals humanitarian sense, on the basis of caste, class and creed like white Americans. Bolden had to complete his job in barbershop before noon because he had to go for drink, music and his wife Nora Bass, a mulatto woman. In early life, Nora was a prostitute from black community and later became Bolden’s wife. He got her not through traditional wedding as “it was just a party marriage” (Ondaatje 49).

Bolden was also a publisher of a scandal sheet “The Cricket” in which Bolden published the informations like “stray facts, manic theories, and well-told lies” (Ondaatje 18) from 1899 to 1905 without editing. These informations were given by ‘spiders’ (‘spiders’ stand for customers) and common people who usually moved to Bolden’s barber shop. Marquis denies the story of “The Cricket” and story of the sheet in his book In Search of Buddy Bolden. He claims, “No copies have ever been found of ‘The Cricket’, Jazzman seems to be the sole source of this story.... The barber reputation probably grew from the fact that Bolden hung around several barbershops, including ones run by Louis Jones, Adam Haley, and Charley Galloway (Marquis 7). Marquis’s rejection of Bolden as a barber and ‘The Cricket’ came from the conversation of Nora with Russell, Louis Jones (friend of Bolden), and Papa John Joseph, a barber of 1905, who were living near Bolden’s home. However, later Marquis agreed that more than ninety percent published works and materials on Bolden revealed him as a barber and, reiterated the tale of publisher and barbershop. No doubt, barbershops have been the minister makers if not king makers. No reporter have gone so close to black common folk.

Unfortunately no extensive written document is available on Bolden’s life or his jazz music. Whatever has been written is based on fragmentary oral information given by his fellow musicians and relatives to his researchers. Their lengthy inspections lead us to know the ancestors of Bolden in detail as his grandfather
Gustavus was born as a slave and got a job in William Walker’s cotton drayage, while his grandmother Frances Bolden was a slave servant and got a job in William Walker’s home as a domestic servant. According to Marquis, each and every member of Bolden’s early generation was a domestic servant as “Frances Bolden, age forty, domestic servant; Thomas Bolden, thirty two, domestic servant; Westmore Bolden, nineteen, domestic servant” (Marquis 12) except sixteen years old Cora Bolden who used to go to School.

On the other side, most confusing and perplexed thing was his family title ‘Bolden’. In his book *In Search of Buddy Bolden: the First Man of Jazz*, Marquis found various spellings of his decentered family title as it was spelled as ‘Bolen’, later sometimes as ‘Boldens’, ‘Bolding’, ‘Boldan’, ‘Bouldings’ and ‘Beldens’. He examined it minutely and discovered that these were misspelled in different certificates and documents like marriage, birth and death certificates. The actual spelling is ‘Bolden’. It is nothing but a matter of negligence to the marginalized black people like other ignored orbs of society by the white dominant class.

Tragic hero Bolden, at the age of five, lost his sister, Lottie, who died of brain inflammation. Another shocking blow came after two years of his sister’s death when his father died of Pneumonia. After his father’s death, Buddy’s mother had to do all domestic works to feed her kid Bolden better way till he completed his schooling. The experiences of slavery and the USA Civil War were just running in his mother’s psyche, which she saw as an open challenge for a Negro woman who spent her life without any kind of assistance from others. So, the geography of New Orleans was not apposite for Negro inhabitants. These hidden catastrophes are thought to be the main reasons behind Bolden’s mental illness. Like his other novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje here has disclosed the covert story of Bolden, so that the readers have a chance to know the true reason behind his insanity, the contemporary social reality of New Orleans and transition of Bolden into a worthless black musician, accused of breaking the harmony of traditional jazz music, with no place in the music history of America. In the foggy history of jazz music, Bolden is hidden and veiled. In this novel under discussion, Ondaatje has tried to change such “wax history, electronic history” (Ondaatje 32) of white dominated society.
The socio-political condition of Bolden’s time, especially the health condition of New Orleans was not up to the mark during the period 1800-1900. The death rate among Negroes was much higher than the whites as a Negro infant’s death rate was “450 per thousand in 1880” (Blassingame 163). The life expectancy of white child was much better than a Negro child. “The average lifespan for a black native of New Orleans in 1880 was only thirty six years; even white inhabitants, lived on, a mere forty six years. Black infant mortality rate was staggering 45 percent” (Gioia 28). Before Bolden’s birth in the year 1860, the black had a better life in New Orleans as depicted by J. W. Blassingame in his book Black New Orleans. According to him, the slaves of New Orleans were generally better housed, fed, and clothed than the countryside slaves in 1860s. “They also received better medical attention because it was easier to obtain in New Orleans. Warren Stone’s infirmary, for instance, had 418 Negroes among its 692 patients in 1860” (Blassingame 2). In 1860s, the Negroes might have been ‘better fed’ but they had to overwork in inhuman conditions that demanded beastly labour which could have been the main reason of their shorter life span. We may accept Blassingame’s information positively but issue of medical treatment covertly means that the health condition of black people was not up to the mark, for such reason, the black people were needed to be checked up and hospitalized to save their lives.

On the other hand, before Bolden’s birth during American Civil War, thousands of black people were being slaughtered in the name of nation’s safety, the black who wanted to remain alive had to move to other safe places like Canada. “During the Civil War it was almost impossible to get food or water supplies to the hospital” (Ondaatje 145). Same situation was also prevailing before the USA Civil War, the patients consisted of black and white in East Louisiana State Hospital suffered from “direst poverty and lacked sufficient food” (Ondaatje 145). The major disease like ‘dysentery’ snatched away their lives as “the diseased patients fell like grass before the scythe” (Ondaatje 145). “In 1870 there were only ten Negro physician for every 5094 Blacks” (Ondaatje 164). Though after ten years in 1880 such menial employment improved but it was not up to the mark as “[in New Orleans] were only thirteen Negro doctors listed in the census, or one for every 4434 Negroes”
The condition of beds was incongruous to sleep on in East Louisiana State Hospital, while the number of patients augmented day by day and the patients were mainly blacks. It reached its peak position after 1900s: from 1902-1904, the total patients were 1397, out of which 490 were blacks. From 1910-12, it raised to 1496, from 1912 to 1914 total patients were 1650 and from 1924 onwards 2100 patients were there.

The other reasons behind the Negroes' fatality and dilapidated health conditions were that they were living in an overcrowded society in the New Orleans city in cottages or wooden shelters with very little space. Their living style was not like normal human beings. They turned out to be easy prey to yellow fever, pneumonia, sexually transmitted diseases, cholera, infection of lungs due to over smoking and consumption of alcohol, etc. Some major causes behind the insanity of contemporary people were due to injury, deteriorated health conditions, loss of wealth and property, excessive addiction to tobacco, alcohol and women, epilepsy, etc. Other things like drinking of unsanitary water, eating unhygienic food, imperfect irrigation and drainage, and less effective aeration caused different terminal diseases, and suddenly the death rate increased after 1900. Another reason was that, when they moved for treatment, they were obstinately neglected to be vaccinated because they failed to pay proper medical charges due to their poor economic conditions. Sometimes their stubborn superstitious beliefs prevented them from taking the vaccines. Such discrimination in socio-economic and political spheres ran rampant in the New Orleans city, which paralyzed them.

Despite such mental health conditions and lack of proper treatment, black musicians like Buddy Bolden didn't stop their interest in and learning of music, especially jazz music. He developed it from his school life at Fisk School for Boys as music was a part of its curriculum. He got trained under the supervision of a Creole musician John Robichaux who was a teacher of music at Fisk School for Boys, who later became Bolden's competitor in the music world. Another musician Manuel Hall, Bolden's neighbour and family friend, taught Bolden how to play the trumpet and read the language of music. Manuel Hall never wanted to reveal himself as a musician, so "hid his trumpet in cupboard and never touched it when anyone was
around” (Ondaatje 93). Bolden’s another community member and contributor guitarist Galloway, another competitor of Bolden, taught him the art of stringing ‘notes’ which Bolden could easily twine. Musician Mutt Carey, a trumpet technician, who had the ability to create strong ‘notes’ and ‘purest sound’ also influenced the music life of Buddy Bolden. As we know, the music created by Bolden popularly came to be known as “Funky Butt”, which was later called “Buddy Bolden’s Blue”.

As a cornet player, Bolden was famous for playing cornet loudly which one could hear from a distant place as he was loudest of the loud. He played in a different style called B-flat. Buddy Bolden gently participated and performed in all kinds of social functions and rituals like private parties and picnics of his black community across the city. Bolden was the catchiest as well as a pathetic person of that time. Buddy Bolden “was the best and loudest and most loved jazzman of his time, but never professional in the brain” (Ondaatje 8) as he earned money as a barber. The writer Ralph Ellison explained a jazz musician’s primary aim and driving motivation in his book *Shadow and Act* (1964). Their driving motivations were “neither money nor fame, but the will to achieve the most eloquent expression of idea-emotions through the technical mastery of their instruments” (Ondaatje 189).

Bolden’s music was much adored by African soldiers. Ondaatje has revealed the power and popularity of Bolden’s music. Once, Bolden’s crafty rhythms easily influenced the embarked Negro regiment who were “bound for Cuba during the Spanish-American war. As the ship moved away the band played ‘home, sweet home’, and some of the men on the board were so overpowered by nostalgia they jumped off and swam to shore” (Marquis 44). His music was also used in church-singing, especially for spiritual hymns. At church and in funerals, his contemporary brass bands like Excelsior, Onward bands, Diamond Bands, Oriental Brass and Band played important roles. According to Bolden, “It was important to have a proper, elaborate funeral; because death was a release from earthly burdens the inclination was to ‘cry at birth, rejoice at death” (Blessingame 167-168).

Ondaatje unveils the hidden story and history of an infamous musician Buddy Bolden, the best and popular black jazz musician of New Orleans city. “Written into fiction in *Coming Through Slaughter*, Bolden cannot be understood without due
consideration of his identity (related to his music, his "pure’ sound") in tune with his location: New Orleans, Louisiana” (Deshaye 473) — a city of melting pot where white, black and Creole brand became very popular by 1880’s. W. R. Stokes has unlocked his famous book The Jazz Scene: An Informal History from New Orleans to 1990 on music in general and jazz in particular of the city of New Orleans with two quotes; one comes from Danny Barker, a famous black jazz musician and author from New Orleans, and another comes from Allan Jaffe, another practitioner of jazz music. Barker says “My family, they encouraged me to play music because they had a psychological attitude that if you give a kid an instrument he becomes attached to that instrument and that becomes a part of him and he’ll be respected” (Quoted in Stokes 3). According to Allan Jaffe, “New Orleans is the only place I know of where you ask a little kid what he wants to be and instead of saying, ‘I want to be a policeman,’ or ‘I want to be a fireman,’ he says, ‘I want to be a musician’” (Quoted in Stokes 3).

America’s zoning laws reinforced that a particular area should be fixed for particular class and race. So New Orleans and Storyville were divided into different parts and regions. New Orleans was divided into two major parts — Uptown area and Downtown area — by Canal Street. “Uptown included the Irish Channel, Rampart Perdido, Bolden’s First Street neighbourhood, the Garden District, Tulane and Loyola Universities, Lincoln and Johnson Park; Downtown contained the French Quarter, Storyville, the Globe, Economy and Perseverance halls, and the Creoles society halls” (Marquis 74). According to his existing interviewers and researchers, Bolden usually loved to play mainly in two places of Uptown, namely Johnson Parks and Lincoln Parks which are still associated with his name, fame, community and band. According to Marquis, “Bolden [had] participated mostly everywhere, [though] he did not play in the brothels” (Marquis 58), but the beginning part of the novel and the novel’s inner repercussion helps us to realize that he had also played for prostitutes.

On other hand, the suggestion for dividing the Storyville came from Joseph Story, the name of the district ‘Storyville’ belonged to his name. In the end of 19th century, Storyville was divided into two main areas, namely ‘Storyville’ and ‘Black Storyville’. The central part was reserved for white audiences, so that they could listen to music from both the areas. Bolden did not confine himself in Uptown area,
but also played in Downtown area of New Orleans, especially in the anonymous red-light areas in Storyville, specially Black Storyville, another favorite place for Bolden. “Jazz also symbolized the limitations on where black musicians could perform” (Porter 77).

The neglected Storyville always remained under unfertilized socio-economic and political conditions. In early part of 20th century, the jazz musicians in “New Orleans supported themselves by providing entertainment in one of hundreds of brothels located in the Storyville district: a 38-block designated where prostitution was legal” (Giessen-Reitsma 2003) till 1917. Storyville in New Orleans is better known as a ‘red-light district’, an urban city where prostitution was a day to day phenomenon. The novel *Coming Through Slaughter* mainly deals with such situations of Bolden’s contemporary New Orleans where black Bolden struggled as a marginalized artist throughout his life. Storyville included two main communities: ‘Swamp’ (a sin rampant section of New Orleans city) and ‘Smoky Row’ that cover hundred “black prostitutes from pre-puberty to their seventies” (Ondaatje 2). The main brothel was situated in the district of Storyville, birth place of Buddy Bolden, full of dilapidation and bestial habits and a city where “gamblers carrying cocaine to game” (Ondaatje 3).

Although Louisiana law prohibited slaves from owning anything or having money, slaves were often accepted as customers at brothels and had money to purchase the sexual services of women, white and black, free and slave. Often free men of color, white men, and slaves all patronized the same brothels on any given night. This amount of racial integration in brothels was unknown in other southern cities. (Schafer 157)

There is nothing to be worried about and there was no dismay in the way the black earned their livelihood. The social history proves that Bolden’s contemporary situations of New Orleans lacked the economic or financial dependency as the black whores and musicians migrated to these places from the outlying district of New Orleans. Due to the poverty, women were driven to opt prostitution as a profession,
while men were involved in disruptive activities like murdering and pick-pocketing. The secret status of the city and the reasons behind their activities were that they had also insufficient income to feed themselves. So, family members sometimes forced their child to involve in such unproductive activities or the teenagers themselves got involved in such crimes in order to overcome the family crisis as “the price of a teenage virgin was $800 in 1860” (Ondaatje 3). That’s why the area came to be known as “Hell on Earth” (Stall and Stall 217). Bolden himself spent most of his time in sleeping with the prostitutes of Storyville, slept with Nora when she was a prostitute. He was a bloom of the dirt, a harmonious tune in cacophony; a fragrance amidst filth.

During Bolden’s time, other problem was the imbalance socio-political condition; white prisoners got better opportunity to be released by their own community judges and police, while black were condemned to death and prison easily. In New Orleans city, black civil society was highly disturbed by white police for twenty four hours and the imprisonment of Négroes amplified day by day due to administration’s pressure. Most of the time, Negroes were abducted and within few hours, they were sentenced to incarceration for long time. As a revolt, they usually broke the peace in civil society by murdering, pick pocketing and disturbing others. What could they do in the face of such discrimination and deprived being of all socio-economic-political rights? In such a situation, they turned to the activities like murder which was thus a common day phenomenon. From 1820-1850, more than 800 murders were committed in this area. Fulmer's *Chasing the Devil's Tail*, a historical murder mystery novel, focuses on the serial murder of three 'sporting women' in different brothels of Storyville who were killed through different techniques adopted by the killers.

In such social destitutions and disturbances, Bolden had to compete with different musicians, especially creole musicians of the city. The Creoles who were more educated and trained musicians than the blacks, played in different parts of New Orleans including Downtown. The trained Creole musicians like Peter Bocage and Manuel Perez who learnt musical notes from ‘French Opera’ “felt great deal of prejudice toward darker-skinned Negroes” (Marquis 75). They also got more and
more remunerations from the audiences than the black musicians. The Creole lived in Downtown, while the Negroes who are defined as ‘coloured’ lived in Uptown.

According to *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, Creoles (mixed European and black descent or a white descent of French settlers in Louisiana) had their French-oriented or Europe-oriented culture different from the aboriginal people of America. Both the black and creole communities were not comfortable with each other because Creoles of Louisiana never tolerated the mixing up with blacks. “The Downtown-Uptown or Creole-black rivalry was not, however, exclusively a territorial, since members of both groups lived within the others ‘boundaries’. The division was really more one of heritage and tradition” (Marquis 74). The blacks were gauged as third class citizen, the ‘Creoles’ as second class, and definitely the whites as first class.

Before ‘Black Code’ amendment of 1894, the Creoles had greater opportunities than the blacks in New Orleans and got better musical training and benefits, whereas the blacks were lagging behind. In 1894, thunder like sudden blow came to the Creole of New Orleans. According to ‘Black Code’ amendment of 1894, Creoles were declared and categorized as “full-blooded Blacks” (Marquis 75) in America. The privileges and social benefits that Creoles were enjoying before the ‘colour code’ amendment were being snatched away. Then, the Creoles suddenly fell to the level of ‘colored’ people in job distribution and incomes. They had no other options to feed themselves except admitting to the level of marginalized black community. Only option left for them was to compete with the black people in socio-economic sphere. The Creoles slowly started competing with the black and captured more business places as ‘one property’ which was being divided between two communities.

So, before giving a full–fledged contour to his band, Bolden had to meet with these obstacles till his lunacy. He usually created uniqueness in jazz music, for such mastery and uniqueness he was treated scornfully as alien one by his contemporary ominous wishers and rivals. In the peak days of Bolden, there was another very popular, senior and highly educated musician of New Orleans, namely creole musician John Robichaux. Bolden had to face rivalry with him as well as with other major and minor musicians of his time to keep his music alive because new music of
his contemporary time has given a hard blow to blot his band out. The popularity of Bolden as a jazz musician was diminished due to his contemporary bands which was the other reason behind his madness. Bolden, a black musician, and Robichaux, a creole, hated each other in the field of music. Thus, such rivalry and politics between the musicians or bands' members ran unbridled in American music history. Unlike Bolden, Robichaux, a rich white musician and professional in nature, played his musical beats for "the wealthy St. Charles Avenue and Garden District plantation owners, brokers, bankers, Merchants and professional often hired blacks for private parties" (Marquis 73). He played his 'waltzes' — "a dance in triple time performed by a couple, who turned rhythmically round and round as they progress around the dance floor or a piece of music written for or in the style of this dance" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 10th edition). Business minded Robichaux got great blow in 1894 after the Black Code amendment. It threw him into the Uptown to compete with the black musician like Buddy Bolden. These two bands always competed with each other, but most of the time Bolden won the heart of the crowds. Earlier, Bolden most of the time played in Johnson Park and later came to Lincoln Park but his rival Robichaux played only at Lincoln Park.

Bolden listened to Robichaux's music in radio and enjoyed the 'clear forms' of his music. The main characteristic of John Robichaux's music was that it consisted different notes, while each and "every note part of the large curve, so carefully patterned that for the first time [Bolden] appreciated the possibilities of a mind moving ahead of the instrument in time and waiting with pleasure for them to catch up" (Ondaatje 91). Bolden had no knowledge of that quality and totally unaware of "that mechanistic pleasure, that trust" (Ondaatje 91). While Robichaux was playing for the Creoles and the whites, it is said that Bolden loved to play for his own black community people. But question arises, did he ever play for the white people? In 1951 Allen and Russell interviewed Jack Laine, white 'father of jazz, who denied that "he had never heard Bolden, though he had heard [Creole musicians] Manuel Perez and Perlops Loper" (Marquis 72).
Black musicians who played with Bolden or knew him likewise never mentioned seeing only White musicians playing anywhere ... but given Bolden's inquisitive musical mind, he more than likely picked up a few ideas from the White musicians and they in turn may have used ideas of his. The debate will go on as who influenced whom, those we can assume that Bolden played where he felt most at home and where his music was most appreciated, doing what he did best in the best way he knew how rather [than] playing as a reformer trying to convert the world or the city to his music. (Marquis 72-73)

Though, Bolden's place as a black musician was limited but limitation for black and white audiences was overpowered by his 'divine rhythm'. They easily left the Lincoln Park and joined Bolden's Johnson Park. Bolden's cornet blew hard and it's mesmerizing, gentle and ear-attracting power easily caught the heart of nearby audiences, thought the music played by Bolden had its own interior significance, usually played in some context, and in some unusual way. So, it was not easy to grasp its meaning. However, the melody of Bolden had a 'heartfelt' appeal to both black and white audiences, especially the women of his time. There was a popular panorama like a bouquet to see when women like Madam Wilson (white woman), Anna Jackson (a mulatto), and other common black and white people of different ethnic and racial background from different areas approached at Lincoln Park to hear Bolden. It is apparent that he had great followers and the listeners from all three communities like black, white and creole communities.

Bolden was a powerful cornet player in the city and a good man by heart. He was more innovative in music, bolder on the stage and keenly expectant than the others to glee his listeners with the richness of his musical ideas. The chief characteristics of his jazz music are that it is noisy, restless and speedy in its nature invented by Bolden. According to Ondaatje, if one wanted to find out the meaning of speedy music's 'notes' passing like a car it would immediately lose its wisdom, because one obviously failed to catch its meaning properly. Bolden approached to it according to his own mood because he was a slave of his own will. The inner
implication of his music was very hard to be understood by the audience, about which Ondaatje writes,

it was a music that had so little wisdom you wanted to clean nearly every note he passed, passed it seemed along the way as if travelling in a car, passed before he even approached it and saw it properly. There was no control except the mood of his power...it was for this reason it is good you never heard him play on recordings. If you never heard him play some place where the weather for instance could change the next series of notes — then you should never have heard him at all. He was never recorded. (Ondaatje 32)

Speedy nature of jazz music forces a musician to take beat decision immediately and it may help a musician to recall the past memories to present situation.

Bolden’s music had a supremacy to catch the ear of children who used to gather each morning in front of his house to enjoy it. Jazz helped Bolden to dream of a woman which escorted him to realize the beauty of life. Bolden’s such musical eminence remained under underscore only for six-seven years from 1899-1905 till his 29th birthday.

The most popular and small string groups and contemporary bands of Bolden were Punkie Valentin, Mr. Charlie Sweet Lovin' Galloway, Pinchback Touro and Senor Butts. “Buddy Bolden was the most popular of all, but he was jealous of the great rhythms, showmanship and popularity of Mr. Sweet Lovin' Galloway with his fiddle and mandolin solos, especially since Galloway was a clown and had an engaging personality and a large following” (Barker 9). Galloway had three terrific horn blowers Frankie Lewis (clarinet), Edward Clem (cornet) and Frankie Dusen (trombone) who loved to battle with Bolden’s band. Bolden started conspiring and thinking to break up the unity of the band. In such adverse situation, Bolden needed some famous players to stay in competition with musicians. So he broke the band of his contemporary to snatch Frankie Lewis in his band. It is said that Bolden had “fired Brock Mumford, his guitarist, and clarinettist Willie Warner as well as trombonist Willie Cornish” (Barker 9) in order to hire Galloway’s men like Frankie Dusen,
Lorenzo Staulz and Frankie Lewis. After the departure of these three musicians, Sweet Lovin’ Galloway’s band and Galloway just started fading from the picture of the world of music.

With cornet, brass clarinet, and drums, Bolden loved to improvise traditional songs into new powerful music which became very popular among the audiences of his black community. In early life, his memory was very strong and powerful, he did not need to write down and memorize the music and its beats. He also adapted the ability to change the course of a heard music. He amassed different musical beats and notes from the different parts of New Orleans and changed the course of the ‘heard beats’ by his mastery, aptitude and personality of improvisation in order to make them different and worthy ones. In a social milieu, a synthesis or fusion was being created to give birth to a new cadence to jazz music: “The jazz world has evinced a more fickle temperament, with its methods and vocabulary constantly changing, sometimes mutating into surprising new forms” (Gioia 20). So, the popularity of jazz came in his hand through the improvisation, nurturing and experiment. Bolden had great gifts and wisdom to ‘smash’ the learnt materials from others “like ice coming onto the highway off a truck” (Ondaatje 147). So, “Jazz improvisation is equally creative and recreative” (Doan 37). Such power of music was accepted by Webb, his friend, who became an investigating officer after his disappearance. One day before Bolden’s disappearance, Webb saw

His nervous friend walk jauntily out of the crowd into the path of a parade and begin to play so hard and beautifully that Webb didn’t even have to wait for the reaction of the people; he simply turned and walked till he no longer heard the music of the roar he imagined crowding round to suck that joy. Its power (Ondaatje 31).

The novel itself is an improvisation of facts and fiction. Here, we can compare and justify the structure of the text and the structural notes of his music in parallel way. The structural basis of Michael Ondaatje’s Coming Through Slaughter helps a reader to realize the text as a jazz text. The structure of Ondaatje’s novel is very much
comparable with the structural 'notes' of Bolden's jazz music. The word 'improvise' in jazz music refers to a production and repetition of musical notes with slight modification from the original one or through improvisation. A musician can change the whole notes to give it a new form. As Ondaatje does through improvisation of historical 'notes' written on Bolden's life and his contemporary socio-cultural conditions, similarly Ondaatje also improvises his novel. He brings together some facts like date and characters and polishes them to suit his fiction:

By such improvising, Ondaatje manages in a single sequence of events (the scene at Lincoln Park; the Bolden-Botley walk; Bolden playing the cornet in the barber shop) to use two extreme forms of paraphrase – one with an almost 'faithful repetition' of the original text, with 'a few ornamental flourishes,' and the other by the 'highly imaginative reworking of the melody, which remains recognizable only by its outline.' (Doan 35)

Ondaatje assesses fragmented history and broadens it through his fictive power. Here in this context, the words 'improvise' and 'swing' are important to understand Bolden's music and Ondaatje's text. If we look at the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (10th eds.), we can find the definition of 'Swing' as "to move or cause to move back and forth or from side to side while suspended". In jazz music, musicians applied the concept of 'swing' notes as they move back and forth. Ondaatje follows the same foot step in his novel *Coming Through Slaughter*. Like Swing music, Ondaatje has oscillated back and forth for collecting his materials to give it a concrete and sequential shape. He 'swings' the historical facts and depicts them artistically to create a literary text through imaginative inspection. Another word 'syncopate' taken from music world here plays an important role. According to *Concise English Oxford Dictionary* (10th eds.) it means "the displacement of beats or accents in (music or a rhythm) so that strong beats become weak and vice-versa". Ondaatje does put the same tension in his text by shifting from its usual major storyline to unusual minor facts and characters. He has adopted and appropriated these insignificant incidents to significant ones through artistic fusion as Bolden
usually did in music through 'blues' and 'hymns'. Like jazz music, Ondaatje creates and produces them by collecting from different sources as he credits and acknowledges his indebtedness at the end of the novel Coming Through Slaughter. He appreciates:

While I have used real names and characters and historical situations have also used more personal pieces of friends and fathers. There have been some date changes, some characters brought together, and some facts have been expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction. (Ondaatje Coming Through Slaughter)

If a music lover comes forward to hear it, he will definitely regret and try to change the history in order to create a space for Bolden. Actually his music was of high quality, he played with his own will and wits, and it seemed that he had no control of himself and his music, “was just as important to watch him stretch and wheel around on the last notes or to watch nerves jumping under the sweat of his head” (Ondaatje 32). So it was unimportant to finish and clear everything if you are playing something very fast. And describing something in different ways is a quality of a genius people as Bolden could do in jazz music. There was a reason as Ondaatje thinks that actually “he was tormented by order, what was outside” (Ondaatje 32), an important line if one wants to know the contemporary problems of black, especially Bolden. The whites made an order by breaking the harmony by marginalizing the black in every sphere of life: social, political, economic and educational. Black people had to struggle in America for their fundamental rights till their last breath, but in different time periods different laws were legislated and implemented against them which were against the moral codes of any society. In his music “there was pain and gentleness everything jammed into each number” (Ondaatje 33). As a musician he hunted for right notes for his music, always changing direction sometimes in the middle and sometimes in the end. Jamming of pain with pleasure justifies Bolden as a master of improvisation which reveals the intoxicated covert world of the blacks. At the age of 22, he came to be known as a recognized musician to the American people. This late recognition of
Bolden as a musician signifies the fact that he had been long deselected by the whites for just being a black.

Certainly, in Bolden’s music there was a harmony and discipline, and it was not easy for all to understand it. So the depth of his music remained a mystery to the people of America as well as to the musicians of other parts of the world, though it reached to the top of the world and “was immediately on the top of his own life. Echoing” (Ondaatje 32) and “too loud but real and strong you couldn’t deny him” (Ondaatje 33). As a ‘colored’ person, he came across so many difficulties and yet is not properly recognized as a talented one in the world of music.

Despite such discriminations and difficulties, thinking of him as ‘formless’ is not true. An important episode about Bolden and justification of his hypnotizing music comes from the description of Bolden’s friend Dude Botley. A story and information given by Dude Botley “some believe and which others don’t believe at all” (Ondaatje 77). Botley spoke of his mental and inner state as “wood planks all over the broken glass window... pretty dark there, not much light. There’s light in the back of the shop and it pours in all over the floor of the shaving parlor and Bolden is restless as a dog in the chair” (Ondaatje 77). Dark and restless both are ‘off-putting’ words here. He tried to come out from his abject condition “with a bottle and the cornet, he [tried] first to drink but he beg[a]n crying and he put the bottle in the sink” (Ondaatje 77). Where were those men and women who followed him when he used to play music? No, none was there to hear his ‘exceptional music’ and ‘exceptional mastery’ except Botley who was listening the music from a distance, unseen by Bolden. Bolden’s only relief was his ‘cornet’ – his intimate friend to reveal his collected unknown agonies. It [was] so lonely! He lack[ed] human company and [it was] the worst poverty to be friendless in sorrow. He was “mixing [blues and hymn] up. [He was] playing the blues and hymn sadder than the blues and then the blues sadder than the hymn. That [was] the first time [Botley] ever heard hymns and blues cooked up together” (Ondaatje 78). Creation of a new one through mixing up of two opposite music would be denied by the Lord who does not “like... mixing the Devil’s music with His [God] music” (Ondaatje 78).
when he blows blues [Botley] can see Lincoln Park with all the sinners and whores shaking and belly rubbing and the chicks getting way down and slapping themselves on the cheeks of their behind. Then when he blows the hymn [Botley] in [his] mother's church with everyday humming. The picture kept changing with the music. It sounded like a battle between the Good Lord and the Devil. Something tells [him] to listen and see who wins. If Bolden stops on the hymn, the Good Lord wins. If he stops on the blues, the Devil wins. (Ondaatje 78)

Blues is called devil’s music because of its association with prostitutes whereas hymns are in praise of God. What could be more devilish than blending the both? But his friend Botley, though was afraid first, could not divert his ears from the fusion because the music sounded so strange, he felt hypnotized. The word ‘strange’ signifies that the music was totally a new invention and ear-attracting. This was not a sin rather a revelation of a genius in the form of revolution in the history of music. But white American society and other orthodox believers of religion would not permit to play such fusion. If it anyhow reached at their ears, he would be executed. So, it was better to keep within oneself or under the clutch of four walls.

In order to analyze his life further, it is necessary to explain the preface of *Coming Through Slaughter* which begins with the enigmatic images of three sonographs: pictures of dolphins’ sound are intimately connected with Bolden’s fusion and improvisation of Blues with the hymns. The left sonograph is explained as “squawk” (multi-frequency harsh sound) considered as “common emotional expression” (Ondaatje *Coming Through Slaughter*) and the right sonograph a “whistle” (a clear, high-pitched sound) unveils as a “pure sound” (Ondaatje *Coming Through Slaughter*) unlike “squawk”. Dolphins use the “whistle” to identify their location in water but the mid-sonograph consist of “vertical strips” (Ondaatje *Coming Through Slaughter*) and “mountain-like humps” (Ondaatje *Coming Through Slaughter*), signal echolocation clicks (sharp sound) and whistles respectively. The quality of it is that a dolphin is capable to create both sounds simultaneously. But “No one knows how a dolphin makes both whistles and echolocations simultaneously”
(Ondaatje *Coming Through Slaughter*) as nobody would come to know Bolden’s hidden talent: the ability to fuse the ‘Blues’ with ‘hymns’. The ability to adopt and improvise the heard music, and bringing city music to his own new style were his mark of genius. He totally rejected the theory of imitation rather believed in the theory of innovation. When he revealed the heard one into a new form, it would become different from the previous one. Later musicologists confirmed Bolden’s mixing up of blues with funeral music as the originators of ragtime music which later came to be known as modern jazz. Here the dolphin is Bolden. Bolden as a Negro musician struggled right through his life to locate his identity as dolphins struggle to locate their place in deep water. The sounds of Bolden’s jazz music like dolphins’ sonographs remained unheard and unrecorded. So, the image of dolphin’ sound is directly or indirectly associated with the cornet player and its sound. Here the phrase ‘pure sound’ is much related with Bolden’s ‘jazz sound’ as an effort to establish his identity and location in a chaotic geography like New Orleans, mainly in the Storyville district.

Later in Bolden’s own band members started leaving his band; it might be due to his unusual behaviour to everyone. Later, they either joined to the other’s bands or created their own band by 1906 that is thought to be the year of Bolden’s insanity. They left him because he had not that much of income to pay his band members. For such low income, he also failed to nourish his family. He was the only hope for his mother because he was the only alive male member in his family. Due to such financial crisis and failure in music world, his frustration increased day by day. Later, Frankie Dusen, a trombonist of his band, and L. Staulz became his band members who handled his band in better way, but did not last long when his insanity started increasing day by day as he was perishing from music world. Later, Bolden gradually became frantic in a full crowded room and their excitement created a kind of fever for him. He could sniff the smell of his audience when he was alone. Everything appeared to him scary: Bolden does not “think [he] will find one person who will be the right audience” (Ondaatje 86). The insecurity he felt could never be cured. Like other brand members, later Dusen too left him and created his own band named ‘The Eagle Band’ with Bank Johnson who took the place of Bolden as a cornet player.
One day, when Dusen was playing with his band members in a parade at Lincoln Park, Bolden reached there. Dusen saw him and announced that he did not need him anymore. Nobody moved to him and asked him to participate, and this time none shouted at ‘King Bolden’ as before. Now he paled into a common man like one among the crowded audience. He started retreating his place. Later, he assumed that his ideas and musical notes were being copied by his competitors. He began to suspect his band members and his cornet too. “Buddy thought everyone was his enemy and was out to get him. Alphonso Picou said that in the end all his friends left him” (Ondaatje 116). There was a logic behind his suspicion, for there it was customary to unduly copy another’s musical notes.

Bolden was a boozier and began to talk to himself and quarreled with the memories of his band. Finally he became frightened of everything even that of his cornet. He lost his all family members except his mother who did care hard to restore his health – the insanity grasping Bolden – but failed. She could not find any way to help her son and when his mental abnormality increased she called the police to put off him from hurting her. Sometimes he began to beat himself also. He was highly addicted to prostitutes and wine which could be seen from the wall decorations of his Shaving Parlour. This suspicion, addiction to alcohol, and excess submission to sex stimulated to develop his physical and psychic twist: “severe headaches in early March, 1906 ... his headaches gave him so much pain he would play wrong note” (Marquis 112). He became frenetic and disturbing at public places. Later, he focused on developing what he usually hated to do like ‘boating’ indicating his insanity and abnormality and diversion from his own control. In home it was beyond control of his mother, she informed the police to arrest him. Within few days he was released from the jail but his mental instability did not impede and got him involved in disputes with some of his close friends. “Depression, hopelessness, and the dark allure of alcohol brought on bouts of severe headaches and paranoia (an erratic fear of his cornet probably didn’t help his music). He became so ‘brainsick’ that the doctors confined him to bed” (Jeff Winke 2013). His mental deterioration reached its extreme, and by March 23, 1906, he had to be sent to bed.
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Before his complete madness, Bolden suddenly disappeared from New Orleans city. In the novel, the inspector Webb investigated the episode of Bolden's sudden disappearance from New Orleans. His friend Webb was unaware about his mental problems though he had spent two years with him. His missing led Webb in tension because Bolden was not safe by himself. At a time Webb thought that the search for his friend Buddy Bolden was over when Bellocq tried to wash the negative copy of photo in the acid tray:

Then the sudden vertical lines which rose out of pregnant white paper which were the outlines of the six men and their formally held instruments. The dark clothes coming first...then the faces. Frank Lewis looking slightly to the left. All serious except for the smile on Bolden. Watching their friend float into the page smiling at them, the friend who in reality had reversed the process and gone back into white, who in this bad film seemed to have already half-receded with that smile which may not have been a smile at all, may have been his mad dignity. (Ondaatje 48)

The whole passage is full of irony. According to Webb, this was the best information which he got from the photo of six men, only this awful picture which kept the figurative record of him and his friend. We have no recorded documents on his life and music. We have only one photo of Bolden as captured by Bellocq.

In his novel Ondaatje improvises a relationship between the jazz musician Bolden and the photographer Bellocq. Although both historical figures lived in Storyville at approximately the same time, it is doubtful that they ever met. Yet in Coming Through Slaughter, Ondaatje's Bolden and Bellocq not only meet, they also become close friends. In improvisation in the music, the only restriction is the fixed chord sequence. In Ondaatje's novel, these "fixed chord sequences" are the facts or received stories about individual characters. Ondaatje has taken these facts and improvised on and around them to create a peculiar relationship between characters. (Doan 45)
(Standing from Left): Jimmy Johnson, Buddy Bolden, Willy Cornish, Willy Warner.

(Sitting from Left): Brock Mumford, Frank Lewis.

Source: Google Image.
The photos was and is still a mystery. Why was he posing with smile when the others were in an ominous mood? It's an enigma like that of Mona Lisa but Leonardo da Vinci was white and the world knows of Mona Lisa as the second self. Sometimes it is said that perhaps he smiled for Belloq who captured the photo. But it may also be that he did not want to show his inner anguish and problems to the world. If there was no solution to his community's problems, then it was groundless to show one's agonies to others.

Bolden's missing was a shocking news to Webb, but his wife Nora did not take any necessary steps or show any curiosity to find out Bolden. Just before Bolden's madness, one of his children dreamt an 'awful dream' as her "Mum [Nora] made some food focus out onions and hair and orange peels and [the children] hated it and [Nora] said eat up its good for you" (Ondaatje 128). Nora appeared like the one of the witches in Shakespeare's Macbeth as she was conjuring bad omen to intensify the chaotic world of Bolden. The dream also signified upcoming danger for Bolden.

On the other hand, Nora might had been fed up with Bolden's irresponsible life and wanted to get herself free from him, that's why she did not take the necessary steps to find him out. Her response to Webb proved her apathy towards Bolden as she said, "If you look for him then do it for yourself, not for me" (Ondaatje 14). Bolden failed to create his own identity here. His problems should be shared by Nora or other nearest to him but nobody came forward to know the reason behind his abnormality. Due to such indifference, Webb immediately started doubting her behind his missing. Such puzzling incident conclusively defines the novel as a mysterious one. Why Bolden left his society and his people without informing anyone remains a doubtful question. Different researchers think that Bolden wanted to create a new identity in a white dominated society by making new friends. Due to his discrimination as a black musician, he left white dominated society in order to exhale his wholesome burden and in search of hope in some new society. He did not take anything with him like his 'The Cricket', the band and its kids. Webb investigated and tried to find out proper reason behind his missing. Though Webb was physically strong but his mental horizon of thinking and judgment was not critical enough to penetrate through the character of Bolden. His primary investigation led him to question Crawly, another
cornet player who was seen with him last time in Sell Beach and then Bolden was not seen in the city again. Despite her ignorance, Bolden’s departure forced Nora to realize the importance of the jazz man Bolden. The living room of Bolden, in his absence, appeared to be like some “old wallpapers and few chair [and] like a tired showman” (Ondaatje 15). Perhaps every age and every society has a Ulysses to remember. Bolden made his presence known by his absence.

Though Bolden stayed for two years with Webb but he did not come to know about Bolden’s music till Bolden moved to New Orleans from Pontchartrain. He was too much conservative and less talkative because either he thought none of them as worthy of his friendship or he was unwilling to share his inner agonies or problems to family members [Nora] and friends [like Webb]. Bolden reached New Orleans city at the age of 22 and Webb came to be known to him for 15 years since then. His true friend, Webb was optimist about Bolden, “He’ll come back Nora” (Ondaatje 15). Webb knew the importance of a woman in the life of Bolden. He said Nora, “When he married you, before you two went to my cabin in Ponchartrain, he phoned and we talked for over an hour, he needs you Nora, don’t worry he’ll be back soon” (Ondaatje 15).

From Crawly, we come to know that Bolden spent his last few days with Mr. Brewitts – a pianist, and his wife J. Brewitts also a pianist. In order to get some temporal release from the tension or to overcome his alienation from his inner self and contemporary problems, Bolden flee from New Orleans, his family and his audiences. He started living with the Brewitts and had an affair with his wife Mrs Brewitts. Bolden desired to get some comfort from the social predispositions, stagnant surroundings and inequalities through friendship and courtship with other’s wife and friends. It was during this period that it seemed that he appeared to reach a sort of equilibrium (Smyter 87-88). J. Brewitts was popular pianist before last five years at Spanish Fort, Shell Beach, Lake Pontchartrain, Milneburg, Algeiess, Gretna etc, all these places were considered as New Orleans suburbs. Bolden was hypnotized by Mrs. Brewitts’ beauty further proving his addiction to women:
When he saw her he nearly fainted. After a party he went home with the Brewitts and pretended he was hungry so they wouldn’t go to bed. Bolden was never much of an eater but he lied that he hadn’t eaten for two days and so they sat there for three hours and he forced himself to eat and eat, taking twenty minutes with an egg squashed in a bowl and a drink in hand … five in the morning they stood … and went to bed. (Ondaatje 27)

His sexual appetite was an insatiate hunger and obsession which streaked his downfall. Women like Mrs. Brewitts became only a sexual object to him. When Webb and Bolden both friends became “financially independent for the first time … [they spent] all their money on girls, and sometimes on women” (Ondaatje 30). So, Bolden himself was primarily responsible for his insanity as his addiction to alcohol and women without control destroyed his mental harmony. So, Bolden had passed through two edges of his life which are vital for his obliteration; one is company of women and another is his attachment to alcohol. But he had rarely to buy wine or whisky. He had many patrons or well-wishers who usually provided these as we see in our novel depicted by Ondaatje. Anderson was the closest thing to a patron that Bolden had, giving him money for the family and sending him two bottles of whisky a day via runner boys. To the left of Canal Street was Dago Tony who, at the height of Bolden’s popularity, sponsored him as well as sending him Raleigh Rye wine. But sometimes, even generosity earns you infamy! It happened to Tom Anderson who was accused as Bolden’s keen destroyer.

Once, Bolden “For the first time … used his cornet as jewelry” (Ondaatje 28) to attract Mrs. Brewitts. Here, he tried to play his best to an open porch unsuccessfully to enchant Mrs. Brewitts as jewelry does to a woman. When both the Brewitts went to sleep, “No one could see […] he aimed for the gentlest music he knew with every sweet stylized gesture” (Ondaatje 28) in a heavy cold weather with wearing just a trouser and a shirt. As “He played till his body was frozen and all that was alive and warm were the few inches from where his stomach forced the air up through his chest and head into the instrument” (Ondaatje 28). No audience was present there to hear him, he tried to enrapture his lady love, but he failed to do so. He and his music genius
remained to the outer world. This whole episode proved that it was a senseless mad man’s activity who even did not feel the harshness of cold weather. But it also put in a new dimension to love and sensuality -- it is a deeper blindness perhaps, not to others but to one’s own self.

Love-hate relationship has been extended by Ondaatje further. Robin hated her husband Jaelin, Nora did not love Bolden, Bolden loved Robin, Nora loved Pickett. Jaelin got pains for her wife’s such infidelity, while Bolden for Nora and Nora for Bolden. It appeared to be awful and exhaustive to him.

The indictment behind his madness pins to Tom Pickett as given by different writers and critics, sometimes Ondaatje too displays the same views like them. Bolden sensed that his wife had incestuous relationship with his friend Pickett. Tom Pickett was “one of the great hustlers, one of the most beautiful men in the District” (Ondaatje 68). Once Bolden crucified with drink, started suspecting that Pickett had illegal relations with his wife Nora. This suspicion of Bolden led him in a conflict with Pickett in his barbershop. “Pickett earlier so confident he knew [Nora] thoroughly, her bones, god he knew even the number of bones she had in her body” (Ondaatje 75). So, Pickett’s incestuous relationship gave new temperament in his madness and Bolden imagined the deceit through Pickett’s mind hunching over him. After his dispute with Pickett in barbershop, he suddenly stopped to be visible in his community and city.

Suddenly, Bolden returned after two complete years of his disappearance. After his return, Bolden wanted to go back in his music world and promised to thread his notes again in public parade. He started his half-mad life again as a musician and joined Henry Allen’s Band. He decided to take part in with ‘Henry Allen’s snr’s Brass Band’ in a weekend parade. But change in his behaviour appeared after his return, avoiding to enlarge the jokes and stories. After his return, he became much gentle to his audiences and his wife Nora. His old friends before three days of his insanity came to entertain him with some sort of stories which “he loved to hear” (Ondaatje 119). He laughed at their jokes but responded a little. In last moment, the intensity of Nora’s love increased “still love you Buddy... I’m sorry. Not like it was before because I don’t know you anymore, but I care about you, love you as if you weren’t my
husband" (Ondaatje 121). His well-wishers and audiences who were 'eventual catalyst' wanted to perk him up in earlier conditions but Bolden turned off from any conversation with them. His 'aficionado' brought famous wine of Raleigh Rye left at his doorstep. Though he brought the bottle in kitchen but did not touch and wish to drink a sip.

The degree of insanity did not stop completely rather increased day by day and ran through everyday slaughtering like a dejected and exhausted fellow. Bolden had no order in himself; he had no control of himself, became a slave of his own will. Pessimist Bolden also started losing his grasp over his 'art' as he had lost his hold on his own life. He thought "[he] wouldn’t let [himself] control the world of [his] music because [he] had no power over anything else that went on around [him], in or around [his] body" (Ondaatje 97-98). His life was like a movement from sane to insane; "Home to nightmare" (Ondaatje 104). 'Home' means a safe place or a place where something or someone grows up, or a place where everything remains free from any attack, but to him, home became a place of fear and foul. Bolden gradually lost his mental track of harmony and failed under the spell of unpleasant prospect. Bolden is "travelling [his] career on a fire" (Ondaatje 104) and like a "parcel on a bus" (Ondaatje 104). Despite his madness, he could separately play his own unique music that was to be distinguished as Bolden's own. Finally like a crazy man, he started spinning round and round at a place which connected Liberty with Iberville. Later he became much thoughtful and less talkative. His condition worsened than the worst. The notes played called 'squawk beats' forced him to remember two women Robin and Nora. Once, he was fainted after sighting a woman when playing at parade between Marais and Liberty in 1907. She appeared to be like a 'bitch' with thin body and long hair. He fainted and fell outward and was caught by Willy Cornish. The red shirt worn by him symbolized caution and danger. Cornish finally "lifting the horn sees the blood spill out from it as he finally lifts the metal from the hard kiss of the mouth" (Ondaatje 132). Buddy, a renowned musician, lost his crown "on the sawdust floors of the Uptown saloons and in the muddy gutters of South Rampart Street, which somehow seemed to parallel the muddy recesses of a mind no longer controlled by reason" (Marquis116). The man who created the first jazz band could never play
his cornet, would never play for common crowd again. This is how he almost fits the Aristotelian precept of a tragic hero. The irony marking his life is breath taking.

Bolden, the ‘King’ of cornet, had erratic fear of everything even of his musical instrument like cornet as “Buddy was always shouting. In any argument he'd try to overpower you with yelling” (Ondaatje 73). If anyone took away anything from him, he would be very loud or be silent – a childlike behavior. Why he behaved in such particular way is still a matter of enquiry. His researchers have retained few information on him as a man who was wholeheartedly addicted to wine and fully engaged in sexual activity. These catalysts cost him a lot, ended his music life at the age of twenty nine. His fellow musician Tom Jones knew his importance in society and also knew of his unhealthy condition. Jones and other friends took him from Barton Rogue to East Louisiana Hospital through the places Sunshine, Vachery and Slaughter, and admitted to the hospital after crossing a river on 5th June, 1907 where he was kept for 25 years in dejection and insanity. Here the word ‘slaughter’ from the novel’s title *Coming Through Slaughter* generally refers to ‘Slaughter’ town located to the north side of Baton Rouge. Through this region Bolden was brought from the Asylum for final burial. This does not stand for mere geographical location but also signifies the hectic and cruel time period through which he passed and ultimately became insane in 1907.

The dinner in this hospital where Buddy Bolden was hospitalized to cure his lunacy was very low both in quantity and quality, served with meat like “a hen’s egg and a small piece of bread….Breakfast was bread and coffee. Supper was bread and tea” (Ondaatje 145). The patients lacked proper cloths and warmth, especially female patients. A picture of a society where people loved to be engaged in war and shaky law making games instead of enhancing the life of the subaltern blacks.

In the hospital, Bolden could just nod his head to answer the questions of nurses and doctors, and lost the ability to “sing through neck” (Ondaatje 137). Even in hospital a nurse appeared like a “smiling rope face and rope neck ... sweet palm” (Ondaatje 137) as well as thought that “everyone who touch[ed] [him] must be beautiful” (Ondaatje 137). His earlier instinct still forced him to accept his willingness and still appealed him to accept the power of a woman body. According to doctor
Gremillion, he had so many followers in the hospital. Bolden, an egoist, had irregular pattern in his behavior, was assigned to cut the hair of the other patients. Willy Cornish who visited Bolden in hospital and saw that he was touching nothing at all nor he ever spoke or went round touching things. Next time though for few moments, Bolden advanced to touch things around but did not utter a single word to his friend Cornish and he had nothing to do with his cornet, fellow musicians and the bands. He even didn’t pretend to know Cornish, while for doctors he was an exceptional patient. In the last moment of his life he did those unusual activities raising his hands up in the air in agony and pain. This was the last gesture happened to him and in his memory for forever. When everyone came to know about his impossibility to recover from such madness, they started talking a lot about him were nothing appeared to be like fools to Ondaatje. It is true that we realize the value of something when the thing starts departing from us. Didn’t we mourn for Socrates after giving him poison? His fate is similar to that of Galileo as well. Bolden had been mourned only after his departure. He has been that precious lost pearl thrown into water forever. He passed away and was buried in Holte Cemetery in New Orleans in 1931. The years he lived, from 1877-1931, makes for an important period in American music history. But his date of birth is sometimes put in dilemma and considered 1868 according to The Complete Encyclopedia of Popular Music by R.D. Kindle.

We can say that it was stroke of luck in so many ways – a person is lucky to have the indomitable caliber to create ‘rhythm divine’. But one is unlucky to be born with so much of talent in a community and family, or better say, surrounding by a colour code made for ignoring! Buddy Bolden is that enigma, carrying a baggage of heavy luck and a heavier unluck. Thus, Ondaatje’s sympathy for the long ignored black Bolden’s glorious debut to the musical arena matches with the sympathy of Thomas Gray, an important precursor of Romantic poets, as registered in his poem “Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard”, for the poor genius who went unsung: “Full many a gem of purest ray serene, / The dark unfathom’d caves of ocean bear:/ Full many a flow’r is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air” (Stanza xiv). Moreover, as a child of ‘domestic black servant’, it was a daring dream for Bolden to become a thriving musician in a world of white dominated
society. But the difference is – he made his mark as he became a renowned jazz player, though remained unknown to most of the people.

Post-Bolden New Orleans appeared to be like a T. S. Eliot’s barren land, a waste land as narrated and observed by Ondaatje. The wooden walls of places like Gravier, Philip and Liberty streets became crumpled and silent after his death. Ondaatje as narrator and vaster entered in the city, keenly observing and surveying the post-Bolden vicinities where Bolden usually loved to play. The places where he lived, “his mind on the pinnacle of something collapsed and where he had to give his brains away. The novelist feels that “there is so little noise that [he] easily hear the click of my camera as [he] take[s] fast bad photographs into the sun aiming at the barber shop he probably worked in” (Ondaatje 134). Buddy just became a “reservoir where engines and people drank, blood sperm music pouring out” (Ondaatje 110). He was never concerned about his personal profit at the expense of others, rather devoted his whole life for his community. According to Ondaatje, each street and its place where Bolden went with his cornet and his band became dry and pink. The sun scorches everything and no one ever hears the name of such a legend. There prevails complete absence of Bolden. Bolden lacked light – a glinting figure. And now “even his skeleton has softened, disintegrated, and been lost in the water under the earth of Holtz Cemetery” (Ondaatje 134). Buddy Bolden became a legend before he went berserk in a parade playing the band of Allen. Ondaatje was much eager to know the status of his mind rather knowing what he was playing. Conclusively, Bolden was “like a weather bird arcing round in the middle of [his] life to exact opposites and burning [his] brains out so that from June 5, 1907, till 1931 [he was] dropped into amber in the East Louisiana State Hospital” (Ondaatje 135).

As a subjugated one, Bolden was being marginalized from the history of music world. As a result, he had no recording of his music as Louis Jones said: Bolden’s jazz was a strictly ‘ear band’. He also added his magnitude as accepted by other jazz musicians later on Armstrong, Bunk Johnson, Freddie Keppard – they all knew that Bolden began the good jazz. After Bolden’s death, different myths on him had been created by his researchers. Sometimes it is assumed that he went mad for he was “trying to play the Devil’s music and hymns at the same time” (Ondaatje 135).
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Another jazzman Armstrong gave an information that he went mad “by playing too hard and too often drunk too wild too crazy” (Ondaatje 135). The ‘excess’ of anything creates a kind of canopy upon one’s life and pushes one-step ahead to death. He in ‘the parade’ reached in the climax of jazz and ultimately had to resign from the “20th century game of fame” (Ondaatje 135) – a fame in the world of music. Nobody came to know the true story of Bolden that remained under unfortified ground of myth: “the rest of your life a desert of facts” (Ondaatje 136). Ondaatje thinks that one must come forward to unveil the truth and one should spread them all over the world so that one can learn the reality about him. Without misinterpreting him as a negligible one like ‘garbage’ – a meaningless story of a neglected musician. The sun faded off and swallowed the fertile colour of the street where Bolden generally used to play and black community are still living. This scenario “a black and white photograph, part of a history book” (Ondaatje 136), which may symbolically incorporate the eternal tension between the white and the black people, ultimately became history.

A saxophonist, Sidney Bechet had great respect for his music and paid homage through his composition named “Buddy Bolden’s Stomp”. After his death, in order to pay him homage, he has been fictionalized and still being fictionalized in different literary genres like poetry, novel and drama etc. August Wilson, an American playwright, in his drama Seven Guitars (1995) postulated a character namely King Hedley resembling King Bolden. Hedley in that novel thinks that Bolden’s spirit would come one day and give him financial support. Mentally unsound like Bolden’s later stage, Hedley reveries to be a king. The Wilson’s drama like that of Ondaatje gives a picture of the struggles of Afro-American young musicians for justice and their rights in the society. The novelist, David Fulmer in his Chasing the Devil’s Tail (2001) depicted the period 1907 of Storyville. Here, Bolden becomes an assortment of fact and fiction as in Ondaatje’s novel Coming Through Slaughter. According to David, the first decade of 20th century New Orleans city diverted from its moral track and engaged in sex racket, drugs and murder. Drugs like cocaine and opium were being sold openly in the city. Louis Maistros penned and created King of jazz musician in his successful novel Sound of Building Coffins as
Bolden was playing his cornet. Like Ondaatje, Fulmer drew the other real characters like E.J. Belloccq and Tom Anderson from the red-light district Storyville.

Thus, the novel *Coming Through Slaughter* becomes a biography, a history and a fiction simultaneously. Perhaps, this is the best tribute paid to Buddy Bolden, his ethnic community and black music in the hands of Ondaatje. No doubt, Bolden's contribution is valuable, for he added another note, another layer to human life and history by adding his way of music. The world will tap to him for centuries as we respond to William Shakespeare even after so many ways.
Works Cited


