

# Building a better future for dance music: A reading list by DeForrest Brown Jr.

---

 [crackmagazine.net/article/lists/deforrest-brown-reading-list](https://crackmagazine.net/article/lists/deforrest-brown-reading-list)

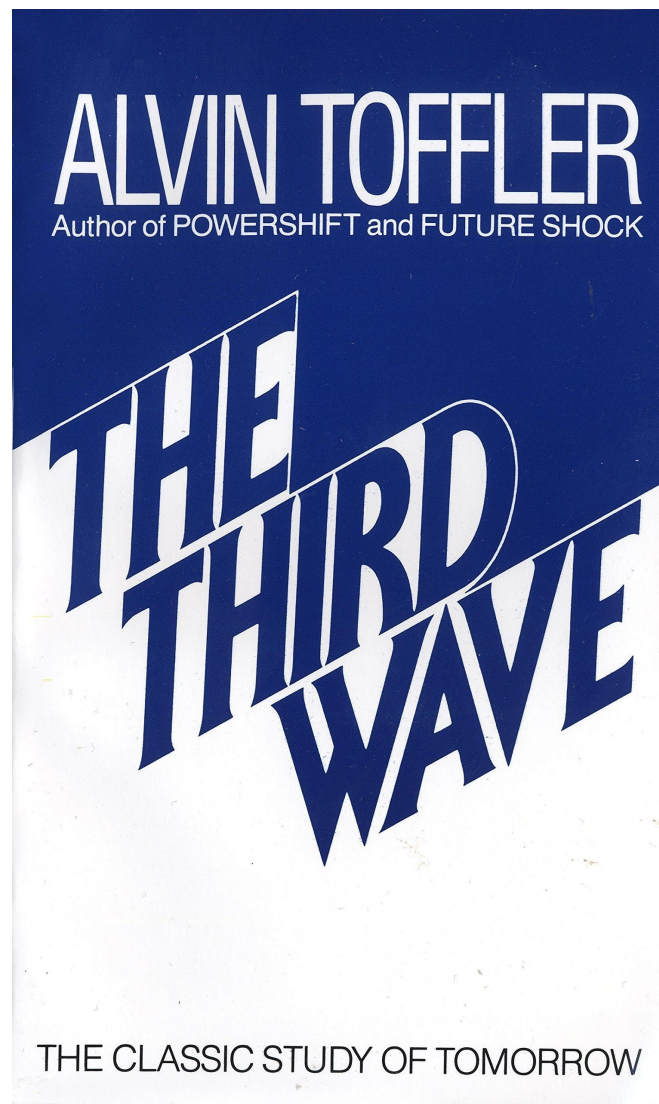
- [DeForrest Brown Jr.](#) / 09.07.20

DeForrest Brown Jr. is a writer, curator, theorist and representative for the [Make Techno Black Again campaign](#) based in New York.

As an artist under the [Speaker Music](#) moniker, he produces long-form audio and media pieces often exploring the same areas he unpacks through his written work. Most recently, Speaker Music released *Black Nationalist Sonic Weaponry* for Planet Mu – an immersive 49-minute piece accompanied by a PDF booklet of collected writings by Black theorists and poets. The piece is a response to recent events. As the protests following the murder of George Floyd spread globally, Brown’s insight around the re-centring of Black and queer roots in house and techno proved to be even more vital.

His book, *Assembling a Black Counter Culture*, will be released later this year via [Primary Information](#) and will provide “a general history of techno and adjacent electronic music with a focus on Black experiences in industrialized labor systems, and explores the development of on-the-ground culture in relation to a unique American art form.”

Here, Brown talks us through six books which, rightly or wrongly, can help to inform you about the Black American experience and its adjacency to electronic music. DeForrest Brown Jr. will be a coach at the [Horst Music Lab](#), 1-9 August 2020.

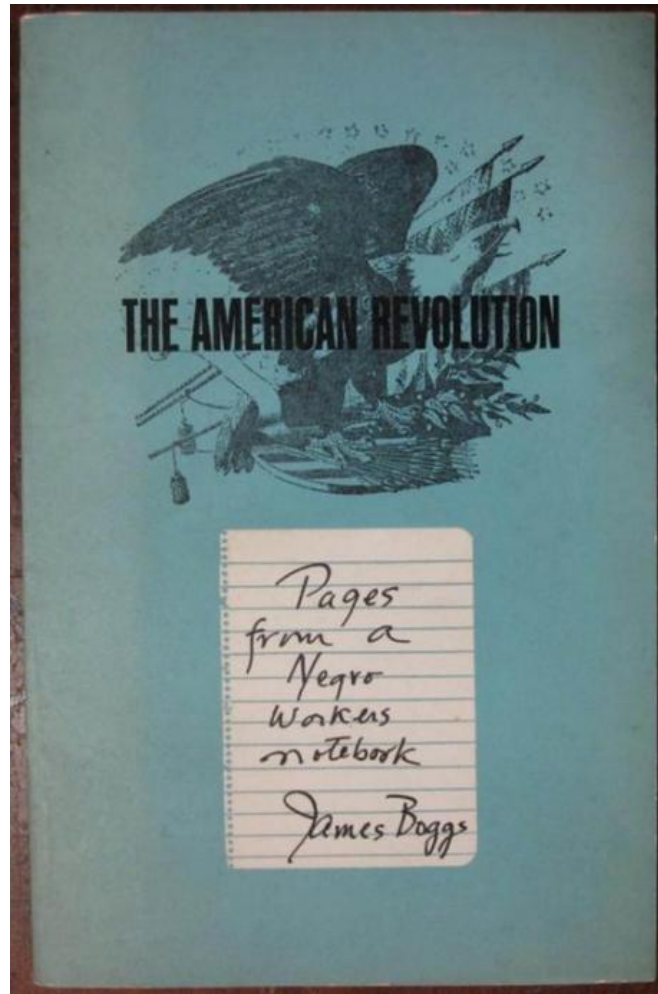


## The Third Wave

---

Alvin Toffler, 1980

I wanted to start with *The Third Wave*, a startlingly poignant book that I discovered in college. Published in 1980 by futurist and businessman Alvin Toffler, the book carefully details the subtle social and psychological effects of the technological revolution as well as the transition of business management from assembly line manufacturing into the advanced data-oriented projects of the Information Age. Juan Atkins actually read about Toffler's ideas in a "Future Studies" class at his high school, and took inspiration from Toffler's use of the prefix "Techno;" which is short for technocracy, or a society run by technical experts. When writing about Techno, I'm often pulling from this book's concept of "the future" within the American Dream and the drastic expansion of the US economic empire through Ronald Reagan's unrestricted free-market policies.

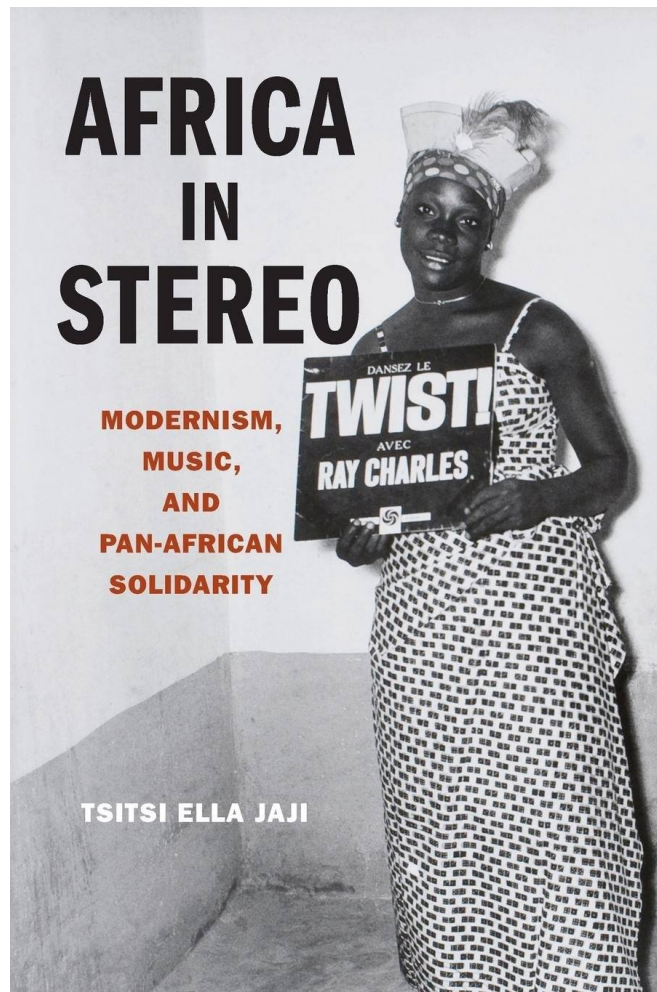


## **The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook**

---

James Boggs, 1963

I was introduced to James Boggs a few years ago by Charles Eppley while discussing the unfortunate racial dynamics of what Boggs calls “the challenge of automation.” The American Revolution for me is a complete rebuke of the kind of puritanical technoutopianism thinking that has driven the American Dream, as well as a direct counterargument against Toffler’s *The Third Wave* from the perspective of the African American worker’s class. A political activist and auto worker in Detroit from 1940-1968, Boggs’ writing is eerily accurate in pointing out that “To visualize the future role of Negroes in a cybernated society, one must review, if only briefly, their past role in American society and what this means at the present stage of industrial development.”



## Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity

---

Tsitsi Ella Jaji, 2013

Jaji's brilliant concepts are fairly new to me, though this book was published in 2013. Her proposal of "stereomodernism," reevaluates Black music's inherent focus on "solidarity, modernism and media." She speaks to how music and art is dense with information and offers intimate expressions of Pan-African trauma and recovery when considered as a whole. Open-ended in its approach, *Africa in Stereo* counters the limited and robotic colonial Western tradition with a detailing of sound and logic specific to the potential unity music shared across the African diaspora.

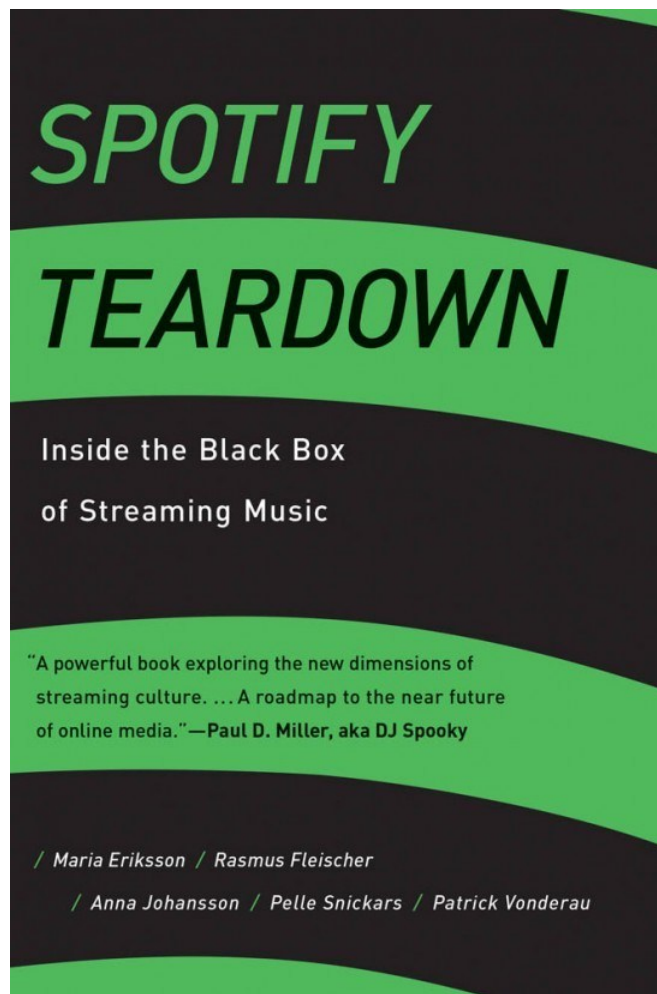


## Free Jazz

---

Ekkehard Jost, 1974

*Free Jazz* is a really thorough and distressingly particular example of the limits of Western music and thought. I'm really appreciative of Jost's detailed examinations of innovative artists and compositions in the mid-20th century Black jazz music canon; but I also find it perplexing that rather than listening to and feeling the messages inscribed in the shapes and sounds of jazz, Jost appears to take a really informational approach. *Free Jazz* is a wonderful encyclopedia of the mechanical structures of jazz from a fairly smart European academic who – like most connoisseurs of music – are only marginally interested in the material conditions of the African American experience.



## Spotify Teardown

---

Maria Eriksson, Rasmus Fleischer, Anna Johansson, Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 2019

*Spotify Teardown* is a multi-authored critique of the streaming service, and a generalist reverse-engineering of the processes that allow for music to be readily available to any consumer at what is effectively wholesale price – Spotify pays ~\$0.004 per stream to rights holders, not exactly the musicians themselves. The authors approach Spotify as a site for experimentation, testing its algorithmic functionality and staging contextual interventions. Referring back to *The Third Wave* and *The American Revolution*, *Spotify Teardown* outlines the structures of a company that more or less enacted exactly what Toffler and Boggs were warning against: algorithmic standardization.





## More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction

---

Kodwo Eshun, 1998

Theorist and filmmaker Kodwo Eshun is probably my most direct predecessor, and was a huge inspiration on my thinking around techno and the material reality of the African Diaspora. In tandem with the above books, Black music for Eshun evokes a “sonic fiction,” meaning that each sound is inscribed with qualities that paint pictures in your mind. Eshun’s writing is a series of conjectures, prodding at the implications of a former slave class gaining access to the technology of their oppressors. Covering artists from Pharoah Sanders to George Clinton to Underground Resistance, *More Brilliant Than the Sun* sketches a map of varying stylistic expressions of Black joy and pain, while also opening up new ways to critically engage with music from the African Diaspora as an “operating system for the redesign of sonic reality.”

DeForrest Brown Jr. will be a coach at the Horst Music Lab, 1-9 August 2020.

Applications are open now until midnight 12 July.