

CHAPTER 5

House Burning Down

Race, Writing, and Jimi Hendrix's War

People should see more violence on the stage, maybe they'd get it out of their system—wouldn't have to fight wars.

—Jimi Hendrix, 1969

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1969, a few weeks after his already-legendary performance at the Woodstock Music and Art festival, guitarist Jimi Hendrix was asked by an interviewer to categorize his music and explain himself to a world that often seemed bewildered by his presence. Frustrated by a question he'd confronted countless times previously, Hendrix spun a metaphor: "What I don't like is this business of trying to classify people," he responded. "It's like shooting at a flying saucer as it tries to land without giving the occupants a chance to identify themselves."¹