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Crossing Traditions- American Popular Music in Local and Global Contexts-

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Crossing Traditions

American Popular Music in Local and Global Contexts

Edited by
Babacar M’Baye
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Introduction: New Approaches to American Popular Music

Babacar M'Baye and Alexander Charles Oliver Hall

Crossing Traditions: American Popular Music in Local and Global Contexts is a collection of academic essays on the relationships between selected American blues, rock 'n' roll, and hip hop music and the connections between such music and their equivalents from Senegal, England, India, and Mexico. Taking a local approach, the first part of the book explores the importance of specific blues, rock, and hip-hop in American communities in which music plays major roles in the development of individual and communal identities and struggles for equality and social change. Such essays reveal the meaning that popular music has for particular American bands who utilize it to represent the characteristics and socioeconomic conditions of their fans and larger communities. Taking a transnational approach, the second part of the book compares specific American blues, rock, and hip-hop music with their equivalents from Senegal, England, India, and Mexico. By juxtaposing essays that provide local or transnational interpretations of American popular music, this volume reveals the importance of such music within and beyond cultural, racial, and national boundaries.

First, American popular music attests to the capacity of dissident, disenfranchised, and marginalized communities to resist stereotypes and bigotry and fight for equality and admissibility. For the various communities (of blacks, whites, Africans, Hispanics, and Indians), they inspire, and rock, blues, and hip-hop serve as viable means of resistance against the denials of their agency and humanity. Such communities and the music they embrace share a love for transgressing boundaries through rhythm, sound, style, and songs. As spokespersons of these various societies and fan groups, rock, blues, and hip-hop artists use music as a tool for crossing cultures, borders, and identities. These artists from the United States and abroad appropriate American rock, blues, and hip-hop and create their own versions of such genres. Such appropriations of American popular music in local and global contexts register the
power of such music to allow societies both within the United States and abroad to
dream of freedom, feel love, and search for new outlets beyond the binaries of racial,
ethnic, and national differences. In allowing various people to have such positive
and liberating experiences, American popular music becomes an important tool for
promoting cross-cultural and transnational cooperation and dismantling ignorance
and oppression. Revealing such music's capacity to inspire peace and understand-
ning both locally and transnationally, our book provides a much-needed study of the
importance of an art form that can help both individuals and groups to overcome
the hatred, violence, and abuse of power. Such music allows people to enjoy creative
rhythms, styles, and songs of love, justice, and equality that resist sexism, racism,
classism, and other forms of dominance.

Crossing Traditions participates in the current interdisciplinary scholarship on mu-
sic's capacity to disrupt barriers between borders. A key example of this scholarship
is the book Native Tongues: An African Hip-Hop Reader (2011), in which Paul Khalil
Saucer writes, "Hip-hop knows no boundaries. It is simultaneously spatial and
spatial. In other words, it is attuned to the local and national, while also disregarding
local and national boundaries." Complementing this type of inquiry, we argue that
music's disruption of local and national boundaries is apparent not only in hip-hop
but also in blues and rock in which one notes similar themes, rhythms, and sounds
between popular music from the United States and abroad. A study of music in local
and transnational frameworks reveals the effective ways in which various communi-
cies use it as a means for creating social and cultural spaces and reclaiming power and
self-actualization from dominant and oppressive structures. By interpreting music as
a tool of resistance against domination, Crossing Traditions stresses the ethical val-
ues of this art form, which Roger Scruton emphasizes in his book, The Aesthetics of Music
(1999). As one anonymous reporter of the Guardian says on the back cover of
the book, Scruton "presents a compelling case for the moral significance of music, its
place in our culture, and the need for taste and discrimination in performing and
listening to it."

In addition, Crossing Traditions extends the current scholarship on the social and
cultural values of American popular music by elucidating the psychological and
economic functions of this music in local and global contexts. On the one hand,
the book explores the historical, literary, and cultural importance of such musical
genera as blues, punk rock, rock opera, bhangra-beat, Christian rap, and Latin
house. On the other hand, the volume examines the links between American and
British rock, and those between African American and Senegalese blues, bhangra-
beat and hip-hop, and Latin house and salsa. By analyzing musical connections
between multiple ethnic, cultural, and national groups, our work reveals the
strong influence of American popular music on world popular music and the rich
cross-fertilizations between diverse traditions. This diversity, which symbolizes the
political and cultural consciousness that American and world popular musicians
of different background share, helps to assuage the socioeconomic inequalities that
many artists denounce in their lyrics. By bringing together essays dealing with
the local and transnational meaning of blues, rock, and hip-hop, Crossing Traditions
complements the remarkable studies on American popular music that have been
published since the late 1990s. The book contributes to the scholarship on the
plight and agency of ostracized cultural groups that Dick Hebdige represents as
"subcultures," or such groups as "the punks," "skinheads," and "Rastafarians,"
who resisted the hegemonic social order in England and the Caribbean during the
1970s with a combination of unique style, fashion, and music. Written about
thirty-two years since Hebdige published his famous book, Subculture: The Mean-
ing of Style (1979), our collection reveals the enduring significance of counterhe-

gemonic resistances in the popular music of marginalized groups from the United
States, Senegal, England, India, and/or Mexico.

METHODOLOGY AND OTHER RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The methodology of Crossing Traditions is multidisciplinary since the volume con-
tains essays that study American popular music through a variety of approaches.
Instead of forcing one single approach to the different artists and genres of popular
music, the essays in the collection draw on methods from one or more disciplines,
including music studies, multicultural studies, American studies, Pan-African
studies, popular culture studies, literary studies, gender studies, and critical theory.
Our approach is to draw from these numerous disciplines to reveal the multicultural
nature of American and world popular music. Nevertheless, each essay employs a
critical perspective relevant to the study of its musical subject. Some of the essays,
for instance, use literary theory to examine works at the level of narrative, while oth-
ers utilize music studies, history, or cultural studies to explore the political critiques
inherent in certain American and world music. Drawing from one or many of these
disciplines, each author examines popular music in either local or global contexts
that reveal how various American and world artists use music to convey ideas of
justice, equality, and freedom from both corporate dominance, exploitation, and
commodification of such music, as well as mainstream, racial, social, and sexual
types of marginalized groups.

On the one hand, the methodology of Crossing Traditions is local, since the es-
says in the first section examine the significance of American popular music in their
immediate contexts. These essays reveal the primary, self-referential, and particular
meaning that such music possesses in the United States. On the other hand, the
methodology of Crossing Traditions is transnational, as the essays in the second
part of the book compare American popular music with its equivalents from other
parts of the world. These essays show that American music is not an island unto
itself because it has historically inspired and influenced its analogues from Senegal,
England, India, and Mexico. Drawing from the fields of cultural, historical, and/or
literary studies, each essay demonstrates popular music's resilience and richness in
both form and content. While the essays pay considerable attention to such literary aspects as songs and lyrics, they also devote substantial consideration to technical elements, including sound, rhythm, style, melody, tempo, and performance. Paying attention to all these patterns, the essays show that a comprehensive study of popular music requires a blending of local and global perspectives and a mixing of theories and disciplines.

By pulling together various approaches to popular music, Crossing Traditions contributes to the innovative scholarship that attempts to bridge the gaps between numerous cultures. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwartz encourage this scholarship when they urge scholars to participate in “what is now a common perspective—geographical, spatial—in literary and cultural studies,” which is a way of “looking beyond the framework of the singular nation-state.” While it participates in this exploration of cultures beyond regional contexts, Crossing Traditions distinguishes itself from the extant scholarship because it also examines the importance of local customs in the development of popular music. Analyzing the transnational meaning of American popular music necessitates a prior exploration of the local significance of such music. In this sense, both the local and transnational dimensions of American popular music need to be studied since they are equally important and convey similar concerns about oppression and freedom.

By studying American popular music in both local and transnational contexts, Crossing Traditions also contributes to the multicultural scholarship on the relationships between American and world musicians. One pertinent example of this scholarship is Timothy Dean Taylor’s Global Pop: World Music, World Markets (1997). Taylor’s book explores collaborations between the American/South African musician Paul Simon and the South African band Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and it shows how Western and world pop/rock musicians appropriate one another’s sounds and styles. A similar book is Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll’s collection of essays entitled Global Pop, Local Language (2003). Focusing on lyrics, this book discusses the “language choice[s]” in global popular culture that appropriate the “forms” of talk of American popular music. For example, as Berger and Carroll contend, “Zulu- and Venda-speaking kwaito fans in South Africa incorporate English-language expressions from American rap into their everyday interactions,” illustrating the “importance of such language choices for the fans’ social experiences.” This global approach to music is inspired by the current emphasis of American studies scholars on exchanges between cultures and nations in an interconnected world. Discussing this trend, Nina Morgan celebrates the growing emphasis on “intercrossings” and “entangled histories” as a “particularly important” focus in transnational American studies. Crossing Traditions fits into this scholarship since it explores cultural interpenetrations both in the United States (where blues, punk rock, bhangra-beat, Christian rap, and Latin house share similar concerns and styles) and abroad (where blues, rock, and hip-hop have inspired analogous music).

Another scholarship to which Crossing Traditions contributes is the study of the rhetorical aspects of American popular music. A major contribution in this scholarship is Simon Frith’s Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music (1998), which argues that “lyrics are a form of rhetoric or oratory” that must be treated “in terms of the persuasive relationship set up between singer and listener.” Using similar perspectives, the essays in Crossing Traditions consider lyrics as literary narratives that are permeated with rhetorical strategies. Yet, bearing in mind Frith’s argument in Performing Rites that performances, or the ways in which artists take “themselves and their bodies as the objects or sites of narratives,” is as important as the “content” and “form” of music, the essays in our book also focus on nonliterary aspects of music. The “form” of music that our volume examines includes performance practices and other patterns, including rhythm, tempo, sound, and style. For instance, Susana Loza’s contribution analyzes the dance moves that the performance of Latin house generates in nightclub audiences who freely dance to this music. According to Loza, “dancing” allows the fans to copy “cool moves” and incorporate them into their “own repertoire,” showing that music cannot be separated from bodily movements, emotions, and other aspects of performance spaces. In a similar vein, Sarah L. DeLury’s essay discusses such technical elements of music as the sound, rhythm, tempo, and words of a specific punk band, Bad Religion. Likewise, Randi Pahlau examines the use of polyrhythm, style, and melody of Christian rap. In a similar fashion, Babacar M’baye analyzes the use of humming, melodies, syncopation, and other aspects of African American and Senegalese blues.

However, the essays in Crossing Traditions also deal with such thematic issues as the meaning of identity, religion, gender, and sexuality in various popular music. By examining the frequent allusions to these themes in both American and world popular music, the volume contributes to the study of the connections between ethnic American cultures, in which David P. Schuyler’s Rockin’ in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll (2004) and Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman’s American Popular Music: From Minstrels to MTV (2007) have made key contributions. Focusing on individual artists, Rockin’ in Time suggests the courageous ways in which early African American rhythm and blues and rock artists took the likes of Little Richard and Chuck Berry used their musical talent to resist racism in the United States. Rockin’ in Time also shows how such American rock and folk music artists as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and other singer activists participated in the civil rights movement of the 1960s by joining the voices of protest against injustices that confronted African Americans and ostracized young white Americans during that decade.

In a similar vein, Starr and Waterman explore the relationships between African American and European American music. They write,

The genesis of African American music in the United States involved two closely related processes. The first of these was syncretism, the selective blending [in African American music] of traditions derived from Africa and Europe. The second important process was the creation of institutions that became important centers of black musical life—the family, the church, the voluntary association, the school, and so on.

Complementing this scholarship, Crossing Traditions examines the ideas of social justice, equality, and resistance to sexism, racism, and economic deprivation that
permeate various American popular music, for example, blues, rock, hip-hop, Latin house, and bhangra-beat. The essays of the anthology recognize the duality that Starr and Waterman identify in African American music, since they explore a similar doubleness in American music that speaks to multiple communities shaped by race, class, gender, sexuality, style, and other identities; therefore, Crossing Traditions is multiculturalist, as it reveals the imbrication, juxtaposition, and cross-cultural influences in American and world popular music that share similar kinds of contacts, desires, and struggles. By avoiding the perception of such music as mutually exclusive traditions, these essays show the common universality, humanism, agency, hopes, and dreams that characterize this music despite the different voices of the particular marginalized groups that they express.

In addition, Crossing Traditions participates in the promising cross-cultural and cross-national scholarship that Peggy Levitt and Sanjeev Khagram describe as an academic inquiry that shows that “transnational phenomena have clear historical analogues.” Levitt and Khagram write the following:

One need only think of colonialism and imperialism, missionary campaigns, antislavery and workers’ movements, pirating networks, and jazz. Indeed, human social formations and processes have always been transborder and transboundary to varying degrees. Even contemporary nation-states and the nation-state system have been transnationally constituted and shaped over time and space in powerful ways.

Placing selected popular music within both national and international contexts, our book shows how American blues, rock, hip-hop, and Latin house cannot be studied in a vacuum, since they have strongly influenced their transnational cousins from such varied countries as Senegal, England, India, and Mexico. The influence is mutual since music from other parts of the world has also influenced American music. By exploring the cross-cultural and cross-national connections between American music and world music, the essays in Crossing Traditions reveal the strong respite of greed, exploitation, and other forms of social, economic, political, and cultural marginalizations that local and global artists share.

Moreover, Crossing Traditions contributes to the scholarship that is known as the “new” or “critical music studies.” Drawing from a variety of critical perspectives, the volume widens the scope of American popular music studies by revealing local and transnational elements of the music that have not yet been explored. For instance, while there are many books on hip-hop, such scholarship often focuses on African American culture only, overlooking the connections between African American music and other cultural groups, for instance, the Christian youth in the United States or the religious traditions in Senegal. Exploring the connections between African American music and other African American hip-hop and Christian youth culture and also those between American blues and Senegalese blues, Crossing Traditions recognizes the primary role of music in many communities’ definitions of their identities and spaces. This valuation of the potency of public representations of selves and places corroborates Martin Stokes’s argument that music “is clearly very much a part of modern life and our understand-

ing of it, articulating our knowledge of other peoples, places, times, and things, and ourselves in relation to them.”

Simon Frith clarifies these relationships between music and identity when he argues that the first reason “we enjoy popular music is because of its use in answering questions of identity: We use pop songs to create for ourselves a particular sort of self-definition, a particular place in society.” Critics tend to overlook such connections between music and identity because they are often caught in the ongoing debates on the superficial barriers between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” cultures that Lawrence Levine has well-theorized in his classical book on this issue. As Levine suggests, these distinctions can be traced from Shakespeare’s England to Mark Twain’s America. Removing these artificial boundaries between “elite” and “low” customs and arts, Crossing Traditions juxtaposes a study of the intimacies between African American slave music, blues, and hip-hop with an examination of the linkages between such American music and world music.

Another scholarly gap is that studies of hip-hop and blues have generally overlooked the ties between such music and their international analogues. Such linkages are overlooked in scholarships that disproportionately focus on the social history of American popular music, neglecting the historical, cultural, and literary connections between the music and world music and societies. Books like David B. Szymanski’s Rockin’ in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll (2004) and Bakari Kitwana’s The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture (2002) have explored the social history of rock and hip-hop in the United States. Yet, these works overlook the transnational frameworks in which such music must also be examined. Kitwana’s The Hip-Hop Generation, a pioneer work in the social history of hip-hop, suggests the negative influence of American popular culture on hip-hop. According to Kitwana, the harmful effect is apparent in how “young blacks” have used their access to popular culture “both in pop film and music, far too much to strengthen associations between blackness and poverty, while celebrating antintellectualism, ignorance, irresponsible parenthood, and criminal lifestyles.” Kitwana also suggests how studying hip-hop can help address these stereotypes and understand the generation “most heavily influenced by them.” In an attempt to understand these stereotypes and the rampant unemployment, drug use, incarceration, and violence among African American men that Kitwana calls the “crisis” of the “hip-hop generation,” Crossing Traditions explores the local and transnational factors that have contributed to this tragedy. Drawing on the importance of unity and spirituality in Pan-African cultures, a few essays in this book show how hip-hop artists have used various traditions from Africa to resist the oppressions around race, class, gender, and sexuality that confront their generations in the United States.

Yet, hip-hop is not the only type of African American music that is analyzed in Crossing Traditions. Complementing pivotal books on music, several essays in this volume explore the transnational dimensions of the music that have been neglected in such works. These books, which attempt to connect African American music with Africa, include Eileen Southern’s The Music of Black Americans: A History (1971),
LeRoi Jones’s *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It* (1963), and Samuel Charters’s *The Roots of the Blues: An African Search* (1981). Jones’s book examines the survival in African American music of various traditional African musical patterns, including “call-and-response,” “staccato punctuation,” and “rhythmic syncopation.” In a similar vein, Southern’s book explores African influences in African American music. Southern first discusses many English travelers’ descriptions of the music of Africans who had been enslaved in the United States. Relying on information provided in James Hawkins’s *A History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa* (1797) and Theodore Canot’s *Captain Canot; or, Twenty Years of an African Slave* (1854), about the music and instruments of the Ibo people. Southern suggests the influence of the traditions of the enslaved Africans who had been brought to the New World on African American music. Southern goes on to examine the development of African American music from the plantation south to America’s metropolitan cities, where talented black musicians brought blues, jazz, be-bop, soul, and other creative music to the masses.

Similarly, Charters’s *The Roots of the Blues* studies the relationships between African American music and African cultures. Charters discusses his conversations with many Senegambian griots (traditional historians) whose lutes and epic poetry are part of the roots of American blues. Likewise, in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (2004), Robert G. O’Meally, Brent Hayea Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin focus on “transnational concerns—in terms of impact, performance spaces, symbolic resonance and transmission, and practitioners” of jazz music, as well as the “ways jazz travels, and the ways that outer national settings have in turn transformed the music.” Paying attention to the “outer national settings” that intertwine blues, rock, and hip-hop with their transatlantic analogues, *Crossing Traditions* contributes to the study of the international significance of American popular music. Our book is different from the previous works because it shows how music allows American and world communities to retrieve and refashion significant aspects of their identities and lives and promote ideologies of social justice, peace, human understanding, harmony, and tolerance across local and transnational spaces. By exploring the manifestations of these ideologies in multiple settings, our volume expands the scholarship on the fluid and changing nature of identities and cultures that can be found within the promising fields of American studies, ethnic studies, and transnational studies.

Another major work on the relationships between African music and those in the Americas is *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances* (2010), edited by Mamadou Diouf and Ilooma Kiddoe Nwankw. This collection of essays connects nations from across the Atlantic—Senegal, Kenya, Trinidad, Cuba, Brazil, and the United States, among others—highlighting contemporary popular, folkloric, and religious music and dance as living evidence of the ironically productive potential of this age of consumerist globalization.

In their introduction to the book, Diouf and Nwankwo contend that, “In this recent era of financially driven flows of culture and peoples within and among the nations of the Atlantic, Afro-Atlantic music and dance have become prime commodities.” A key essay in this book is Hallif. Osumare’s “Motherland Hip-Hop,” which, as Diouf and Nwankwo point out, “argues that overlapping global social spheres of culture, class, historical oppression, and youth itself complicate the typical explanation of American popular cultural imperialism for the perceived wholesale adoption of rap culture by global youth.”

In her essay, Osumare states that, African hip-hop culture facilitates connections across nation-states, languages, cultures, and ethnic groups that have been often divided and in conflict. African hip-hop youth find that they have more in common than they have differences, offering a potential ameliorating force for some of Africa’s long-standing problems.

Our book expands on Osumare’s excellent insight by analyzing hybrid and socially conscious blues songs from Senegal, where one can find another concrete example of the relationships between African American and African music. In addition, by exploring the relations between hip-hop and traditions hailing from India, Latin America, and the United States, our book reveals hip-hop’s ability to transcend national boundaries and achieve a status that is both local and global.

**CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

Focusing on Chicago’s Maxwell Street Market, in chapter 1, John Terry explores how this neighborhood represented an important site in the creation and dissemination of blues during the middle of the twentieth century. The market was located in what was once a primarily Jewish neighborhood in Chicago’s Near-West Side, and it became home to an expanding African American community. The market was particularly notable for its live blues (Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, and Chuck Berry, among many others, played there), and it helped to establish the Chicago Blues, which were distinguished by the mixture of an established urban blues sound and the Mississippi Delta musical traditions migrants brought with them to Chicago. For years, the market was organized haphazardly; vendors claimed their spaces and musicians set up wherever they could access electrical outlets. However, by the 1960s, the University of Illinois at Chicago had expanded to border the black neighborhood and Maxwell Street. As the university sought to attract professors and the children of affluent whites, the poor black neighborhood and market became targets for urban renewal. Despite vigorous efforts to preserve the market, the university expanded, building softball fields over much of Maxwell Street as the city moved the commercial site, issued licensing requirements, and restricted musical performances in the area. The rhetoric of the battle for Maxwell was racialized, and typical code words—filthy, poor, unseemly, and criminal—were employed to justify "renewal." The university used its influence to get rid of a poor black neighborhood that was viewed as a threat to attracting students and professors. While this is not a story of complete loss, as the market went, on some levels, so did the music that prospered there.
In chapter 2, drawing attention to rock 'n' roll music in the United States between the 1950s and early 1970s, Paul Gaston examines memorable songs about the pursuit of young women by older men and the impropriety and volatility of this theme, which attracted relatively little censure. There are at least five possible explanations for this lack of censure of transgressive rock 'n' roll lyrics during these decades. First, the musical idioms of rock 'n' roll became the overriding priority. While never negligible, lyrics often seemed secondary. Second, the singers became more important than the songs. Third, the songs themselves often discouraged close attention to their texts. Within the limits of the 45 rpm disc, an arrangement had to establish its motif quickly, repeat its hook often, and end promptly by accommodating disc jockeys with a slow fade-out or dramatic crescendo. Fourth, once one or two highly successful songs had defined a topic (tragic accident, unrequited love, infatuation, and breaking up), subsequent songs with similar themes could be uncritically relegated to that subgenre. Finally, chance may have played a role. A U.S. Senate subcommittee studying possible links between mass culture and juvenile delinquency considered "horror" comics, the movies, and television but adjourned before it could take up popular music. From a historical perspective, the acceptance of transgressive lyrics in the period under consideration may have, in some sense, prepared the ground for the far more disturbing and direct songs that were to follow.

In chapter 3, Sarah L. DeLury contends that Bad Religion, a steady figure in the punk rock movement, fits almost at the center of this genre. Like other punk bands, their music is crafted to speak lyrically and instrumentally to issues beyond the surface of what listeners hear. Throughout nearly four decades, Bad Religion has produced dozens of albums that address a variety of issues confronting American society, including capitalist exploitation, environmental destruction, and political underhandedness. The messages Bad Religion imports into its songs are not simplistic notions of inequality or angst; rather, these messages are complex ideas that help the group's audience think through the music they are experiencing and find a higher level of appreciation within it. Yet, as DeLury also suggests, despite Bad Religion's complex messages, one wonders whether the band has escaped the commodification of the punk movement? With any form of popular entertainment, commodification of image, ideals, and style quickly follows as an artist attains mainstream status. Bad Religion grew out of this commodification of principle and yet managed to distance itself from the direct result of being turned into a commodity by constantly shifting its identity to impress its audience. This band has produced a type of music that resists easy commodification and works against the main capitalist goals of media production. With songs specifically aimed at questioning the system, Bad Religion asks its listeners to resist capitalist structures and strike out to find new, less restrictive, and financially motivating identities.

In chapter 4, Randi Pahlau represents African American gangsta rap as a protest music portraying magnified masculinity, heightened sexuality, and violence toward police officers and women, which has been appropriated by white Christians, who use the musical style, coupled with evangelical and worshipful lyrics, to glorify their God and heighten reverent emotions in their listeners. Even if a few African American artists and critics do not recognize it as a legitimate form of expression, white Christian rap is a valid form of resistance against the dominant secular culture. Christians view themselves as a marginalized subculture because of ever-increasing laws and judicial decisions separating church and state. They use music as a form of social protest, criticizing the self-promotion, sex, and violence prominent in mainstream hip-hop, directing the use of violence against what they view as sin in themselves and society. What began as a uniquely African American secular form of music logically and progressively spread to African American churches, white listeners, and, finally, white Christians. White Christian rap is genuine and should be acknowledged as such.

Next, in chapter 5, Alexander Charles Oliver Hall examines how Frank Zappa's conceptual rock 'n' roll album Joe's Garage adheres to the conventions of the literary critical dystopia. Taking policies in effect during Iran's Islamic Revolution of the late 1970s as its central critique—chiefly the banning of much popular music, including Western and Western-inspired popular music—Hall shows how Joe's Garage demonstrates an exchange between popular music and the non-Western world. The critique, then, of this critical dystopia is inspired by one of the repressive policies of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which is carried over to what Zappa sees as its logical conclusion. In this way, popular music in the local context is actually inspired by politics from abroad.

Beginning the second part of the book, in chapter 6, Babacar M'Baye studies how both the African American blues diva Mahalia Jackson and the Senegalese blues queen Aminata Fall used blues as a means for representing the invaluable role that black mothers fulfill by helping their children cope with slavery, violence, separation, alienation, and depersonalization. Comparing the lyrics of the legendary African American gospel-blues singer and those of the iconic Senegalese blues vocalist, this essay provides a much-needed comparison of African American and Senegambian blues. Spirituality permeates such melodies and provides succor, sustenance, and salvation to black children whom forces of modernity take far away from their parental homes. In their songs, Jackson and Fall, who came from different parts of the Atlantic Ocean, reconnect with one another (spiritually and vocally) and express a comparable modernity that reveals black people's capacity to use music as a tool for coping with the fragmentation, suffering, and other dilemmas that slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism have created in their lives.

Next, in chapter 7, Andrea Carosso examines key connections between African American and British popular music. Carosso argues that the music referred to today as "rock" was born in the transatlantic circulation of African American forms of popular music that migrated from the United States to Europe and back again to the United States. This movement, which Carosso calls the "paradox of
recolonization,” involved the adoption in Europe, circa 1955, of American blues and rock ‘n’ roll and their “indigenization” through processes of adaptation and transformation, which are now labeled under the shorthand of the “British Invasion of American popular music.” Carasso’s essay traces the origins and peculiar forms of that adaptation by focusing on the indebtedness of the invasion’s key artists to African American music.

Focusing on the Latin American contributions to American popular music, Susana Loza analyzes, in chapter 8, how Latin house music mixes genres and juxtaposes the traditional traces of the past with the insistent beats of the present. Moreover, Loza elucidates the links between personal desire, authentic identity, communal tastes, and cultural transformation. Analyzing this sonic excursion into the polyphonic rhythms of Latino músimas, Loza reveals the ways in which musical mapping of self allows various people of Latin American heritage to connect across the policed borders that separate cultural communities, nostalgic nations, and authentic ethnicities. Exploring these dimensions, Loza shows the strong influence of Afro American-derived music, for instance, disco, electro, and R & B music, on Latin House music.

And finally, in chapter nine, Melissa Ursula Dawn Goldsmith and Anthony J. Fonseca draw attention to the significance of past and current Indian musical traditions to reveal the connections between American popular music and bhangra-beat. As this chapter argues, although it has its origin in the music and dance of the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, bhangra-beat music is far removed from the tradition from which it descends, hybridized to have as much in common with rap and hip-hop performance as it does with Punjabi farming ritual. Rap, hip-hop, and bhangra-beat share common cultural aspects, including rhythm and gesture, as well as similarities in their orchestral and video dance and performance practices. A second-generation music, bhangra-beat incorporates more Punjabi instrumentation than its predecessor (bhangra), as its artists (musicians and remix DJs) use traditional vocals in Punjabi and traditional drum instrumentation (the dhol). The resulting sound is a fusion of the underground dance club circuit, on occasion branching out into mainstream radio and music videos. Cross-borrowing between bhangra-beat and rap and/or hip-hop has involved music, aesthetics, and culture, as urban black youth and urban Asian youth share broad ethnic and assimilation experiences, both using music as a method of enculturation and unification.

The chapters in the volume reveal the intrinsic diversity and resilience in American and world popular music. As hybrid artistic forms that resist categorization, blues, rock ‘n’ roll, hip-hop, Latin house, and bhangra-beat reflect a multiculturalism that is apparent in their creative lyrics, multiple audiences, complex social message, and strong political and economic significance. Such American and world popular music share an agency that deserves scholarly attention. As the essays of Crossing Traditions suggest, both types of music serve as subversive tools of resistance against oppression and reification of identity for the acquisition of power and the implementation of social change in ostracized communities.
REFERENCES


AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC IN LOCAL CONTEXTS
Blue Maxwell: Race, Space, and the Battle for the Chicago Blues

John Robert Terry

There was always a border beyond which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially. There was always a possible limitation to any dilution or excess of cultural or spiritual references. The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man’s culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man’s land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music.

—LeRoi Jones (1963)

Each day [Chicago] changes a little. An aging tenement, a crumbling hotel, a row of lakeshore mansions no longer occupied: They pass daily from our midst, unnoticed but for the crunching noises of the wrecking crane.

As the city shifts this way, so then is Maxwell Street dying, the old hurly burly street market on the near west side, where once 70,000 might have thronged on a single day. . . . The hysteria is gone now and only a handful wander where once the thousands pushed and shoved.

—Michael Kilian (1968)

The Maxwell Street Market and its surrounding neighborhood, located just southwest of downtown Chicago, was home to one of the most unique and, for a time, popular forms of black music, the Chicago Blues. These blues reflected a mixture of cultural traits that black migrants from the Mississippi Delta brought with them to Chicago, the encounters between Delta and urban blues traditions, and the effects of segregation. The resulting sound contained elements of “country blues” from the Mississippi Delta that were, according to John Collis, “revived by an alliance of electricity and an ironic urban perspective” combining “sophistication and world
The music reflected its urban environment and had an outlet at the Maxwell Street Market, an open-air thrift market that drew thousands of shoppers, spectators, vendors, and blues fans.

I got news for you

In the United States, the blues has long served as an overt complaint music addressing poverty, inequality, and discrimination in employment and the relationship between the government and its black citizens. In the semisegregation of segregated urban neighborhoods, African Americans created a heterogeneous culture of resistance, not only to racism and discrimination, but also to the problems that accompanied poverty and dislocation. Barbecue Bob’s “We Sure Got Hard Times” exposes such dilemma when it expresses a theme common to many blues musicians: “Hard times, hard times, we got hard times now / Hard times, hard times, we sure got hard times now.”

The black community in Chicago faced blatant racial discrimination, which ensured that black spaces had inferior services, housing quality, employment opportunities, and educational facilities. This precarious environment fostered music that reflected its drastic situation.

Meanwhile, the technological innovations and availability of certain resources (amplifiers, electric guitars, and cheap steel strings), along with the type of migrants in Chicago (with more than half of Chicago’s residents in 1940 were born in Mississippi), assisted in the creation of a unique sound. Erratic industrial employment in Chicago made music a way to supplement incomes and provide leisure. A crucial factor in the popularization of these Chicago Blues was the Maxwell Street Market. The latter was an open-air bazaar where Jewish and black residents sold produce and goods. It attracted thousands of visitors on any given day and was a venue for street musicians who thrived on audience interaction. The fact that portions of Chicago were marked as black spaces abetted certain kinds of cultural production and made these areas subject to destruction in ways that white spaces were not. Even as whites enjoyed the music, they devalued the black culture and space essential to its creation, and Maxwell Street became a target for urban renewal.

It is my contention that in Chicago, a battle for space was drawn along racial lines: White University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), city planners, and developers who stood to profit from urban renewal on Maxwell Street opposed the black residents of the neighborhood. University officials were backed by city hall and powerful development interests, and local citizens were convinced that the college and a poor black neighborhood could not coexist. Although the removal of poor blacks was couched in terms of “improvement,” the result was that the Maxwell Street Market was brought under city control, which allowed both the city council and the mayor to capitalize on the popularity of black music and the market’s tourist appeal. Using a rubric of “renewal,” the university and developers spent city, state, and federal money to remove poor blacks, clear dilapidated buildings, acquire land at a reduced price, and rebuild the neighborhood in an attempt to attract university students and professors.

As streets were destroyed, landscapes were remodeled, and the Maxwell Street Market was brought under the regulation of the city of Chicago, white residents and university employees defended their decisions by using common racial codes. Newspapers, press releases, and development plans portrayed market vendors as thieves and the neighborhood as not worth saving. Through concerted efforts from the city and university, a once low-income black neighborhood became home to university condos, a parking garage, and strip malls; softball fields were built over the street, and two ceramic statues commemorate the old market.

I feel like going home

One of the most important factors in making the Maxwell Street area a black neighborhood—and in the creation of the Chicago Blues—was migration. In 1910, no city in the United States had more than 100,000 black residents, and 73 percent of all African Americans were rural. James Dorsey found that by 1960, the trend had reversed dramatically, with 73 percent of the nation’s blacks living in cities. From 1916 to 1919, 50,000 to 70,000 black southerners relocated to Chicago. The city’s black population increased from 44,103 in 1910 to a remarkable 109,458 by 1920. A 1920 report from the Chicago Commission on Race Relations stated the economic and sentimental causes of migration. The report showed that low wages, the poll tax, lack of capital, unsatisfactory living conditions, and a lack of decent schools in the South were the primary reasons that motivated blacks to migrate to the North, where the cessation of immigration, high wages, better living conditions, and schools attracted them.

Migration was an important theme, and the pleasures and anxieties associated with it are expressed in a variety of blues songs. Big Bill Broonzy, one of Chicago’s most famous migrants of the prewar period, expresses the importance of mobility in his “Key to the Highway,” where he says “I got the key, to the highway, and I’m billed out and bound to go / I’m gonna leave here runnin’, cause walkin’ is much too slow.” He further fleshes out the theme of migration in his classic “Make My Getaway” by expressing not only the strong desire to leave the South, but the anxiety associated with making the trip. Broonzy did make his getaway, but in his song he is always one day away from leaving: “Feel like hollerin’, I feel like cryin’, I feel so bad boy lord, I just feel like dyin’ / Lord but if I can feel tomorrow, oh like I feel today, Lord I’m gonna pack my suitcase, and make my getaway.” The problems facing the South are also expressed in songs about the failure of cotton crops, Jim Crow, the poll tax, and the economic despair of sharecropping.

The 1920 Chicago Commission report also identified “sentimental” reasons for migration, including “lack of protection from mob violence, injustice in the courts, inferior transportation facilities, the deprivation of the right to vote, unfair competition
of 'poor whites,' persecution by petty officers of the law and the 'persecution of the Press,' and a general cultural denunciation of the South." As much as industry attracted blacks, who were eager to trade in sharecroppers' tools for better-paying industrial jobs, Jim Crow drove blacks out of the South by the hundreds of thousands. A variety of songs address the hardships of Jim Crow in rather straightforward fashion. Bronzny comments on Jim Crow in his "Black, Brown, White." He talks about unemployment, segregation, discrimination in hiring, unequal pay, and African Americans' participation in building and defending the country. In his final stanza, Crow sings that he "helped win sweet victory" with his plough and hoe, but asks his "brother" and audience, "[what are] you going to do about the old Jim Crow?" He ends the song with his legendary refrain: "They say, if you was white, should be all right, If you was brown, stick around / But as you's black, ooh brother, get back, get back, get back." Leadbelly, more of a folk blues musician than a blues performer per se, also offers fair warning to listeners in his "Jim Crow Blues," in which he tells listeners that they will "find some Jim Crow" any place they went: "Down in Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia's a mighty fine place to go / And get together, break up this old Jim Crow."" The rise of the blues' popularity began in 1920, with Mammie Smith's hit "Crazy Blues," and was commercially marginal by the 1960s. The history of the popularity of the blues, then, parallels the history of the most significant era of black migration. Since blues is noted for being a highly reflective and personal music, it is no surprise that themes of migration, mobility, or, in blues parlance, "ramblin,'" are recurrent in this music. Maggie Jones's "Northbound Blues" addresses the same motives for black migration that Leadbelly and Bronzny highlight and links the move more directly to labor: "Goin' where they don't have Jim Crow Laws / Don't have to work there like in Arkansas." In many blues songs based on migration, the North is represented as an escape from the Jim Crow South, a "promised land" free from the problems plaguing southern blacks. The importance of place is manifest in many of these songs that depict the South as a land of hardship and the North as a land of potential economic, social, and political freedom. Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport expresses these sentiments in his song "Jim Crow Blues." He was "tired of being Jim Crowed" and wanted to leave his southern town; he was "sweet Chicago bound." He highlights both the push and pull factors for musicians leaving the South. He wanted to "go up North," where "money grows on trees," and did not give a "doggone" that his "black soul" left the Jim Crow.

These lyrics express common migration themes in blues lyrics. Many songs specifically identify problems particular musicians were facing. Thus, Jim Crow, New Deal programs and Roosevelt, the military, and employers were regularly and explicitly mentioned in these songs. Although seldom used as a direct reference to "whiteness," blackness is commonly featured in the songs detailing migration. The "promised land" theme, even when musicians were aware of the lack of racial tolerance in the North, is also common, with references to money growing on trees, cool lake breezes, beautiful girls, and employment opportunities. Davenport's particular example references Chicago directly, which was, along with several eastern cities and Memphis, an extremely important destination for blacks and is featured in many popular songs.

Although Leadbelly alludes to the South as the home of Jim Crow, many migrants realized that Chicago was not the "promised land" for which they longed. They were, according to Allan H. Spear, "systematically excluded from white sections of the city," limited to menial jobs in industry, and "barred" from places of "public accommodation." Despite the fact that many of their hopes were dashed as racism followed them, conditions in the North still, on some levels, "compared favorably to those in the South." Chicago, however, did not free blacks from discrimination, guarantee them economic success, or provide a welcoming atmosphere. New migrants contended with old settlers who expressed panic about growing migrations and racial tensions, and they feared that the migrants' deportment would undermine their precarious status in the urban North. Old settlers had problems with new migrants' clothing, speech, manners, and habits, and these concerns are expressed in a 1919 Chicago Defender article suggesting that migrants should not be "public nuisance[s]," appear "on the street with . . . ragged clothes," or use their "liberty as a license to do as [they] please." Despite the chilly reception, some found success and joined social institutions, including churches and schools, which provided support to the black community.

A second peak in migration, in which Mississippi lost one-quarter of its total black population, occurred from 1940 to 1950. Spurred by higher wages (the annual median wage for blacks in Mississippi was $439 compared to $1,919 in Chicago), opportunities provided by wartime industries, and the fact that many migrants knew people who had migrated before them, blacks left the South in "droves." The arrival of these new migrants to communities like Chicago's South Side stretched the borders of the city's black community and exacerbated patterns of residential segregation that had become firmly entrenched.

White racial identity gave certain Chicagoans access to greater privileges after World War II, as white suburbs grew in response to black migration. Thomas Sugrue has studied how policies, as they did during the New Deal era, excluded or capped black participation. Whites profited through greater access to jobs in factories that were relocating to the edges of cities to take advantage of tax breaks. They also had a greater ability to purchase such valuable and durable items as homes and cars, which added to their equity. Finally, suburban whites took advantage of an expanding highway system that allowed them to live farther away from city centers, yet remain connected by short commutes.

The segregated black community that these conditions created was home to the Chicago Blues. The unique social and cultural conditions of the Maxwell Street area and the existence of the open-air market led to the formation of a distinct brand of blues. Such local musicians as Big John Wrencher, Arvelia Gray, and Snooky Pryor could hope to make bigger names for themselves by playing in the same spot that greats like Muddy Waters and Ella Fitzgerald had played. Ira Berkow describes the market as a "noisy, colorful" place where, by the late 1950s, "some 70,000 people
haggle[d] on Sundays." The music flourished as the market prospered; as early as 1924, Papa Charlie immortalized the market in his "Maxwell Street Blues," in which he sings, "Lord I'm talkin' about the wagon, talkin' about the push cart too / Because Maxwell Street's so crowded on a Sunday, you can hardly pass through."

Musicians only needed to find electrical outlets to display their talents to thousands of spectators. Tom Smith, who photographed the market for thirty years, refers to Maxwell Street's "Golden Age" before the city had relocated it. He writes,

Nothing can compare to the atmosphere of the old Market. It was much bigger than the music alone. The old Market was the perfect backdrop. The music, the Gypsies, concert artists, the run-down urban area, street preachers, the food, the eccentrics of all kinds came together every Sunday regardless of the weather."

The "Golden Age" was predicated on the existence of a distinctive black culture with a perfect venue for its expression, the Maxwell Street Market.

**THE FIRST TIME I MET THE BLUES**

The blues sound was derived from a combination of influences from early folk ballads, field hollers, and spirituals, but the most important elements of the music were social themes. According to Amiri Baraka (a.k.a. LeRoi Jones), the "Negro's music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment." As the shouts and hollers could no longer account for the myriad experiences of blacks after emancipation, a more elaborate musical structure, the blues, developed. The music allowed for grievances to surface in ways that reinforced cultural bonds, allowing musicians to vent frustrations to a sympathetic audience. Blacks could suffer severe consequences if they directly confronted whites; therefore, the blues was these individuals' means for making social commentary. Songs often explicitly assigned blame to particular people and power structures. As William Barlow notes, the blues enabled musicians to directly confront those responsible for their social conditions under the guise of entertainment."

The blues were also a culmination of regional influences as musicians utilized themes that made sense to them in their specific cultural circumstances. One of the most distinctive regions was the Mississippi Delta, which was notable for the bottleneck slide, an intense sense of emotion, and distinctive polyrhythmic patterns. From the 1920s into the 1950s, migrants brought Delta musical traditions to the city and altered them as urban life put new demands on the artists. Innovations in the electric guitar and personal amplification technologies meant blues musicians could play for larger audiences, and, with access to a few electrical outlets, they could do so outside. These artists had a familiar fan base of southern migrants, new fans in black northerners, and the venues and technologies necessary for these blues to expand.

The existence of a large and popular outdoor market at Maxwell Street contributed immensely to the development of the Chicago Blues. The market was an all-access performance space for aspiring musicians, a talent pool for record producers and club owners, and a place for musicians to share ideas and learn new techniques. The resulting sound of the Chicago Blues reflected the environment from which it emerged. Bruce Iglauer, who was a president of Alligator Records, recognizes the unique marriage between the rigors of the urban environment and the Delta blues sound when he argues that the Chicago Blues were the "toughest, hardest, rawest form of electric Blues." This was partly because "it grew out of the toughest, rawest form of acoustic Blues [that] was being played in the Delta, and partly because Chicago is very hard-edged, very unrelaxed, a very loud city where you've got to play hard-edged, unrelaxed loud music to fight it." The market and socioeconomic conditions of black Chicago set the city's music apart from that of other cities. Chicago became a mecca for blues musicians. Playing outside at the market could get performers discovered by record men, recruited to play club gigs, or the attention of successful musicians with business and social connections. Groups or artists could not only solidify a fan base, but, in Chicago, playing outside could sometimes be more lucrative than playing in clubs or recording music. Guitar player Jimmy Reed, a session player on many Chicago Blues hits, said of his first band, "that's where we started up, playing in the street to make a little money." They made more money "with three or four guys just playing and collecting money" on the weekends than they made "in a club the whole week!" The Chicago Blues became the soundtrack for many black migrants, and no place better embraced this new frontier than the Maxwell Street Market.

**THAT'S THE TRUTH**

By the 1940s, a large number of Delta migrants had found jobs in one of Chicago's industries. Gradually, a distinct working-class neighborhood was established. New wage earners began using their disposable income to enjoy a local music scene that included the likes of Muddy Waters, Ella Fitzgerald, Bo Didley, and many other less well-known artists, including Johnny Young, Floyd Jones, and Daddy Stovepipe, who played in clubs and impromptu jams on Maxwell Street. There was support for local musicians, but it was still tough to make it as a gigging musician. J. B. Hutto, a migrant who eventually relocated to Chicago and recorded there, is emblematic of this synergy. He actually gave up music completely for a time before returning to make recordings that often address labor conditions in the urban environment.

The emphasis on work in Hutto's "Things Are So Slow" is not surprising, since it comes from a gigging performer who quit playing to work and, later, took another job while trying to make it as a musician. Reminiscing these experiences, Hutto "went to work." In the morning and "was all set to start" before his boss told him "son [it breaks] my heart." He finishes with the refrain, "Things are so slow, don't think we need you anymore / He told me "things were so slow, don't think we need you anymore."
The job market was fickle, and stable factory work remained elusive to many; renters were frequently short when payment was due. The tradition of organized crime that developed in Chicago during Prohibition led to what John Kobler describes as an elaborate system of illegitimate clubs and illicit house parties that established a "rent party" tradition in the city. After Prohibition, some residents, black and white, still ran illicit bars or threw parties with small admission fees on weekends to help pay for their rent; in black neighborhoods, bluesmen were often hired to play. The fear of the rent man was actually a long-standing blues tradition. Carrie Edwards's "Hard Time Blues" expresses this tradition rather directly: "Times is just so hard that I can't find no job / And every mornin', the rent man rattles on my doorknob." Peetie Wheatstraw's "Tight Time Blues," which he recorded in Chicago in 1934, also references the kind of anxiety that any black worker would understand: "The times are getting tighter, getting tighter day by day / But the rent man comes as usual, when he knows that we can't pay." Guitar Slim, a Delta migrant who recorded in New Orleans, lists the new range of expenses and necessities for migrants in his "Working Man Blues" and also reveals a pessimistic mood toward new urban responsibilities to pay for rent and groceries, as well as have some coal, wood, and ice to keep the "food good and cool." Slim sings, "Says a workin' man have a hard time / Ahh because things don't just get easy, ohh well well, until he's dead." For some musicians facing these circumstances, the rent party remained a popular way to make extra money in times of need. Playing at these parties could also lead to bigger gigs for musicians who made a lasting impression. Muddy Waters's group, which became the most famous blues combo in Chicago, started out by performing at house parties. Jimmy Reed, who played guitar with Waters, describes their start, saying:

"So we got together, rehearsing, playing little house parties... people liked it, then Jessie Jones [Waters's cousin] got us a little nightclub deal... not too far from where he lived... People come in, liked what we were doing and it went from there... That's how the band got started."

As musicians like Waters and Reed established reputations, they found it possible to make a living playing music.

The popularity of records and radio increased alongside advances in technologies, and the business of the blues at the time was quite lucrative for several independent Chicago record labels. Following World War II, the sales of both phonographs and records increased. By 1948, there were 500,000 black people living in Chicago, and black radio was becoming a regular and important medium for the residents. Due to this vibrant black culture and these unique circumstances, Chicago became the new home of the blues. In 1948, Muddy Waters's first single, "I Can't Be Satisfied"—the first popular recording of the Chicago Blues, despite its country blues sound—was released. The repetitive chorus reveals an underlying mood of many migrants, who had considered giving up and desired to go "back down South." Waters was "troubled, I be all worried in mind / Well baby I just can't be satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin."

Barlow comments on the role of black music and culture in Chicago after World War II by stating that, "Chicago was the undisputed capital of the urban blues in the United States." "The Maxwell Street area," he adds, "also became a focal point for outdoor blues jam sessions." These blues "had been collectively transformed from a rough and realistic rural folk blues into a hard-driving, electric urban folk blues, without losing its critical quality.""40

**IT HURTS ME, TOO (WHEN THINGS GO WRONG)**

In the 1940s, Maxwell Street was home to southern black transplants who brought their own "population, architecture, language, odor/noise, dirt, and signs" into the area (known as the "Wickedest District"). For fifty years, the neighborhood's buildings had deteriorated, but the street's market gave it tourist appeal and dollars that provided tax-free revenue to the First Ward. The market and neighborhood showed remarkable resiliency and flourished even as the area deteriorated, but it increasingly became an area of concern for city planners who wanted the area permanently altered.

In the late 1950s, Phil A. Doyle, the director of Chicago's Land Clearance Commission, determined that 90 percent of the residential structures in the Maxwell Street area were dilapidated. Berkow argues that the neighborhood of Chicago that used to be known as "one of the city's most notorious slums" had now deteriorated so badly. City officials proposed displacing the market with a $5 million land clearance project. Statistics that correlated blackness with deterioration and diminished property values provided the impetus for the removal of poor blacks from the neighborhood, and the area was marked as the site of the Dan Ryan Expressway, which was to bisect the neighborhood and run from Chicago's downtown through the South Side. The plan had originally called for the expressway to run down Halsted Street, but after protest from whites, who, according to Berkow, had "substance and clout," the 42-plan was moved eastward, bisecting Maxwell Street and curtailing the neighborhood in half. A *Chicago Sun-Times* article demonstrates one vendor's distress at renewal. The vendor stated the following: "Twenty-five years I've been selling here... Twenty-five years—and now! I don't know. They say I'll have to move west of the expressway, but I ask, 'Where? There just isn't any room.'" The most crucial blow to the area was the "urban renewal" carried out at the hands of the UIC in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1960s, the division of the street meant that the market attracted "fewer and fewer tourist dollars" and that "more and more deterioration" would take place. Early in the decade, as Mary Kaysser notes, the declining area became a prime target of the city's Department of Urban Renewal, and the beneficiary was to be the university, which stood to gain more than 100 acres of property. In the case of the racialized battle for Maxwell Street, the honesty and self-reflection of the blues could actually tend to hurt the case of musicians who wished to keep the market open. Big
John Wrencher was a regular performer on Maxwell Street in the 1940s and (again, after a stint in Detroit) throughout the 1960s. At a time when Maxwell Street's bad reputation was threatening its existence, Wrencher's 1967 song “Maxwell Street Alley Blues” added to the negative public perceptions of the neighborhood. The song contributed to this stereotyping of Maxwell Street by depicting the community as a place of danger. This imagery of Maxwell is visible in the segment of his song in which Wrencher says, "Have you ever been on Maxwell Street, babe, you know what I mean / Well you better leave before dark, baby, don't you won't be seen." He ends his blues song by depicting Maxwell Street as "a dangerous little street" and the "roughest little street in town."

Robert Nighthawk, another regular of Chicago and Maxwell Street, portrayed the market in the same ominous ways. In 1964, he recorded "Cheating and Lying Blues," a tune with the kind of content that may have angered antismoker advocates who already held negative opinions of marketgoers. Nighthawk sings about getting his pistol out of pawn to murder his cheating lover. He says, "Yes, I'm going to murder my old lady, if she don't stop cheatin' and lyin' / I'd rather be in the penitentiary, than to be worried out of my mind." Countless examples of these lyrics abound in the Chicago Blues.

Snoopy Pryor, another Maxwell Street Market regular, is even more punitively misogynist, as is apparent in his song "Cryin' Shame," in which he says, "Yes it's a pity, baby, I declare that's a cryin' shame / Yes you know I killed my woman, cause you were lovin' another man." These types of songs, even though they were often played alongside gospel music at Maxwell, certainly added to a bad reputation for blacks and the blues at the same time when powerful forces were advocating the market's removal. On some levels, the blues would stop being its own kind of protest music if it ended being reflective of personal experience. Yet, this very fact made the content of the music proof of the degradation of the market for its opposition, even if many whites liked how the music sounded.

Most renewal of the early 1960s occurred north of Maxwell Street, frustrating whites and exacerbating a racialized campaign to remove black residents from the area. Florence Scala, a local resident who protested for years to "save" her neighborhood adjacent to Maxwell Street, resorted to racial codes as her community was threatened by renewal. She argued that, "For some reason Maxwell Street was excluded. It drove us up the wall." "Maxwell Street," she continued, "was the area that should have gone because it was such a slum." She added that, "there never seemed of a community rallying around it, either. The people were very poor and disorganized, and, besides, there wasn't much for them to keep." Hobby Sherman, a store operator, highlighted a racial component that ironically protected Maxwell Street from early projects. This area served as a "buffer" that kept bad elements out of the Loop: "The Loop people know that if Maxwell Street died, all the people, all the drags of humanity that come to Maxwell to shop, they'd go to the Loop. And the entire Loop would come tumbling down. It couldn't handle all the thievery." Sherman believed that the Loop's inhabitants could "handle the thieves better here.

We know them and they know us." The continued deterioration of Maxwell, and the increase of the neighborhood's black residents, made it the target not only for freeway construction but slum clearance that would cede valuable property to the UIC and the city.

Structural forces were to blame for Maxwell Street's deterioration, not the black residents, who were victims of discriminatory employment practices and absentee landlords who, with little regard for their properties, charged exorbitant rent for poor housing. Employment was probably the biggest concern for most residents, and, as we have seen, this is reflected in countless Chicago Blues lyrics. John Brim, a Chicago Blues stalwart who—until he began to receive royalties for his song "Ice Cream Man," which Van Halen turned into a hit in the 1980s—ran a dry-cleaning operation and record store. In "Tough Times," Brim describes conditions that were familiar to many of the inhabitants of Maxwell Street. In the song, Brim says that he had finally gotten a good job working for many hours a week, but when the company had a layoff, he, like many black employees, was the first to go. He also describes the difficulties for people who had lost steady employment and could not "find a part time job," and had nothing to eat. He says, "Tough time, tough time is here once more / Now if you don't have no money, you can't live happy no more." Throughout the long battle to keep the market on Maxwell, the residents of the area facing these conditions worried that planners would ignore structural causes of black poverty. They rightfully feared the consequences of university expansion and, therefore, joined the efforts of vendors and other supporters to save the street and the market from destruction.

Cooperation was considered for various projects in the area, but suggestions from locals were often ignored. In 1966, when Chicago's city council officially designated the 156-acre area encapsulating Maxwell Street as an urban renewal project, Larry Frederick notes that officials held several public hearings in an effort for the project to "reflect the community's ideas and reactions." Despite protest at that time, nearly $40 million of city, state, and federal funds were granted to clear the 88 percent of the buildings in the area that was, according to city officials, "deteriorated to a degree where rehabilitation or conservation would not be economically possible." The campus was awarded 48.5 acres, on which it eventually intended to build an outdoor sports facility and add to its 96-acre campus. The new land granted to the university immediately served nonacademic purposes, including "residential, shopping, and related uses." The city gave UIC and developers land cleared through taxpayer money to generate private profits. Previous renewal plans had suggested that the university incorporate the market, recommending that vendors "diversify and modify their services to appeal to students and faculty at the Circle campus." For the market to exist on the university's terms, however, poor black residents had to be eradicated, and vendors would have to cater to students.

In 1967, UIC expanded into the Maxwell Street area. As racialized notions of crime, poverty, and deterioration were providing the impetus for renewal, the market began to service white students and faculty who were moving into the immediate
vicinity. The market initially survived, but Maxwell Street was again in jeopardy as racialized justifications for further "improvements" came to the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Black residents rioted and rebelled, and vendors noticed a new attitude among the residents. Whites no longer kept their shops open after dark, and white tourists were more reluctant to visit the market. White ethnic groups felt that they had built Maxwell Street left the area for good. There was still hope for the market, however, as federal funds for urban renewal ran out right at the neighborhood's door. Much of the neighborhood was flattened, but the market remained. The debate about Maxwell Street continued as the university pressed for more land by playing on white fears after a decade of what they saw as black violence.60

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, rumors of another extensive phase of expansion began to circulate. In 1990, a New York Times article discussed UIC's plans to finally put a "field house where the peddlers' tables now stand on Sundays."61 School officials proposed that the market be relocated and enclosed, which they felt was good for vendors. Many vendors, however, feared the move would "drive them out of business."62 This time, vendors had the support of groups like Friends of the Market, former residents, descendants of the original vendors, professors, businessmen, and concerned citizens.

Lewis Kleinberg, a member of the Westside Federation, dedicated to saving the area, could not "understand the university taking this land, and especially taking it for nonacademic use," referring to the university's intention to clear the market area to finally build its outdoor sports facility.63 He argues that the area would have been better "used for the poor through the development of a park, play lots, and a school."64 The city never officially stated plans regarding the area's poor, but Kleinberg feared that continued expansion amounted to what was "Negro removal" when what was needed in the area was "economic and social integration."65 Bessia Scott, a member of the South of Roosevelt Planning Association, echoed his concerns, saying, "We know that we aren't going to get half what the land is worth," before stating, "this area is an ideal location, one of the best in the city."66 She also said, "I want to know what's going to happen to these poor people... No one has told me. I'm going to the top and I'm going to demand personal answers to some embarrassing questions."67 Seymour Taxman, legal counsel for the association, attempted to quell fears by arguing that a wide diversity of opinions should have been considered during planning and suggested that locals knew no one who "had been consulted when the original proposals were being prepared."68 Supporters feared that the various proposed projects would "add to the woes" of residents "by forcing them into another slum or by taking their property without full compensation."69

The battle of the 1990s was reminiscent of those of the 1960s. In 1963, Ira Bach, who was then a commissioner of Chicago's City Planning Department, rebuffed questions about "missing Maxwell" and the area's poor.70 He minimized the plight of black residents, claiming that the "University is the big thing to remember."71 He predicted that the university was "going to have a tremendous impact on the area's business and residential facilities."72 Locals wanted a compromise with remodeled low-income housing and proposed that the university and city, in cooperation with local merchants, "restore Maxwell so that it not only draws the tourist trade again, but also appeals to the huge student market nearby."73

Just like in the 1960s, dismissive attitudes and practices about Maxwell Street prevailed in the 1990s. The justification for renewal was that there were "fewer peddlers, less merchandise, and far fewer customers. Many people no longer feel safe going there."74 Those in favor of expansion said it was "not exotic anymore. It's dirty. You see rows of old tires. The garbage hasn't been picked up. It's not a healthy part of Chicago anymore."75 Maxwell Street, however, had never been a "healthy part of Chicago" by white definitions, but opponents could still not understand what was too clear to struggling vendors: "Poor people need a place like Maxwell Street,"76 James Forester, coordinator of UIC's building plan, maintained a façade of cooperation to appease vendors. "The university has the right of eminent domain," he said, and added, "but it prefers not to resort to that power."77 The only place where the market could now be in its plan was in a "modernized" and sanitized environment contradictory to the conditions that gave the neighborhood its character.78

In 1994, the city of Chicago limited the size of the market, instituting measures that prevented poor blacks from participating. Vending fees were raised from $25 a year to $25 a day, and vending licenses were restricted to nonfelons. David Whiteis, a Maxwell Street regular, describes these measures as the "first step toward death."79 He says he "would rather see [the market] die and rest in peace than see it uplifted and trendified."80 Whites living near the university claimed that the market was an eyesore, home to the stolen goods and collected garbage of the neighborhood. With supporters in the neighborhood, the city council drew closer to the goal of university expansion at the expense of the market. Its zoning committee approved the school's plan of expanding into the 10-block Maxwell Street market area in March 1994.81

Steve Balkin, a professor at Roosevelt University, used the legacy of the Chicago Blues to organize, through an editorial, a protest of city proposals at the 1994 Chicago Blues Fest. A "friendly and informative demonstration" was held to show a genuine effort to keep a "pipeline open" for "great Chicago blues musicians in the future" by saving the market.82 "Without [having] Maxwell Street as an incubator and proving ground for Chicago blues musicians," there would be no Chicago Blues.83 Without the street, Balkin argues, many "migrating blues musicians could not have stayed long in Chicago; they would have had to return to Memphis, St. Louis, or the Delta."84 Maxwell Street was where the blues "became electrified" and where the music was given its "strong backbeat."85 The music inspired an entire generation of rock and rollers. If Memphis honored Graceland for its historical impact on music, "why," asked, "isn't Chicago honoring Maxwell Street?"86

University residents, however, coughed their complaints in racially coded language that amounted to a campaign to keep black residents out of the area. White residents like Rose Tavolino complained of theft. Tavolino said, "They come and steal off our porches" and "they take our lawn chairs and mops and brooms and sell
them for a buck or two." The "theys" to which Tavolino referred, of course, were black vendors. Joe Pucci, spokesman for the Concerned Citizens of the West Loop, said that, "if something is stolen in our neighborhood, whether hubcaps or radios or barbeque grills, chances are you can find it on Maxwell Street the next Sunday." The director of the University Village Association, Catherine Mauro, also pointed out problems with theft. Mauro said, "In my neighborhood alone, every Sunday morning you could go and pick up 60 percent of what was stolen from their lawns the last week." She asked, "Am I going to have to clean up Maxwell and having someone ask me if I want to buy hubcaps, cassettes or dirty movies?" Her answer was an emphatic "No." Unsurprisingly, developers and city officials favored removal and relied on "race neutral" policies to rid the neighborhood of what they considered an undesirable population. Jim Williams, the mayor's press secretary, favored higher fees and more regulation of the market, claiming that the vendors were getting a "free ride," paying paltry fees and utilizing public land. "It takes an investment to do business," he said. "Maxwell Street is no different." City Alderman Ted Mazola, in whose First Ward the market was located, asked, "What's historic here? What's left?" He argued that there was "nothing to save." To Mazola, the market was a "seedy part of life we don't want to continue or condone." Mazola would later clear several millions of dollars on real estate deals in the area when he returned to private life. Joseph Beale, chairman of the Hawthorn Realty Group, felt that change was necessary for the Near West Side to "grow as a vital economic sector of the city." His firm owned two buildings and two acres contiguous to the area designated for redevelopment and argued that they were "tortured by the problems created by the vendors in the Maxwell Street Market." Thus, politicians and business interests used race to consign the market to removal and the neighborhood to destruction.

GOING AHEAD

August 28, 1994 was the last Sunday that a market was held in what was left of its original home. City hall sold the 11.8 acres where it used to take place to the university for $4.25 million. The market was moved to Canal Street, strictly regulated, and reduced to 425 stalls, less than half its original size. The change was welcomed by the university, as white residents could go to the market and hear the blues in a "safe" environment. Market supporters, not surprisingly, lamented the move. "It will lose all the color and flavor," George Hemmens, an urban planning professor, stated before saying, "it will be gentrified." Nate Duncan, the owner of the renowned Duncan's Deli, felt "horrible, absolutely horrible," and said, "there is a sad feeling. I just hate to walk the streets ... poor people make a living there, but they're being pushed aside." Al Prez, a vendor, said that the market was "part of your blood. This is your culture." A writer and the architectural critic for the Chicago Sun-Times, Lee Bey, went so far as to declare in 1998 that "Maxwell Street is dead." The market was "turned into a weekend Brigadoon on Canal south of Roosevelt. And what's left of the Maxwell Street shops and businesses likely will be razed." "The university" he writes, "wants retail, academic buildings, and market-rate housing—not towel salesmen and roasting-vendor porn sellers." While other cities "would kill for a legacy" like that of the Chicago Blues to draw on, Chicago was paving for the burial of such heritage.

At the very moment that UIC was demolishing the street, Mayor Richard Daley, "one of the prime supporters of Maxwell Street's destruction," was awarded with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Policy. Daley's policies were "set for the real estate developers" who tore through Chicago's "historic fabric with abandon, making a mockery of the National Trust." Max Page and Steve Balkin point out the irony of a National Trust that supported a policy maker who destroyed the "historic fabric" of a major city. They write that, Daley "helped to empty the city not only of poor and working-class people but also of their legacies to the city." His racialized policies, designed to save empty mansions and outdated skyscrapers by offering companies incentives to redevelop, revealed to Chicagoans what kind of history really mattered to city officials. The Maxwell Street area was home to blues legends but counted for little in the eyes of city planners, politicians, and the wider preservation movement. Maxwell Street's buildings were razed and softball fields, student condos, chain stores, restaurants, and a parking garage went up in their place.

Rather than addressing poverty, racist employment, lending, and residential practices, or recognizing the cultural value of Maxwell Street and attempting to preserve its legacy, Daley, city officials, university officials, and other pro-redevelopment forces that stood to gain from "renewal" played on white ethnic's fears of black poverty to acquire valuable property "cleared" with taxpayer money. It was easier to destroy the neighborhood, regulate the market and merchants in a controlled environment, and build anew in the name of "progress" rather than face the issues created by racism and poverty; however, the racialized campaign against poor blacks could never be complete.

CONCLUSION

Whites enjoyed the Chicago Blues, and some of them profited immensely by producing the music. The compromise was to keep an aspect of black culture that whites desired (the music) while ridding the area of the black people who created it. A racially contested space, Maxwell Street was vital in the production of the music, but as whites removed black people from the area and brought the market under tighter regulation, both the culture and the music of the neighborhood were fundamentally altered.

NOTES

REFERENCES


John Terry


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The Camouflaged Celebration of Irregular Romance in Early Rock 'n' Roll: "Robbin' the Cradle" in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s

Paul L. Gaston III

In a thorough and unerringly sober survey, Dawn R. Hobbs and Gordon G. Gallup Jr. find through content analysis of popular song lyrics 18 reproductive themes that read like an outline for a course in evolutionary psychology. Moreover, they find a direct correlation between the frequency of such themes and the popularity of the songs. Their most startling discovery may be that "approximately 92 percent of the 174 songs that made it into the Top Ten in 2009 contained one or more reproductive messages." Given the broad range of performance styles, creative personas, and often sharply discrete audiences in contemporary music, the recurrence of any common theme in such an art form deserves scholarly attention. That the theme document appears virtually universal should entitle them to a lifetime backstage pass.

In their study of popular music, Hobbs and Gallup identify numerous "coding categories," including "genitalia," "long-term mating strategies," "sex acts," "promiscuity," "commitment and fidelity," and the unexpected "parenting." Each category represents the effort of the authors to "transform subjective emotions into objective actions." Seeking examples of texts corresponding to these categories in country, pop, and rhythm and blues music listed in the weekly charts published in *Billboard* in 2009, Hobbs and Gallup find "reproductive themes" to be both diverse and pervasive. And while they focus on contemporary popular songs, the critics encourage us to explore "reproductive themes" that also pervade such venerable classics as "La ci darem la mano" ["There We Will Be Hand in Hand"] from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* Franz Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade" [Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel], and Giulio Caccini's "Ave Maria." Although attributing such themes even to a setting of *Hail, Mary* may seem like a stretch, the lists and categories Hobbs and Gallup propose encourage vigilance in approaching any lyric.
Just how such themes have become so dominant in the present age cannot be easily explained, but one answer may lie half a century back, in what an interesting outline of rock history assembled by the Capistrano School in Modesto, California, refers to as the “Innocent ’50s,” a common, if dubious, phrase. For its continued currency, look no further than Time-Life’s 10-CD collection, “Malt Shop Memories,” marketed as “full of memories that will take you back to those wonderfully innocent ’50s.” That there was an assertion of innocence in many of the songs of this period is clear. It is also evident that beneath this assertion, there is an occasional and dark celebration of irregular desire on the part of men (often rather mature men) for relationships with younger women. You have only to listen, but therein lies the problem.

IT’S COMPLICATED

Hobbs and Gallup are probably wise to “focus on the written lyrics that comprise popular songs.” While acknowledging that nontextual elements may contribute to a song’s popularity, they limit their study to texts and, thus, yield an overview that is both substantive and straightforward. But a more revealing consideration of the phenomenon that interests them would show that lyrics represent only one point of departure for an appreciation of what makes a song appealing, influential, or subversive. To more fully understand how popular music has managed the volatile issues of sexuality that Hobbs and Gallup pursue, we must also pay attention to the unstable balance in any song of text, music (melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, timbre, etc.), performance (both live and recorded), and production.

The relation between text and music has been dynamic and unstable for some time. For example, in the sixteenth century, according to a traditional story, the Roman Catholic Church sought to discourage polyphonic settings of the mass on the grounds that their complexity obscured the liturgical texts. Hence, there arose the legend that Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina wrote the Missa Papae Marcelli in 1567 to demonstrate that polyphony could satisfy the concerns of the church by offering a “clearly audible declamation of the text.”

If we move forward to the golden age of lieder, the nineteenth century, we will find Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Hugo Wolf as notable figures among those who took on the challenge of setting complex and evocative poems in such a way that textual and musical priorities would compete in the ears and minds of listeners to create a pleasing tension. When Schumann sets “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai” [In the Remarkably Lovely Month of May], the opening song of Dichterliebe [The Poet’s Love], both the piano accompaniment and the vocal melody interpret Heinrich Heine’s poem as a stretching, very nearly overlapping, perhaps futile quest to confess in the eighth and final line “mein Schmerz und Verlangen” [my longing and longing for] to a beloved one. Read in isolation from the musical setting, Heine’s poem, in which the lover compliments his favorite through understatement, may appear both earnest and reserved, but when performed well, Schumann’s song moves us as a cry of the heart, an effort to reach toward the unattainable.2 By conferring equivalent priority on both text and music, art song enables us to enjoy their alignment, when they seem well aligned, and to find pleasure from the tension between them, when they are not.

The same might be said of many songs in what is called the “Great American Song Book.” Indeed, songwriting teams often give equal billing to lyricist and composer: George and Ira Gershwin, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein (and Lorenz Hart). While some songs are more memorable for their lyrics than their melodies, others are more notable for the music. And just as some songs may please the listener through a straightforward alignment of melody and text (think of the title song of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1955 classic musical Oklahoma, in which the declaration of proud self-promotion is reinforced largely by ascending scales), others challenge the listener to reflect on the song’s priorities by juxtaposing texts with musical settings that qualify or confront them.3 In another song from Oklahoma, “People Will Say We’re In Love,” Curley and Laurey claim that they wish to avoid affectionate exchanges so as to discourage any speculation about a possible romance, while the musical accompaniment, in this instance a flute obbligato, maintains an amusingly ironic commentary, in effect, “Ha, ha, so you say.”

What these examples have in common is a commitment, which is sometimes greater, sometimes lesser, to convey—and perhaps enhance and emphasize—lyrics through music. Even in those songs that suggest discordance between music and lyrics, an edgy dialogue between the two, rather than their accord, may convey a respect for both. That is not always the case, however.

EFFECTIVE CAMOUFLAGING

In attempting to understand contemporary music’s fondness for “embedded reproductive images,” we can develop a useful perspective by considering one “reproductive” theme that emerges clearly but subtly in the songs of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. This issue, the pursuit of young women by older men, is one we might expect would have unsettled listeners of a supposedly more “innocent” age. But, in fact, songs expressing a theme of such impropriety and volatility appear to have attracted relatively little censure. Why? As we consider the paradox, we will find that an exclusive focus on texts will finally not take us very far in understanding the complex relationship between what lyrics say and the attention they receive.

Somehow, rock ‘n’ roll songs that were widely played, performed, and purchased both in the United States and United Kingdom found a way to confront conventional morals without drawing attention to what they were saying. When songs allude more or less explicitly to behaviors otherwise roundly condemned, both then and now, we may well ask whether anyone was paying attention. Even as they listened to these songs, few of the fans seemed to have been “hearing” the words behind the music.
As Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman observe with regard to Little Richard, "it must have been assumed by programmers that. . . nobody would pay attention to, or understand, the words of his songs," a reminder that while music—in its structure, performance, and production—may draw attention to a lyric, music also can distract from or camouflage a lyric. And that appears to be the case in many of the songs we should review.

DISTRACTION

Musical elements within the broad idiom that is considered rock 'n' roll, while not as simplistic and primal as sometimes described, often became the overriding priority of transgressive songs. The infectious "back beat" of the evolving genre, with its suggestion of the rhythmical sexual thrust that so unsettled Ed Sullivan, satisfied the demand for a music that appeared to contrast in virtually every way with the carefully orchestrated, brilliantly performed, often cleverly sophisticated songs of the previous generation.

To be sure, many found the driving rhythms of the new music noxious. In his Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll, David P. Szatmary describes a two-pronged backlash, from racists who deplored the growing influence of black artists to established white artists who did not care for the competition. As part of this opposition, there were occasional charges of "dirty" lyrics aimed at the long tradition of double entendre in blues, but the strongest objections were to what one "Ace" Carter of the Birmingham, Alabama, White Citizens Council described as the "basic, heavy-beat music of the Negroes." For many listeners, that beat would invoke and prompt a multitude of sins. When the music drew dancers to the sock hop floor, the lyrics, while never negligible, often seemed secondary. Few of the teenagers who bought the hit "La Bamba," by Ritchie Valens, were able to understand the lyrics in Spanish, but that was no impediment to the song's success. For that matter, Valens could not understand them either; a native English speaker, he learned the lyrics phonetically. The same point is made in a clever 2011 television commercial for the Volkswagen Passat, as one person after another attempts to sing the words of Elton John's "Rocket Man" but instead provides a far distant, comical approximation. If you ask a friend to repeat the lyrics of Elvis Presley's songs, which have been popular for 50 years, in all likelihood he or she will be able to hum the melody and simulate Presley's characteristic inflections without being able to recollect more than a few words of the text itself.

Without indulging in recondite musicological analysis, we should acknowledge simple associations that bear on our interpretation of a lyric. As Robert Walser observes in his contribution to Analysing Popular Music, "analysis is inevitably reductive, which is precisely why it's useful." For example, following the patter (andante, with suggestions of the minor) that opens "Robbin' the Cradle," a song we will consider later in the chapter, the verse begins vis a vis the major, with a firm emphasis on the tonic: G-C-E. These are the same notes that open the principal theme of Franz Schubert's "Trout" Quintet and that summon the dead in George Frederick Handel's "The Trumpet Shall Sound"—vigorously, ebullient tunes. Hence, a rock 'n' roll song mounting an irregular defense of a man's love for a young girl addresses us paradoxically in a musical vocabulary that could hardly have more positive associations. The point is not that lyricist Anthony Bellusi (a.k.a. Tony Bellus) intended to quote Handel or Schubert, but that he chose to launch the transgressive lyrics of his song by using tempo, harmony, and a bizarre mix of timbres (accordion, Latin back-up singers, guitar) to create an impression of cheerful whimsy.

Second, as the examples of Valens and Presley suggest, the 1950s was a period in which singers and "records" were more important than songs. In the 1930s and 1940s, "when a particular record became a hit, its success was attributed more to the song than to the singer." But, in the 1950s, as Starr and Waterman observe, "studio recordings. . . increasingly came to represent the original, primary documents of the music, often preceding and generally taking precedence over any live performances of the material." So when performers other than the original recording artists attempted to "cover" rock 'n' roll songs, the result could seem an aberration. One need only recall Pat Boone's version of Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" to understand the difference between authentic interpretation and imitation—although at the time Boone outsold Richard and the other black artists whose songs he "covered." Even efforts by the original performers to re-record their songs (following the introduction of stereo recording) were often poorly received. Even today, a cursory glance at the iTunes' popularity rankings will, in most instances, show authentic mono versions of early hits as clearly preferred to the later stereo mixes offering higher fidelity.

Third, just as singers were more important than songs, the recorded performances themselves—the fusion of music and words—often discouraged close attention to their texts. Within the limit of three minutes or less enforced by the capacity of the 45 rpm disc, an arrangement had to establish its motif quickly, repeat its hook often enough to claim its audience, and end promptly by accommodating the increasingly influential disc jockeys, either with a slow fade-out (allowing a voiceover) or a dramatic crescendo (offering a compelling lead-in to news on the hour). And because low fidelity automobile and portable "transistor" radios were the principal source of access for most listeners, lyrics, even when delivered forcefully, were often difficult to decipher. Served largely as means to musical ends, lyrics, for the most part, occupied a distinctly lower priority.

Of course, it is true that, like "jazz," rock 'n' roll was at first a colorful euphemism for sexual activity, but Alan Freed was careful to avoid folk etymology in marketing rhythm and blues songs to his young Cleveland listeners. Rather, as Starr and Waterman point out, "rock 'n' roll" in the 1950s was a marketing term intended not so much to define a new style of music as to launch an appeal to a new audience, young people of high school age. While there were songwriters and performers grounded in the suggestiveness of a well-established R&B tradition, there were promoters and disc jockeys determined to ignore double entendre and other subversive techniques so as to avoid criticism and encourage wide sales.
Fourth, once one or two highly successful songs had examined a topic (tragic accident, unrequited love, infatuation, breaking up, reconciliation), subsequent songs on similar themes could be more or less uncritically relegated to that subgenre. The recycling of familiar issues and sentiments was no impediment to success if the music of the song could offer a different sound, but songs that sounded like their immediate predecessors, even though their texts might take up a different issue, were likely to face difficulty.

There are instructive examples of this phenomenon of “protective cover” in other periods, of course. To cite but one example, “A Rapture,” by the seventeenth-century English poet Thomas Carew, develops a remarkably frank extended metaphor for the act of sex.

Yet my tall pine shall in the Cyprian strait
Ride safe at anchor and unload her freight:
My rudder with thy bold hand, like a tried
And skillful pilot, thou shalt steer, and guide
My bark into love’s channel, where it shall
Dance, as the bounding waves do rise or fall. 28

But Carew’s lascivious poem, usually found alongside other lengthy poems of Cavalier romance, enjoys the secure cover of an abundance of seventeenth-century poems that celebrate romantic sexuality in far less graphic terms. The poem has now found its way into the “sine qua non of college textbooks,” a book capable of “setting the agenda for the study of English literature,” The Norton Anthology of English Literature. 29

Finally, while the sheer quantity of new songs may have disarmed those who might have otherwise found cause for criticism, chance may also have played a role in the free passage that potentially objectionable and actionable songs have enjoyed. As Martha Bayles observes, a U.S. Senate subcommittee studying possible links between mass culture and juvenile delinquency considered, in order, “horror” comics, the movies, and television, “but it never did get around to rock ‘n’ roll.” 30 The committee had little interest in the “latest teenage dance craze.”

Certainly, there were those who condemned rock ‘n’ roll. There are those who still do. In 1987, Alan Bloom famously described the rhythms of popular music as the “beat of sexual intercourse.” 31 But such critics typically share a more general concern with the rhythms of the genre, the volume at which the music is played, and the physical movements it may inspire in performer and audience. Where are the condemnations of songs with lyrics that celebrate the lust of men for girls? Don’t worry, we imagine oblivious observers agreeing, it’s just rock ‘n’ roll.

“AND BACK IN CLASS AGAIN”

All of these possible explanations notwithstanding, we may still find it fascinating that songs with remarkably subversive and transgressive lyrics appeared in the Top 40 lists during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s with scarcely a ripple of objection. Again, such performers as Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis drew criticism for their stage appearances and the lives they led. Lewis, in particular, was heavily criticized for marrying a young cousin, and Chuck Berry was indicted, convicted, and imprisoned under the Mann Act. But the texts of songs that celebrated, sought, or considered relationships between a mature man and a young woman largely escaped censure.

Of course, by the standards of later decades, the lyrics of this formative period may not appear particularly startling. An increase in candor and explicitness through the latter half of the century led to lyrics that are now, by any standard, unprecedented in their willingness to offend public sensibilities. But this march toward the wide use of direct sexual references appears as a gradual and cumulative process only in retrospect. At the ground level, the evolution appears not quite so linear. In the 1950s and 1960s, disturbingly direct songs coexisted with or preceded coy ones, and songs with suggestive lyrics paved the way for those offering innocent and trivial badinage. In contrast with the songs considered by Hobbs and Gallup, which offer their “embedded reproductive messages” with alarming frankness and specificity, these earlier songs span a considerable spectrum, from those that consider conventional topics but sound aggressive and confrontational, to those that offer disturbing content but sound innocuous. Something more interesting than a smooth statistical curve becomes evident: Cheerful songs of teenage prattle provide protective covering for songs describing mature desire for youthful sexuality. After the flying at the record hop, it’s back to class, and the world’s innocence is safe again.

“ROBBIN’ THE CRADLE”

The singer (and lyricist) Tony Bellus frames his only hit around a provocative question: whether it might be considered “strange” for an older man to be in love with a girl who is “so young.” Having been persuaded to call off his relationship with a young girl, the “broken hearted lover” in “Robbin’ the Cradle” (first released in June 1959) concedes that the romance has ended. 32 But he soon reverts to defiance. Acknowledging that he has come under criticism for his pursuit of the young girl, he insists that the relationship has been justified by the authenticity of the feelings it generates. 33 As though the depth of his feelings offers sufficient justification, he insists that he “really” loves the girl. 34 While such a defense would be unlikely to sway those who might regard any relationship between a mature man and an underage (by whatever standard) girl as “outta line,” “Robbin’ the Cradle” is one of those songs that establishes a safe harbor for a category that already included far more unsettling and subversive songs on a similar theme. Sung in a pleasing, jaunty voice to an effervescent melody, the song trivializes and thereby decontextualizes its theme. The deliberate opening patter, with its minor chords, announces the breakup, while the celebration of the irregular relationship takes off in a fast major key melody characterized by high
“aspirational” intervals. Once the dancing begins, there is no longer any need to give careful attention to the lyrics.

But consider, for example, a song from two years earlier: “Young Blood.” The Coasters would enjoy great success with such novelty songs as “Yakety Yak,” “Charlie Brown,” and “Poison Ivy,” but the flip side to “Searchin’” is no novelty. Although they would become notable for their close harmony and simple driving rhythms, they forsake the arena of innocent fun when they follow their songwriters, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, into a much darker space. The title anticipates the urgency of illicit desire, and the song, a “far cry from the starry-eyed romance” found in a piece like “Earth Angel,” more than fulfills the hint.36

The song begins with a spotter’s account. Recalling his having met a young girl on a corner, wearing a yellow ribbon, the lead singer (probably Carl Gardner) also recalls his instinctive, compulsive, and threatening response: “I couldn’t stop myself from shoutin’ / Look a-there, look a-there, look a-there.”37 Bystanders chorale conspiratorially and usher in a refrain calculated to inspire fear in a father’s heart: “Young blood / Young blood / Young blood / I can’t get you out of my mind.”38 In the next stanza, the singer, rendered “lame” by his desire, makes his approach and, stuttering, asks for the girl’s name. There are four different voices that then pose the question, one after another, suggesting at the very least a confrontation between the girl and an intimidating, demanding group. Rather than respond, she heads for home. They follow her. There, as the irregularity of the encounter becomes patent, things “go bad.” Her father warns the pursuers to stop what he regards as harassment, but that does not end the story. A sleepless night follows, during which the pursuer is obsessed by a repeated, rhythmic mantra, “You’re the one.”39 His last words are again those of the song’s title.

By any standard, this ought to be an unsettling song, memorable for its direct portrayal of assertive and insistent desire, but it seems more likely that “Young Blood” was relegated to the “safe” category of songs celebrating youthful romance. Another song of the same theme had only recently fallen off the popularity charts after seventeen weeks. Sonny James’s “Young Love,” a sentimental paean to youthful romance, offers none of the threat that would be implicit in the Coasters’ song a few months later. Never mind that James is 28 years old when he croons in a near-monotone about finding his predilection lover. He has discovered “true devotion” and “deep emotion” in kissing her “sweet lips.”40 It seems likely that because James and others so clearly established the propriety of songs about young love, more sinister songs in pursuit of this theme failed to alert likely sources of resistance. James attempted to tap the same vein four months later with “First Date, First Kiss, First Love,” but to no avail. The song reached number 25 on the chart and fell off after a week.41

A similar topic appears in a cluster of songs addressed to girls aged sixteen by voices that sound far older. These disturbingly observant songs range from “Sweet Little Sixteen,” by Chuck Berry (February 1958), to “Sixteen Candles,” by the Crests (December 1958), and “Only Sixteen,” by Sam Cooke (July 1959). There followed “You’re Sixteen,” by Johnny Burnette (August 1960), and “Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen,” by Neil Sedaka (June 1962).42 With the exception of “Sixteen Candles,” each of these songs is a bright, up-tempo celebration of youthful energy and attractiveness. Never mind that only one of the singers claims to be anywhere close to sixteen himself. (Sam Cooke’s character is seventeen.) The celebration of nubile sexuality grows so familiar and its conventions so predictable that otherwise potentially unsettling lines pass by virtually unnoticed.

Chuck Berry’s iconic “Sweet Little Sixteen” is, in fact, so familiar that the relationship at which the song hints has attracted little scrutiny. Consider the details used to describe the girl who, given her age, has presumably advanced no further than her sophomore year in high school. She is precocious, passionate about rock music, determined to have the latest “famed autograph.” At best, the song conveys a weird avuncular absorption in the details of a young girl’s life and, at worst, an irregular and potentially sinister interest. Chuck Berry’s 1959 arrest, conviction, and imprisonment for “transporting across state lines an underage Apache girl who was arrested on a prostitution charge weeks later” (Weiner, 2008) might have persuaded some to favor the latter interpretation.43 But, while the case prompted denunciations of Berry himself, there is no record that an outcry developed with regard to the lyrics of his best-selling songs.

In the song by the Crests, there is an acknowledgment that the girl is “only sixteen”; nevertheless, the singer refers to her possessively as his “teenage queen.”44 In “You’re Sixteen,” the object of the singer’s affection is “all ribbons and curls,” direct from the nursery rhymes and ready for love.45 In this song, the girl now belongs to the singer. When he recalls finding his first opportunity to kiss her, he confesses that he “could not stop.”46 In “Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen,” the singer acknowledges that he has been counting the days until the girl is no longer a “baby.”47 In a phrase that eerily anticipates what will later be a much more direct report from Rod Stewart, “Tonight’s the night,”48 he will smile knowingly, recalling that he has observed her childhood, her nascent maturity, the early signs of her sexual maturation. It is probably not a coincidence that the age of consent in more than 30 states at the time was, in fact, sixteen. And it must also be remembered that in 1960, “nearly one-third of American females had their first child before reaching age twenty.”49

In sum, by the late 1950s, songs purporting to celebrate youthful romance between individuals of comparable (or indeterminate) age had offered protective coloration for “Robbin’ the Cradle” songs that spoke frankly of affection between a young girl and an older man. Almost invariably told from the perspective of the man, these songs either affirm this kind of relationship with no apparent misgivings or seek to defend it against societal criticism. Despite their range, such songs express a common assumption that such relationships are—or should be—acceptable.

“WAY OUT OF LINE”

It is the extension of this expression that becomes even more interesting and unsettling as songs begin to celebrate relationships acknowledged as irregular, profess
a determination to resist or withdraw from such relationships, or assert that the normal boundaries of society will no longer apply and thus may be ignored. Unlike the earlier ones, for the most part aimed at a teenage audience, these songs generally appear not to entertain those who are sixteen. In their references to popular culture and the increasing sophistication of their musical arrangements, they appear to be addressed instead to adults who might share or at least find of interest the proclivities they celebrate. Drawing on the assumptions of cheerful innocence established in the 1950s and early 1960s so as to cloak genuinely transgressive statements, such songs introduce themes that if appearing out of context might have drawn considerable objection.

In 1965, for instance, John Sebastian and The Lovin’ Spoonful conceded that the appeal of a girl much younger than the singer is irresistible. Sustained by a soft and casual folk-rock accompaniment, the laconic singer in “Young Girl” describes someone who has so far enjoyed an impeccable youth. Given her claim of innocence, he considers “hanging around” in a brotherly way until he might not only avoid criticism but achieve public approval for his amorosity, but he then abruptly decides that he can delay no longer. He says, “If I wait I’ll just die.” Claiming to have been influenced by both Bob Dylan and the Beatles, the group called their sound “good-time music,” which is a reasonable description of their art if one does not look too closely at the “good times” envisioned there.

Two years later, Jim Morrison of The Doors moved from the laconic to the unequivocal, although in the case of “You’re Lost Little Girl” (from the album Strange Days, September 1967), the inscription of illicit romance, or, at least, of the prospect of one, lies as much in the performance as in the lyrics. At the outset, there is an unsettling impression of risk and irregularity in the repeated assertions that the “little girl” is “lost,” vulnerable, as yet unidentified. The singer makes his approach, asking the little girl who she is, but his interest goes far beyond her identity. Following his hopeful suspicion that despite her youth she may “know what to do,” he pauses for a moment to acknowledge the possible incongruity involved in his infatuation with her, but his ethical dilemma lasts only for a moment, since he candidly says, “Yeah, I’m sure that you know what to do.” That’s it. The lyrics are repeated without a variation in tone until the song fades away.

Few listeners would associate Neil Diamond with Jim Morrison, but, in April 1967, Diamond released the startling “Girl, You’ll Be a Woman Soon.” The singer assumes the role of an outcast who has lived on the fringes all his life. Having now found the object of his desire, a young girl, he understands that any action on his part may lead to retribution. He says, “If they get a chance they’ll end it for sure.” The clear presumption is that the girl in question is not yet a woman. That she will soon “need a man” suggests that she does not yet feel that need. The song is resolutely one-sided. There is no suggestion that the girl so much as acknowledges, much less welcomes, the attention she is receiving from the singer. People are saying, “The boy’s no good.” Perhaps they’re right.

By contrast, we find considerable give-and-take in the song by Gary Puckett & The Union Gap that followed Diamond’s song a year later (March 1968), “Young Girl,” which remained on the chart for 13 weeks, dramatizes the issue of courtship across what is apparently a significant age divide. At the outset, the relationship with a girl “much too young” is admitted to be “way out of line.” But the transgression is not the fault of the man—or so he says. Rather, he has been deceived by a girl who has used womanly appeal to conceal her youth. She has led him to believe that she is of legal age, but she is not, and “now it hurts to know the truth.” And the truth so referenced should hurt. In 1968, in 38 states in the United States, ignorance of a victim’s age offered no defense against a charge of statutory rape.

Having now recognized that she is under age, he warns her that she should leave him at once. She must recognize the peril involved in remaining alone with him. But he remains transfixed by her alluring eyes. Perhaps the relationship has already progressed to a point that may be inappropriate. Yes, the singer urges her—how sincerely may be open to question—to take herself out of his life. Then there follows a halfhearted entreaty: “Better run, girl.” Two observations may be appropriate. First, the imperative “Run, girl!” might be heard as an urgent directive with some significance. “You’d better run” appears to offer advice; the singer hopes will be refused. The boastful overtone in the singer’s emphasis is difficult to ignore: “You’re much too young, girl.”

How will this dilemma be resolved? He urges the girl to rush home to her mother—hardly the kind of appeal likely to persuade someone who is already using makeup and sophisticated mannerisms to camouflage her youth. But he presses the issue, goading her. Her mother must surely be missing her. He appears to dismiss her irrevocably—almost—insisting that she leave before his willpower erodes any further, saying, “Don’t go far I’m afraid we’ll go too far.” A final, irrevocable dismissal! In context, the lyric appears to mount a challenge calculated to appeal to just the ambitious suberfuge the girl has maintained. And there is no indication in the narrative of the song that anyone leaves.

It appears that the lyrics of the song, written by Jerry Fuller, raised little concern, but they should not invite easy listening. They sustain an unsettling tension between the overt impetus for the song, the singer’s sense that he should distance himself from a relationship dangerous for him, and his obvious interest in testing, affirming, and extending that relationship. At no point does the singer indicate that he has made an irrevocable decision to withdraw. Indeed, what he says suggests just the opposite. Is she the running kind? That doesn’t seem likely. That she is capable of moral reasoning appears in his awareness that she knows the relationship is “wrong,” but her willingness to set aside this presumption shines out from the invitation of her eyes.

The final stanza of the song leaves us little to question about the intimacy between the man and the girl. Whatever comfort may be taken in the suggestion that the singer and his young girl may not yet have consummated their relationship must
She may think she needs him, but Plant's performance of the song suggests that he knows better. The words, to be sure, are nearly inaudible, given the foreground conceded by the production to a strong, driving rhythm and the simple but powerful guitar chords that define the mix. The music's stifling of the words may be strategic, given the underlying premise of the song that the life of the rock star finally renders such distractions as the pubescent groupie peripheral. This is clearly a song for the stage, for the arena, and its interesting chromatic shifts, from (for instance) E minor to A major, take the attention from the carelessly enunciated words. While the song may traffic in the clichés of need and desire, the bravura of the performance may disarm any suspicion of real need or real desire, at least, for the moment, during the performance. Questioned on this point by a Rolling Stone reporter, Cameron Crowe, Plant conceded, "It's a shame to see these young chics bungle their lives away in a flurry. . . . If you listen to 'Sick Again,' a track from Physical Graffiti, the words show I feel a bit sorry for them. . . . One minute she's thirteen and the next minute she's thirteen and over the top. Such a shame."73

The following year, another British singer, Rod Stewart, released the album A Night on the Town, with the aforementioned hit, "Tonight's the Night."74 As the singer is carefully and deliberately seducing his "virgin child,"75 the song is less cavalier and dismissive than "Sick Again," but there's no avoiding the summons toward which the song builds. Like Marvell's speaker who finally becomes impatient with his "Coy Mistress" and proposes to "rear our pleasures with rough strife / Through the iron gates of life," the seducer in "Tonight's the Night" tells the child that she would be a "fool" to resist him.76 He demands, "Spread your wings and let me come inside."77

The song aroused limited opposition but was not banned (or, for that matter, heavily criticized) either in the United Kingdom or United States, despite its unsettling directness. But why? The following is a typical comment from the interesting website Songfacts.com: "I've heard this song a million times but never listened to the words before. I always thought it was a cheesy Rod Stewart song (as most of his songs are), but then I actually listened to the lyrics for the first time today when I heard it on the car radio."78 The implication appears to be that if you record enough "cheesy" songs, you can, with relative impunity, place on the top 40 a song that celebrates a deliberate deflecting.

Another theme in Stewart's songs is that of a young man who seeks to escape from an obsessive sexual relationship with a mature woman. Stewart has claimed that the lyrics for "Maggie May" offer "more or less a true story about the first woman I had sex with."79 But even without this autobiographical claim, the song would be unusual in several respects. First, its perspective is that of the exploited younger person rather than that of the predatory adult. Glancing at the calendar, the young man tells the older woman that he is overdue at his school. Second, the young man's odd aubade, in which he declares that the direct sun of the early morning cruelly reveals the wrinkles in his lover's face, offers an account of the exploitation and indicts the exploiter. Having sought a friend, the young man found someone who "turned into a
lover, and, mother, what a lover.”86 She has drawn him away from all that is familiar and exhausted him. Now, he wishes that he had never seen her face. The song ends indecisively with the young man pondering several options (he might “get on back to school”) but choosing none.87

A more experienced and thoughtful perspective on youthful desire emerges in British rock from the February 1981 hit by Sting and the Police, “Don’t Stand So Close to Me.”88 Here, the singer is a raconteur who understands and sympathizes with the mutual desire that draws an inexperienced teacher and his young student to what must inevitably be a bad end. The refrain, “Don’t stand, don’t stand so close to me,” expresses the failing sense of self-preservation that the teacher attempts to maintain,89 but his favoritism in class becomes apparent, and the friends of the teacher’s obvious favorite grow jealous. A moral and professional precipice appears before teacher and student on a rainy afternoon. Having struggled with the frustration of his desire, the teacher sees the girl half his age standing at a bus stop, getting wet, as he drives by in his comfortable car. As a result of what follows—and what does happen is not made clear—there is gossip in the classroom and censure in the halls. Accused by his colleagues, the teacher “starts to shake and cough” like the apprehended protagonist in Vladimir Nabokov’s novel of sexual precociousness and adult despair, Lolita.90

Unaware of the precedent established by the song’s close harmony, its major key assurance of optimism and energy, a composer beginning to set this lyric from scratch might instead choose a very different approach, one with gravity commensurate to the subject. But Sting and the Police know what they are doing. The real tragedy of the events described lies not in their singularity or profundity, but in their everydayness, their banality. The Police consign teacher and teacher’s pet to an inevitable humiliation already under way before the song ends. There is nothing to be done.

“AND IN THE END . . .”

This brief overview has revealed a broad spectrum, from songs that assert a determination to perpetuate the innocence of young lovers in an ideal marriage to those that describe or admonish the sexual abuse of the young by the mature.

At one end can be found the smarmy 1962 hit entitled “Paul and Paula” and sung by Paul and Paula.91 The male voice advances a plaintive, simpering proposal of marriage. Unlike other variations on this theme, “Paul” wants to marry “Paula” for all the right reasons. Because he will never find anyone else that will suffice, Paul has patiently waited for their graduation from high school. Now he can’t wait any longer. Fortunately for Paul, Paula whines in response that she has been waiting, too, in the belief that their love will “always be real.”92 Joining their voices in affirming the confidence and complacency of requited love, they sing a hymn to the ideals of marriage, which includes “being together the whole day through.”93

The other extreme? Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing to the present day, there are many examples rich in “reproductive themes” that illustrate the categories identified by Hobbs and Gallup. Even if we attend only to distant descendents of songs of the 1950s concerned with “robbin’ the cradle,” the list is long and the lyrics startlingly bold. Gone are the euphemisms and far distant effort to cloak the transgressive in musical camouflage. There now appears a clear intent to overtstep, disturb, and seek confrontation. And unlike the songs of the 1950s and 1960s, which often manage to direct attention away from their lyrics, the often monotonous and unremarkable accompaniments in many of the later songs make their lyrics conspicuous. In contrast to the narrative reticence characteristic of songs documenting irregular relationships, there emerges more and more frequently an unmistakable confidence, a swagger in the sexual claims that are made. And such claims often involve young girls.

A few examples must suffice. In the 1977 album by Kiss, Love Gun, the compelling attraction is “Christine Sixteen.”94 The singer insists that while he does not make a habit of approaching young girls, when he sees Christine leaving her school, he knows that he must have her. Infatuated, he must “give her what I’ve got.”95 This infatuation turns out not to be an issue for the singer, who says, “She’s hot every day and night, there is no doubt about it.”96

The title of a 1980 song by Motorhead, “Jailbait,” suffices to introduce the familiar topic again, but it may not sufficiently prepare one for the exploitative claims the song develops.97 The object of the singer’s affections is a “teenage baby,” a “sweet young thing” who is still under the influence of her mother.98 She is so young that the man will not risk asking either her age or her name. She has somehow found a way to the singer’s dressing room, and that is all it takes for him. She may be “jailbait,” but he “just can’t wait.”99

“All in the Name of Rock ’n’ Roll” (1987), by the American band Mötley Crüe, could hardly be more direct.100 Following the first line of the song, which identifies the girl as fifteen, the lyrics summarily dismiss any issue of legality. That has never been a concern, and it is not a concern now. The singer admits his vulnerability to the girl’s power when he says, “I try like hell but I’m out of control.”101 But the perfect cradle-robbing fantasy requires the assignment of initiative to the young girl. Sure enough, she tells the singer that she will be his “nasty” anytime he wants.102 Two years later, the same band takes up the topic again in “Slice of Your Pie.”103 While some ambiguity may emerge regarding the age of the woman who is desired by the singer—there may well be more than one woman—the opening is unambiguous. Should he be apprehended, her youth will make him liable to prosecution. This song is less confrontational than “All in the Name . . .,” as it prefers the jazz penchant for double entendre to overt reference, but it, too, suggests the likelihood of exploitation. On the same album, Dr. Feelgood, we find the less ambiguous “She Goes Down.” This song commends the talents of “Little Miss Muffets,” who offers “sweet girl’s school stuff.”104

Among the other many songs that extend the spectrum is “Hot for Teacher” (1984), by Van Halen, in which the narrative is provided not by a predatory adult but by the underage student. He thinks his “homework” with his teacher is an opportunity to make up for lost time.105 And there is “Seventeen” (1988), by the group Winger, in which the confrontation with “Daddy” (either the girl’s father or her procurer) is singularly direct.106 Whatever her real age, “She’s old enough for me.”107
What began in the 1950s and 1960s as teasing, suggestive, and only indirectly threatening invocations of romantic attraction across significant age gaps has evolved into a music saturated with irregular sexuality and often bereft of nuance and charm. It would be misleading to suggest that none of these songs attracted negative attention. For example, as previously noted, Stewart's song prompted (ineffective) calls that the song be banned in England for the suggestiveness of its lyrics, and "Hot for Teacher," released as a music video showing a "teacher" stripping, aroused some opposition. It would also be unjust to give the impression that such songs are in every way unappealing. For instance, the opening drum solo on "Hot for Teacher" would be a tour de force whatever the lyrics of the song to follow. But it is fair to say that the acceptance of transgressive lyrics in the 1950s and 1960s for the reasons we have considered did, in some sense, prepare the ground for the remarkably open field that far more disturbing, far more direct, and far more transgressive songs have exploited and on which they continue to thrive.

Even the implied malice of "Young Blood," which seems remarkably dark and direct in the context of the music of the 1950s, seems fairly tame in contrast to more recent songs on the same topic. After all, in the song by the Coasters, a father's threat is sufficient to discourage the presumably unwanted attentions of the young girl's pursuers. But fathers are apparently not allowed backstage in the latter part of the century, and the attentions of the rock heroes who congregate there, at least so far, are the stars themselves believe, are very much in demand.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The limited observations we have considered on the basis of a necessarily highly selective sample are hardly conclusive. Rather, they suggest lines of inquiry that invite further pursuit. For instance, a future study of the issues discussed in this chapter could examine the complex relationship between evolving national ethics and popular music. It would be fascinating to consider, for instance, why an increasingly insistent emphasis in rock music on the desirability of young women, for the most part ignored by the broader public, has developed in the context of an unprecedented expansion of access to pornography, on the one hand, and a vigorous commitment to the prosecution of child pornography, on the other. It would also be revealing to compare evocations of sexuality in general, and transgressive sexuality in particular, in popular traditions that antedate and have influenced rock 'n' roll: jazz, rhythm and blues, rockabilly, and even some indigenous folk music. The suggestion made here, that music can, under some circumstances, desensitize listeners to issues raised in the lyrics through the anodyne of performances and arrangements, deserves further scrutiny and more detailed analysis. Only a broader discussion addressing such ancillary, yet compelling, issues could lead us closer to answering the question asked by "Robbin' the Cradle": "Is it strange for true love to be so young?"

**NOTES**

14. Zinnemann, *Oklahoma!*
REFERENCES


3

Resistance Stance against Commodification: Bad Religion and the Punk Rock Protest Music They Make

Sarah L. DeLury

As one of the last vestiges of old-school, relevant, and popular punk rock bands, Bad Religion has an undisputable place on a proverbial center stage, where they continue to vocalize their opinions and captivate minds with ideas that will one day affect social change. Not all protesters have to take to the streets or stand behind barricades in picket lines. Some stand tall and proud, microphone in hand, in front of thousands of fans, singing important messages to eager listeners. And while Bad Religion’s songs against capitalism and commercialization present their greatest form of sociopolitical resistance against oppression, their protest songs captivate the minds and interests of their attentive listeners. Through various songs that emphasize the perils of capitalism, Bad Religion expresses distress over American greed, but also global excess, commercialization, and individual and cultural commodification. It is not difficult to see how each social ill is directly tied to the excesses of capitalism; this is what Bad Religion so eloquently critiques with its music.

WHAT IS “PUNK” ANYWAY?

How can one properly define the word punk in this day and age? While it was once used to refer only to attitude and personal style, the term punk has since morphed to describe a variety of music, people, fashion, and communities. As Nicolas Roebes suggests in A Cultural Dictionary of Punk: 1974–1982, this broad and complex definition opposes the narrow and simple characterization of this concept as a "worthless; decidedly inferior; displeasing; [and] "rotten" culture.1 Such a negative definition of the word is ubiquitous and popular, since, according to Roebes, many critics represent “punk” in the same derogatory terms as a word that signifies “a stupid person,” “a no-good, a waster, a person of no importance,” and perhaps most
unjustly, "a coward, passive person; [and] a nonfighter." One cannot say that every individual who identifies themselves as "punk," or who feels themselves most aligned with a "punk" identity, does or does not meet any of these definitions. "Punk," in its truest form, does not represent individuals or stylistic representations of identity; while it can be demonstrated through individuals and their personal style preferences, it is most knowable and recognizable as a form of music. By examining the major characteristics of punk rock through music, one quickly discovers the music to be anything but worthless, inferior, or rotten. A similar analysis on the makers of such music shows that the producers of punk rock are not stupid, cowardly, passive, or pacifistic.

Punk rock began as a slap to the face of many stunned observers and conventions, for example, corporate music production agencies, bourgeois ideals and social constraints, and constricting outdated social norms, which were too weak to defend themselves against change. According to John Rahn, punk was and is an "integral part of life for many people, but it is also a cultural initiator; to like [punk], to like a certain kind of [punk] rather than another, is also a way of life, a manner of reacting; it is a whole set of tastes and attitudes." As American punk was springing into existence, British punk music emerged as an outcry for the working class; English bands sang on behalf of working people, expressing a common anger with the ruling governmental systems and claiming their right to exist as they needed to, all the while incorporating their choice of clothing, style, and music. Beyond simply representing this class, punk artists had "class anger, but [were] not militant." By contrast, American punk rock, which developed much along the same lines as British punk rock, followed a more militant path that reflected the tumultuous nature of the American political system, as well as the extreme differences found because of U.S. regionalism. Instead of forming into a specific and definable genre of music, with one theme or one form of representation, similar to the newly emerging representations of knowable forms—pop, jazz, rock, or rap—various punk subcultures were springing up in major U.S. cities, each with different musical tones, styles, images, and principles that limited not only the genres' simple classification but also their ability to be easily commodified.

In regional terms, the pioneers of American punk rock have long been seen as split, much like rap and hip-hop musicians on the East Coast and West Coast of the United States. Yet, the punk artists were not limited to only New York and California. From the 1970s onward, the nation as a whole saw an increase in the formation of punk bands. Cleveland saw the formation of the pivotal punk band Electric Eels, and Washington, D.C., witnessed the rise of Fugazi. During this period, many other punk bands emerged in garages, basements, clubs, and schools throughout the United States. East Coast and West Coast bands, however, offered the most influential and lasting styles. The Ramones and New York Dolls in New York represented the "New York Punk, [an] avant-garde, arty" style of punk rock. Meanwhile, in California, bands like Bad Religion and The Adolescents formed, bringing to life the California standard of punk that was seen as "destructive" and "extreme." From these two styles of punk, new adaptations developed in the United States from the early 1970s through the 1980s: today's punk rock adaptations or evolutionary outgrowths of these older styles of punk have come to reflect the "persistent nemesis of the authoritarianism that emerged in the 1970s and expanded and intensified throughout the 1980s and 1990s." Although regionalism still exists in modern punk rock, commercialization has changed the degree to which location influences style.

In accordance with the growth of commodity exchange and production, the "avant-garde" standard of much of New York's punk rock became highly absorbed into popular music styles and was further refined to fit into culturally appreciated forms of revenue. The flash and glitz that some early punk rockers pioneered lasted throughout the 1970s and continue to have a strong influence on contemporary American music and culture. But not all bands created themselves around knowable forms of avant-garde; instead, some bands, most notably the Ramones and Bad Religion, formed a new form of avant-garde expressionism. By mixing pieces and parts of old and new fashions, both commodities for trade and art in life, these bands began to represent a new form of avant-garde music that now can simply be called "punk." And still, beginning in the mid-1990s, punk rock of the avant-garde style offered record companies and other industries a new means of production and reward. The old avant-garde attitude was mixed with the newer punk style of being, bringing to life through highly experimental art and artistic representations of identity a new genre that at once mimicked and exaggerated previous avant-garde representations in both life and art.

But like all good acts of rebellion, both forms, the old avant-garde and the newer style of "punk," were quickly being assimilated into mainstream culture. As this new genre of punk rock became absorbed into popular media, people began to view punk rock as accessible. Where punk music used to be seen as very avant-garde and aggressive, it was now perceived as a popular and accepted form of social expression. Through this social shift, punk rock lost most of its edge and abrasiveness. We currently accept these extreme forms of avant-garde styles as artistic expression; Lady Gaga's meat dress, worn at the 2010 MTV Music Video Awards, would have stunned and shocked a less accepting cultural climate had the avant-garde extremes of the past not been exploited by modern industries and fan bases. Gaga, like many other artists, avant-garde or otherwise, wore the dress not merely to demonstrate her intensely interesting fashion sense, but also, and more importantly, to express a firm belief. During an appearance on the Ellen DeGeneres show, Gaga explained that the "dress was worn in part as a statement of protest against the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, adding, "if we don't stand up for what we believe in and if we don't fight for our rights, pretty soon we're going to have as much rights as the meat on our own bones. And I am not a piece of meat." Were it not for the extreme bands of earlier American generations, we would not see these new forms of intense avant-garde representation in such great numbers. Yet, past punk rock pioneers did not simply influence avant-garde attitudes or style. It is easy to stop at the avant-garde styles that confront us on a daily basis, but when
we take a closer look at the cultural influence of punk rock music, we find a deeply rooted desire to be a living representation of experimental art and more of a movement aimed at fighting against oppressive systems.

Throughout the first decade or so of the twenty-first century, punk music and punk listeners have focused large efforts on fighting for change. One such event can be seen in Punk voter, a movement described by Sam Howard-Spink on the online collaborative journal *First Monday* as a coalition of punk bands, musicians, and record labels formed in October 2003 to educate, register, and mobilize 500,000 young people to vote in the upcoming presidential election. On their webpage, Howard-Spink states that their purposes draw on the history of punk as a “force for grassroots political activism and social agitation.” In a similar vein, Howard-Spink writes:

Punk voter was founded by Fat Mike, singer-songwriter of NOFX and owner of Fat Wreck Records, and boasts such punk alums as Wayne Kramer of the MC5 and Jello Biafra, formerly of the Dead Kennedys, as well as many contemporary acts. Its mission is derived from the belief that, “music has always been ahead of societal change and a major influence on both the culture and the politics of the day. Punk rock is about taking an in-your-face attitude…to rebel against the problems of our society. It is time to engage the punk rock spirit in today’s political battles.”

Looking at punk rock music and its various influences in this way, the avant-garde representations are seen as powerful means to display dissatisfaction with oppressive systems. But that is merely a display; when we consider more deeply the reasons behind all avant-garde expression, especially in this light, we understand that the display is the introduction to the message, the first rhetorical principle used to pull people more deeply into the message. To understand the true anger at play, one needs only to dig deeper into the music.

California-styled punk rock has not been exempt from cultural absorption. It began as an extreme, abrasive, and destructive form of punk rock, and, like other forms of punk music, it also demonstrated substantial doses of social awareness in the music. Perhaps more than any other American punk style, California “punk rock is rooted in the word and often expresses vocal critiques of the dominant political establishment of the United States.” As the commodification of punk rock took hold, however, some of California’s destructive, socially aware style shifted.

Green Day is a perfect example of this California commodification of style and image. In their beginning stages, Green Day was neither too destructive nor too extreme, existing instead somewhere between the fine line of cultural capital and discontent to current social and cultural issues. Their brand of easygoing, pop punk rock soon came to represent punk’s current cultural incarnation. Commercial and easy enough to listen to, Green Day came of age during a period when punk was pushed out of its old skin and acquired a new shell characterized by tattoos, mohawks, eyeliner, and oversized facial piercings. As one of the “best-selling punk groups of the 1990s, Green Day,” or even “Offspring, clearly belie this notion [that previous punk never happened] in building on Bad Religion, a group that emerged precisely when punk was written off.”

As this quotation suggests, there is more to the present state of California’s style of punk rock than commodities exchange or commodification can account for. It is hardly useful to deny that a true market exists for the commodified products of punk cultures and punk music. Yet, it is crucial to note that there are bands that still refuse easy commodification and work hard to retain some semblance of a true punk nature. As Nehring points out, still present in one of California’s founding punk rock bands was the abrasive, extreme style that made its punk rock famous.

Bad Religion lies outside the principles of commodification that have smothered punk rock music. Ray Hogan, music journalist, noted in his review of the album *New Maps of Hell* that Bad Religion is “one of the few veteran punk acts that is still relevant.” Yet, one wonders how authentic and true Bad Religion’s music is today or how the band can still be considered punk with a founding band member who serves as CEO of a major independent record company. Bad Religion has consistently produced California-style punk rock music; the music began as extreme, with its dedication of expressing a deeply rooted and intensely critical view of social and cultural issues, and it has remained this way to this day. Their lyrics have always commented on social issues, and they have yet to waver on their intention to produce a style of punk rock music that goes beyond simple listening and easy absorption into popular culture. Unlike other bands of the day, Bad Religion was not absorbed into a cultural commodification; they did not change their image to fit a cultural niche, nor did they attempt to market their image as a commodity. And while Bad Religion has garnered commercial success, when compared to other popular, mainstream bands, they have remained as they were when they formed, punk rock musicians using their music to call attention to a plight and make a stance against injustice and ignorance.

**MUSIC TRANSCENDING CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AS PROTEST THEMES TAKE HOLD**

Founded in 1979 in the So-Cal style of punk rock, Bad Religion has been churning out music without reprieve ever since. Essential to understanding what has kept the band relevant and ever important in the punk rock community is the understanding that their music does more than convey the ever-popular punk rock image. Instead of adjusting themselves to the changing whims of consumer culture, Bad Religion has maintained its image and style, static but never stale. Juxtaposed against bands like Green Day, with their tight black clothes, black spaghetti hair, and smudged black eyeliner, members of Bad Religion are comfortable in jeans and T-shirts that defy easy marketing in popular markets. Where other bands let their image speak for their music, Bad Religion lets their music speak for itself, and lets their image be nothing more than who they were and are day-to-day.
In addition, outside of the conventional fashion of the punk rock community is Bad Religion’s place as punk’s most intelligent band. Greg Graffin, a founding member of the band, concentrated not only on musical production, but also on attaining the highest level of education, culminating in his Ph.D. in zoology from Cornell University. Another impressive aspect is his concentration in evolutionary biology and the fact that he is busy teaching at UCLA or Cornell University when he is not touring. Brett Gurewitz, the second founding member of the band, established and heads one of punk rock’s most successful independent labels—Epitaph Records. The education of Graffin and the success of Gurewitz’s Epitaph Records, however, are not the principal forces that have catapulted Bad Religion to the position they maintain; their song lyrics, as riveting as they are shocking, have allowed the group to continue to make relevant music that addresses key social issues even as it entertains. Commenting on a vast array of social issues, including consumer culture and the need to resist commodification, organized religion, complacency, and idealism, to name just a few, Bad Religion sustains itself as one of the only popular punk rock bands that has stuck to its sociopolitical roots.

The name Bad Religion alone carries extreme and destructive connotations. Some could find the band’s name antagonizing. Yet, like many of their songs, the band’s name works on many levels. To read Bad Religion without a critical thought, one could first assume that the band represents the sentiment that religion is bad. Someone else could go even further and say that a band with that name seeks to undermine popular religions. Still another could insist that the name Bad Religion, coupled with its most recognizable symbol (a black cross encircled with a bright red circle and band that crosses out the cross) directly mocks organized religion. This symbol, as much as the band’s name, offers these simple explanations. Yet, when we view the name and the symbols more critically, we can see larger, less straightforward messages being put forth. One way of understanding this name and popular symbol would be to demand that we see past power or powerful symbols and think critically about what we deem powerful and all-knowing. Crossing out the highest religious symbol in our world, the band is asking us to think more critically about all that their symbol and name represent. Considering the band’s true motives more deeply helps to alleviate any initial repulsion and suspicion toward them. As explained by the band’s front man, Greg Graffin, Bad Religion seeks to symbolize society’s blind faith in negative sources:

Faith in your partner, your fellow men, your friends is very important because without it, there’s no mutual component to your relationship, and relationships are important. So faith plays an important role, but faith in people you don’t know, faith in religious or political leaders or even people on stages, people who are popular in the public eye, you shouldn’t have faith in those people. You should listen to what they have to say and use it. It might give you some ideas on how to view the world, but ultimately you have to base your views on evidence. Evidence comes from your own eyes and ears. But of course this [philosophy] is in a society where the concept of ‘cool’ doesn’t apply, and unfortunately we’re far away from that.¹⁵

In choosing a name so fraught with meaning, the members of Bad Religion ensured that their messages would speak volumes. What at once felt so extreme, with proper critical reflection, feels rational and proper. Faith in people and communities can bring about a better life. Yet, by focusing human need on blind spiritual, cultural, or political faith, humans have enacted a “bad religion.” This “bad religion” has allowed for a world full of misguided faith, hurtful direction, and, ultimately, failure. Analyzing just part of one of the band’s songs, “Faith Alone,” brings this meaning to lyrical life.¹⁶ Situating the song first from an individual hearing a sermon in an empty church, the track goes on to detail the restricted relationships available in centers of blind faith. Throughout the song, it is noted that neither the religious people nor the sinning people in them could offer the insight and direction needed for the individual. What the individual finds is that faith alone can’t solve any issues; being cajoled to see the world through rose-colored glass can’t truly enact change.¹⁷ But blind faith, in this sense and in this song, doesn’t simply extend to the religiousness around us; within the song, Bad Religion asks us to see how faith attached to any mechanism of power isn’t enough to make the mechanism enact power. It is not the faith, but the people, who can really ever resolve conflicted situations. Blind faith in science, the progress it will bring, and in a market that promises stability and prosperity are just as questionable as faith alone in an empty pulpit. As “Faith Alone” shows, Bad Religion’s music is not simply a catchy form of punk rock; they combine hard-hitting, catchy music with lyrics aimed at addressing complex and important issues. Within this song, we don’t find the band singling out any one organization or party responsible for current issues. Instead, “Faith Alone” asks listeners to see the variety of issues and potentially catastrophic consequences of taking things on faith alone. In some cases, while their songs may not directly cite a specific issue that the band is for or against, careful listening yields an understanding of the song’s plural meanings.

When the band released its first full-length album in 1982, How Could Hell Be Any Worse, many eager fans were introduced to a new style of California punk rock. Their musical style was relatable to the California punk bands they tried to emulate, yet this album opened minds to a style of punk rock that was more thought-provoking than the lighter, more easily commodified styles of punk that formed since Bad Religion’s beginnings. By 1988, Bad Religion had released its second full-length punk record, Suffer. Like most of the other styles of punk that were produced during this period, many of Bad Religion’s songs criticized the Regan administration. Speaking to the constant environment of paranoia, excess, greed, and ignorance, Bad Religion stood up against Reaganomics and its entire administration’s efforts by releasing Suffer. One song off that album that conveys the anger and desire for change felt by the band is “Land of Competition.”¹⁸

Looking very briefly at the song, we quickly discover that Bad Religion may not have named President Reagan in the song, but the vibe of the song undercut the land of competition he and his political party had sought to create in the United States. This notion of a land of competition can be applied to any one place, in
many specific times, but in California, during the 1980s, an intense movement toward competition began, spurred onward by the ideology and rhetoric employed by President Reagan and his administration. Such a subtle and simple song speaks volumes about the anger felt by the band and countless listeners adversely affected by Reagan's trickle-down economics, welfare-mother views, lackluster space initiatives, and countless other situations. Instead of accepting the blind assumption that progress is a forward movement, the band uses this song to instead propose that progress is really regression dressed up nice in a suit and tie, denoting not regressive properties, but some fake semblance of development. As the song continues, the band notes that individualism in such a land of competition is not a valued and beneficial thing; instead, individualism becomes a cloning of sorts, with each competitor fighting the other for the commodities, market control, and an often unattainable prosperity. Attempting to dispel this myth of a beneficial land of competition, the band asks listeners to understand that no one really "has it all," and the best we can ever hope for is to "turn to [ourselves] for the rest." Simply stated, the song hopes to get listeners to see that individual interests rooted in human desires rather than competitive, market-produced interests will better enable each person to pursue a successful life in a country made up to look like a "Land of Competition." We don't have to continue to fight one another to attain what the Other has; rather, we should see competition for what it is, a manufactured thing aimed at making the market, not the individual, succeed.

The beauty that lies in songs like "Land of Competition" is that while they may specifically relate to the political climate of 1988, songs are timeless and insightful. This timelessness may be what is most interesting about Bad Religion. According to Hegel, music that is in touch with the spirit of the time (Zeitgeist) is crucial to aesthetic self-realization. Great music crystallizes the Zeitgeist. It provides stimuli that can lead to emotional and historical truths. Fitting into the Zeitgeist of the time of the production of each album and still remaining relevant to the Zeitgeist of later periods, Bad Religion's crystallization of the Zeitgeist does not end on the production date. In this vein, Graffin argues in the liner notes to his 2004 release, *The Empire Strikes First*, that although they are specific to some current issue, "songs are universal enough that in ten years' time they should still hold up quite well." Looking at the lyrics from the title track of that album, "The Empire Strikes First," listeners are able to truly understand this timelessness of songs. No specific date or time is given, nor are specific situations mentioned; rather, the song asks that listeners see, with each time they listen, that each person, "the lunatic, the hypocrite, are all lost in the fray." The Empire, the thing controlling all of us at any time (it's up to each listener to supply the meaning to "the Empire"), holds the key to the discovery of happiness and security, but what the song also demonstrates well is that "the Empire will never relent its control, as "The masses of humanity have always had to suffer" under the Empire's power." What the song asks us to understand is that relying on some sort of superficial salvation from such an entity as an Empire will only continue the suffering of the masses. This is a notion that has been repeated in time, allowing the Zeitgeist contained therein to become elastic, expanding to fit into current moments and experiences.

Moreover, such issues as elastic meaning allow Bad Religion's music to comment beyond specific political or social issues. The band's lure derives from the range of issues that they have continued to address in their music. World history has shown us that rarely have twenty years passed without the majority of the population suffering in one way or another. Since industrial development in the United States, and perhaps even as far back as the colonizing of the United States began, the businessman, the group with all the money, or the 1 percent in our current age, creates and controls the master plans we all must attempt to live through. Each item described by the band links our time to a past time, from twenty years ago to as far back as hundreds of years ago. The band's songs speak about the reoccurring of the Empire's long-exulted power and control over ordinary people. For instance, the song "The Empire Strikes First" asks us to see the madness in letting this empiric control continue. As we link ourselves to the seemingly timeless problems of this song, we are thus better able to think about the ways we make ourselves suffer and the small steps against power that we all can take toward creating a world with far less suffering.

One of the best songs that articulate Bad Religion's quest to sway public opinion and put itself in opposition to the accepted status quo of the general American public is "Against the Grain." Through this song, Bad Religion sets itself indefinitely inside the protest community, attempting to call attention to the constraining norms and expectations championed by powerful people whose ideologies push them to limit the rights and freedoms of the common man. In her definition of protest songs, Deena Weinstein argues that "broadly speaking, the protest in protest songs means an opposition to a policy, an action against the people in power that is grounded in a sense of injustice." Close examination of "Against the Grain" helps the listener understand Bad Religion's position in the protest genre. In this song, we find not only a call to go "against the grain," which is simply to say do not fall in line with conventional operation and power systems, but also a critique of expansionism and the destruction of environment, as well as a call to act against socially set standards of opinion and thoughts. Here, another clarification is required. John Street makes a distinction between musicians or groups and protest singers of political activists, stating:

One might be called political activists and the other political argument or polemic. The first describes the case of people who happen to be musicians, and as such have acquired a public presence or status [that] they can use to support causes or candidates. The second captures the case of those who use their music to give expression to their political view.

As protesters giving a voice to those who wish to go against the grain, Bad Religion is providing a new depth to an old mantra and is thus demonstrating that it is not only possible to go against the grain, but it is also favorable when compared alongside simply falling in line with it. Through this brief analysis, we can easily
recognize Bad Religion as Street’s second type of musician or group. They have criticized and brought attention to issues through their music for years, but they have never allowed their personal politics to affect their music. That is not to say that they have not campaigned in their own way for specific issues or political representation. Yet, if they have done so, it has always come second to their music and the messages they put forth and champion therein.

Despite the ever-shifting nature of both mainstream and underground punk rock, Bad Religion has consistently held its place in punk rock protest communities. Graffin explains, saying, “Whether or not punk is the flavor of the month is not important for us. . . . The genre punk itself [is] a new form of folk music, because there’s always a new generation of people who feel that they don’t fit in society and people who are skeptical about the world they live in.” By focusing their music on those members of society who feel they don’t fit in and find themselves skeptical of everything around them, Bad Religion’s provocative nature is always in style. From their first record to *The Dissent of Man* (2011), Bad Religion has continued to challenge listeners with their thought-provoking themes. As a new form of folk musicians, the group has taken up the protest aims of many styles of traditional American folk music. This is not to suggest that all folk music speaks about political turmoil and societal unrest. Yet, the folk music tradition to which Bad Religion can be linked is one that has long championed the rights and needs of the people, asking listeners to hear and understand sentiments they already know. Graffin himself notes that the main point of Bad Religion’s music is “to make catchy songs that are infectious but make you think.”

Thinking takes center stage, while the catchy elements of the music simply supply fuel to the fire of the message within. The message and music become one, melded together with a driving force that few bands have attained.

The thought process required of listeners has allowed Bad Religion to thrive as it flies below the mainstream radar. Harmon notes that the band’s album *The Process of Belief* (2002) serves as a testament to Bad Religion’s longevity. . . . At a time when rock bands string together obscenities and call it song, Bad Religion continues Graffin’s goal. . . . In one album the band touches on politics, depression, and religious dogma. . . . Such diversity makes it hard to categorize Bad Religion, which is probably why it hasn’t achieved widespread commercial appeal.”

Like other individuals enacting forms of protest, Bad Religion uses diversity of lyrics to present a wide range of topics. Beyond lyrics, Graffin has refined his singing style to a form of rhetorical exchange with the audience. James R. Irvine and Walter G. Kirpatrick explain this phenomenon, stating that the “musical artist is engaged in a rhetorical exchange to which he manipulates a symbol (sound, rhythm, words, and tempo) to react to and modify the dominant philosophical, political, religious, and aesthetic values of both general and specific audiences.”

By using this rhetorical style, Bad Religion has been able to create a catalog of music that places itself outside the mainstream, both musically and culturally, which has given them a unique position as cultural influencers. James M. Jasper incorrectly assumes that, others who manage to influence cultural meaning—even while they are shaped by them—can usually do so because they have access to the news media: They are news-makers. These may be police officials who make statements, funders of social research, politicians who hold public hearings or professional groups that call press conferences. [Or] they may simply be celebrities interested in an issue.”

Under the radar of the mainstream, Bad Religion exerts its influence specifically because it is not a news-making source. It is true that reviews, interviews, and articles may be written about the band. Yet, in Jasper’s view, the band does not influence cultural meaning by making news. Instead, they influence cultural meaning through a diverse presentation of lyrics and a blunt refusal not to become what the superstructure around them tells them they should be or do what it tells them to do.

**A REFUSAL TO BE COMMODIFIED**

Without question, Bad Religion’s music acts as a critique on social and political issues. As such, the band represents the best-known form of protest punk rock. According to Jasper, “[p]rotestors have varying goals. . . . They hold multiple goals simultaneously, their goals change over time.” Yet, Bad Religion does not fit nicely into Jasper’s definition of protesters’ goals, since the band’s objectives are unspecific and unstated; their protest functions in the form of thought, not specified directives or identifiable goals. As Johnny Temple notes, “The greatest contributions of today’s punk lies in changing minds, spreading an anticorporate message in a culture whose dominant voices are MTV veejays and athletes adorned with the Nike Swoosh.” Simply by singing year after year, album after album, about the ills of our society, economic and political systems, and cultural practices, Bad Religion has inspired fans and casual listeners alike to become educated about issues. By listening to a Bad Religion song, an individual is initiated into a new form of thought.

Introducing the notion of protest to listeners, Bad Religion has spent more than three decades cultivating the minds of maturing generations. Thoughts, the first step toward action and involvement, enable Bad Religion’s listeners to become more active and insightful members of their communities. Songs like “A Walk,” from the album *The Grey Race*, impel listeners to take their own walks, both figuratively and literally, by seeing the world for themselves, from their own perspective, and developing a plan for independence as they walk on and on.

From the album *The Empire Strikes First*, the song “To Another Abyss” joins listeners in the band’s lament of issues that affect all of us (from what directions our lives should take to what beliefs and values we should adhere to). Released in 2004, this song remains relevant. We can all stand together and ponder the enduring questions raised in the piece: Where is the American Dream we were promised? Is all we
find in this world an abyss of nothingness? What about Medicare? What about our social security, welfare, schools, jobs, women's rights, and homes? What about the security promised to us by a long-decaying American ideal? Songs like "To Another Abyss" address these issues and demand, with such intense and moving messages, that we join together, at least under the common banner of appreciating the band's music. By creating songs that link a larger audience, a vast community of people who will never speak or meet, Bad Religion's music enables listeners to act in their own communities as they interact in their band's community.

Although Bad Religion has garnered commercial success, the band has remained as it was when it was formed—punk rockers who do not easily fit into the culturally defined punk image. Bad Religion has had few songs that have been played on mainstream radio stations. "Infected," "Sorrow," "Broken," "The Process of Belief," "Dearly Loved," and "New Maps of Hell" represent the most played Bad Religion radio songs, and even these are played most often on college radio stations, not on top-40 stations. Of sixteen albums and hundreds of songs, only a handful have ever been presented to the general public via mass media outlets; in fact, "today there's only a minimal chance that any music fan—young or old—will encounter through any major media outlet the songs of protest that continue to spring up from the punk underground."38

As one of the founding bands on Epitaph records, Bad Religion has been able to use Epitaph's connections and influence to further their music and message, just as the band has allowed Epitaph to elevate its own status as an independent record label. Beyond Epitaph, Bad Religion had long been a part of the commercially popular Vans Warped Tour. The group often stood out as the least commercialized, yet still popular, band on the tour, giving both credibility and authenticity to the journey. Different from other popular punk bands, Bad Religion's influence does not derive from commercial means, but from their own innovations. The band always represents itself as more authentic and credible than other punk bands because they avoid commercialization and because "punk activism has always existed outside most progressive political channels, and its subversive undercurrents have, for the most part, been unrecognized," allowing Bad Religion to retain its underground status.39

By immersing their music with complex meanings that speak to a variety of timeless issues, the group has set itself apart from the more easily commodifiable punk bands. By calling attention to commercialism, vacant power structures and vacant promises from the powerful, and a myriad of other issues, Bad Religion has ensured that those who most easily control music, bands, images, or minds could not hope to commodify them.

To fully understand why Bad Religion has not become a commodity, we must evaluate how popular music becomes one. Ray Pratt explains, writing the following:

> Popular music is one of a variety of cultural commodities (serving as commodity in both the sense of 'value' Marx distinguished in Capital as 'use' and 'exchange' values). People use these cultural commodities to define their identities and define as well a particular subculture or personal style. . . . Music can be so utilized because, among other things, it is a commodity. In the varieties of its popular forms, music serves as an item of exchange.40

Although Bad Religion markets materials relating to the band and its music, the individual members have not marketed their image. Beyond marketing such basic band materials as CDs, special boxed sets of specific collections, and clothing or other band-branded merchandise, the group does not include itself in its commodification. Only having released two official "collections" (Tested, in 2001, and All Ages, from 1995), out of sixteen albums, Bad Religion lets music remain its motivation, and the only finances that the group members worry about are the ones that they critique.

The excess that Bad Religion sings about dates back to the youth and adolescence of the band members. As the Cold War faded and Reaganomics took hold of American culture, these young men saw the devastating effects of "progressive" policies and legislation. Despite the poverty that crushed not only their own communities, but also one neighborhood after another across the nation, the citizens of the world had long been victims of media attempts at brainwashing ordinary people into commodified submission, instructing them to ignore their plight and seek more products. As the media bombarded American consumers with image after image, perceptions of need were continually altered. Not only were new technologies formed and advertised as necessities, but new products in every field also began popping up. Clothing trends, automobiles, diet fads, houses—everything we consider as a commodity today—were advertised on television and radio, and also through music. Band members became representations of genre communities; as these communities became reified, everything they produced began to emulate their commodity status. New forms of advertising, for example, music videos, inoculated new generations into commodities exchange. And still, there was a disconnect between what celebrity commodities were selling and what other artists and individuals were feeling.

By 1995, popular music assumed the facade of popular appeal. That same year, "142 songs . . . made it to number one on the pop charts. . . . Of these hits . . . six . . . directly addressed class or economics. It is interesting to note that four of these were rap, one was rhythm and blues, and one could be considered alternative or pop.44 The rest of the music rang out in agreement with the contemporary global situation, ignoring the plight of the underclass, its producers seeking only admittance into the world of opulence that came with popularity. In one year during this period, only six bands produced music with a message against the current sociopolitical and socioeconomic structures, while the rest fell to popular indulgences. In this age of perceived and somewhat imagined national affluence, Bad Religion again surfaced with a critique of the costs that affluence would exact from our society. Although Bad Religion does not often critique the individual members of society that bought into the excess, they found fault with people's inability to control their own lives, as demonstrated in their song "No Control."45 Here the band seeks to reveal the faux control individuals have of their lives in the United
States. Instead of placating listeners, the band firmly demonstrates that culture, and all that controls it, have the control; we little people may question and self-identify with our own motives and actions, but all too often we are controlled by outside forces.

“No Control” offers listeners an explanation as to why our actions are quick to fade into the oblivion of the past and only be repeated again in the future by demonstrating this external control levied against all the consumers throughout time. Time is an element of life that we understand as being uncontrollable, but within this song, Bad Religion goes further to demonstrate our lack of control by illustrating positions of powers as fleeting in and because of time. Even a king or someone who simply intends to conquer something only has so much time until their intentions and aims are fully taken out of their control. Even for less lofty individuals, time escapes all of us, often controlling aspects of our lives we don’t think about until it has taken them away. But even time is regulated by culture, or society, of even the worn-out analogy of Empire. Time itself does not set its standards; someone in control of its power sets the models, the arms on the watch that we all follow. Through a song like “No Control,” listeners can feel not only our lack of control, but also the universal nature of this reality.

Another song, “21st-Century Digital Boy,” offers a window into what the reality of the twenty-first century is, which is perfectly analogized as a “trampled flag on a city street” or a “symbolized bar code, quick ID.”44 As this song begins, we can already link ourselves to the qualities of the twenty-first century that the band is describing. Not only do we have quick-scan bar codes on our phones, but we use all symbolized bar codes with the unending discount cards we use at every store where we shop. We have become so linked to these bar codes that they have come to represent us for millions of companies buying our personal information and tracking our preferred shopping habits. Our flag (whichever flag listeners identify with) has become tattered and torn under the rise of commodification; the old glory of nations is diminished by the new plight of the world. Moving the song along, we begin to see more and more commonalities from our own lives or those broadcasted to us on media across the country, and we are able to understand these elements as regularly accruing events in our everyday lives. Images of lack of parental supervision, fading national glory, and a desire for everything that is not really needed but that takes over every want illustrate how banal twenty-first century existence is, just as the song reiterates earlier messages Bad Religion has offered. In “21st-Century Digital Boy,” the narrator says, “ Tried to tell you about no control / And then you told me how bad you had to suffer”44; therefore, while excess is a prominent theme in its music, Bad Religion makes weighty observations on the vast impact of commodification of society.

To understand the commodification of punk rock music, one can simply analyze a statement in which Fredric Jameson argues that, “ overt expressions of social and political defiance no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized.”45 Consumer culture has attempted to remove all originality and scandalous behavior from the punk identity, and, in most cases, it has succeeded. Popular forms of punk music radiate throughout the mass media markets. Whereas it once existed as an underground movement, punk has now taken center stage in music, television, videos, movies, and even books. Green Day still produces popular music. Yet, it has been supplanted as the most modern popular form of punk rock by newer and more institutionally accepted bands, including Middle Class Rut, Panic! at the Disco, The Gas Light Anthem, Rise Against, My Chemical Romance, Alkaline Trio, and Dropkick Murphys, all of which have gained some level of popular commercial success throughout the years. Graffin himself has commented on this commodification of image, style, and music by acknowledging that he is “not bitter” and saying the following:

But if you are aware of our culture, which I think I am, then you see how it’s becoming more and more superficial, and I’m addressing that. The media and television seem to take over people’s brains. [People] don’t want to see what happens in the real world. Their minds get corrupted by fashion. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying fashion, if it’s just a casual enjoyment, but it isn’t just that anymore; it has become compulsive.46

By acknowledging that his community, much like all of society, has become completely commodified, and by acknowledging that this is what the group seeks to address, Bad Religion becomes a strong protest against a society that suffers from commodification. Pushing every ounce of strength, the band calls attention to these negative acts and repels them from gaining more ground. Sheshman Sharma has stated that, “even artists must now bow to the environments to profit financially... The domination of nature does not lead to freedom for artists in the modern age; it leads to their loss of freedom and subservience to administrators.”47 Hence, it is easy to recognize Bad Religion as existing outside of that opinion. Brett Gurewitz, CEO of Epitaph records, is concerned, at least in that respect, with finances, but the band protests against such financialization of society as a whole. For the band, companies are not people. Companies can be financialized, but people cannot be made to symbolize all that a company does.

AN INCOMPLETE THOUGHT—WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The study of punk rock music is not simple and straightforward. How do we specifically choose what to study and why? This conundrum, relating even to a band like Bad Religion, is shown in John Charles Goshert’s following statement: “[H]ow are we to speak of alternative culture at a time in which words such as ‘alternative’ and ‘punk’ have themselves become the blue-chip terms of marketing popular culture?”48 He then goes on to state that the “ability of bands such as Green Day, Offspring, and Bad Religion to be first noticed and then marked as the exemplars of punk is necessarily problematic, for their renown arises from MTV, Spin magazine, Alternative Press, or other similar
industry outlets.\textsuperscript{49} Active listeners of Bad Religion would take exception to the band’s inclusion in these remarks because the group has not had the commercial success of Green Day or Offspring, nor have they been steady features on mass media outlets like MTV or Fuse. While Bad Religion has reaped some substantial economic benefits, it is important to note how long they produced music and toured before making such gains.

Unfortunately, there are few articles that have covered the band’s music, concerts, careers, and productions. Some material covers Greg Graffin’s education and Brett Gurewitz’s business accomplishments, but critics often ignore how Bad Religion’s main source of renown has come from extensive music production, longevity, and political awareness. Yet, “punk” has become a catchphrase in today’s cultures, and listening to punk music and labeling oneself a punk, with bright-colored hair, extravagant tattoos, and body piercings, is socially acceptable. So where and how does Bad Religion’s more important brand of punk fit into this development?

Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, along with John Charles Goshert, only understand the role of punk as an underground counterculture, whose members protest mainstream American values and standards in a subversive way; thus, they limit the potential of their argument by negating the emergence of punk rock from the underground. By arguing that the only true forms of punk rock hide hidden from popular view, they further dilute the message and viability of punk rock, reducing its role in the growing and vibrant protest community. This is made clear by their statement that, “when punk bands achieve mainstream success it seems to be indicative of corporate acceptance and the rejection of punk rock ideals.”\textsuperscript{50} Essential to the study of punk rock is the recognition of subcultures within punk cultures, some focusing on image, others on message, and still others on both. Some of these have attained mainstream success, while others have gained a level of popularity while existing below the radar. Still, even studying subcultures can become problematic because too often the wrong subgroups are being studied. Goshert writes the following:

To focus a study of punk on such clearly commercially successful supergroups, whether to repeat Heddige’s proclamation of punk’s demise in 1978 with the breakup of the Sex Pistols or to point to the continuing influence of punk on youth culture, consumer culture, or the music industry since that time, is to miss what is perhaps the most crucial point about punk: that its tendency is a resistance to working with the usual terms of commercial success and visibility. In other words, it is precisely when punk becomes popular culture that it ceases to be punk; thus, it remains to be argued whether there is anything ‘punk’ about the way in which it has been defined and described for the last twenty years of academic treatments of the subject.\textsuperscript{51}

So, to understand the proper way to study punk, its commercialized and fully commodified aspects must be separated from the noncommodified bands that still exist and thrive.

As a noncommodity, Bad Religion resists easy categorization and study. That is not to say that the members of the group fail to understand the neglect that mem-

bers of other noncommodified punk rock bands understand. Most noncommodified bands, or simply groups in society, are faced with the paradox of understanding what they are fighting against and who they are, or how they fit in. Everyone has and needs an identity, we know this, but what we don’t yet understand is how these identities are formed and fully developed. When we fight against a system, we take a new identity, but not all of these identities are necessarily the same. Studying this is not always easy to do.

Academic studies of punk have neglected attempts to evade being recuperated as a commodity. Typically, they aim to explain it sociologically, to read it, and place it within a functionalist model of society. . . . The problem lies in the monopoly over the construction of identity held by the bourgeois hegemony. As soon as a subculture attempts to establish a communal identity, it becomes recuperated since the only tools for doing so are already hegemonic.\textsuperscript{52}

The members of Bad Religion understand this shifting principle of identity as well as anyone else in the punk community or other punk bands. As a pioneer and staple of vintage California punk rock, Bad Religion is in an awkward place, stuck between the glitz and glam that make up commercialized California punk and the criticisms that they have sold out. The most valid form of criticism that arises to Bad Religion’s having sold out its identity are those opinions involving the band’s tenure at Atlantic Records from 1993 to 2001. The time Bad Religion spent at Atlantic allowed the group to reach a greater audience. During this time, receiving mixed reviews for their work, they gained some acclaim that paled in comparison to the reactions that their music produced in new listening audiences. When New Maps of Hell was released in 2007, Bad Religion was able to explain their impact and influence on others. On their MySpace website, the members of Bad Religion state the following:

And while a stunning new record from one of the most influential bands in recent history may not be enough to save this messed up world, it could very well inspire a few defiant souls into action. Watching the band rip through a live set in front of a few thousand exhilarated fans days after completing New Maps of Hell, the sheer power of Bad Religion’s music is unquestionable. The kids are pressed against the barrier, many with eyes closed and fists raised, singing each lyric as if it means the world to them. The entire affair has an intensely inspirational and cathartic air like some riotous punk rock baptism in the name of free thought and dissent.\textsuperscript{53}

CONCLUSION

After nearly thirty-four years together, shifting bandmates, partial breakups and reformations, and two or three wayward albums (ask true fans of Bad Religion and they will tell you that No Substance really did lack traditional Bad Religion substance,
that *The New America* wasn't anything new or anything near what we'd all longed for, and, most recently, that *The Disent of Man* lacked the power and meaning that Bad Religion is known for, despite its promising name.

Bad Religion still understands the point that they set out to make. Unlike nearly every other punk band that has known as much widespread popularity as they have, Bad Religion has refused any nearby constructed label or image. The band was formed by like-minded teenage boys on a mission to make some changes. Today, we see some of those teenage boys as men trying to make not only the same changes, but new, more daring ones. The world is a darker place than it was when Bad Religion formed in 1980. Beyond simple economic catastrophes, the band must now attempt to address such issues as global warming, near tyrannical presidents, widening class distinctions, war, persecution, hate, greed, sexism, death, and, sometimes, love. Time has changed the surface of the United States significantly since Bad Religion has been active. Yet, time has done little to change what Bad Religion is, what they stand for, and who they are.

NOTES


17. Bad Religion, "Faith Alone."


24. Bad Religion, "The Empire Strikes First."

25. Bad Religion, "The Empire Strikes First."


29. Gabriella, "NYRock Interview with Greg Graffin of Bad Religion."


31. Harmon, "Old-School Punk Band Bad Religion Tells It Like It Is."


44. Bad Religion, "21st-Century Digital Boy."


46. Gabriella, "NYRock Interview with Greg Graffin of Bad Religion."

47. Sharma, *Music and Culture in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 34.

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Who “Owns” Rap? A Justification for White Christian Rap

Randi Pahlau

Consider the following vastly different lyrics: “Fuck tha police” who “think they have the authority to kill a minority.” Or contrast that with “Oh Lord, my God, Creator, lover of my soul, / Lord, we praise you. Not one can match your beauty.” These lyrics represent two extremes of today’s best-selling rap music. The NWA (Niggas With Attitude) lyrics are inflammatory and offensive to some listeners. Like the lyrics of NWA, those of Shachah, which are worshipful and give glory to the Christian God, are offensive to some listeners. An analysis of the two examples of lyrics will reveal the growing controversy over the already controversial medium of rap music. Gangsta rap, generally performed by young African American men, scandalizes the United States with its lyrics that portray and magnify masculinity, heightened sexuality, and violence toward police officers and women. Diametrically opposed to this medium is rap performed by white Christian artists who use the musical style, coupled with evangelical and worshipful lyrics, to glorify their God and heighten reverent emotions in listeners. These artists have appropriated what was once solely the domain of African Americans for their own spiritual purposes. Although some African American artists and critics do not recognize it as a valid form of expression, white Christian rap is a legitimate form of resistance against the dominant and secular culture. Because white Christians view themselves as a marginalized subculture, they use music as a form of social protest, and because African culture has a history of dissemination around the world, white Christian rap is genuine and should be acknowledged as such. What began as a uniquely African American secular form of music logically and progressively spread to African American churches, white listeners, and finally white Christians.
WHO "OWNS" RAP?

Some rap artists do not agree with the appropriation of African American hip-hop by white Christians and do not even recognize it as authentic rap. One British record store owner flatly claims, "there's no such thing as white hip-hop...it's like a black music. You can't talk about white hip-hop, it doesn't exist."

Other commentators, including some in the Christian music industry, claim that music style is neutral and cannot be rightfully claimed by any one group. As William D. Romanowski argues when justifying the inclusion of pop culture into the services of the Contemporary Christian genre became a "musical chameleon" that adapted to any existing musical style, including rap. To further complicate the controversy regarding whether Christians can claim hip-hop as their own, some Christians question the appropriation of this contentious musical style as a form of worship, arguing that its association with violence and misogyny precludes its use for more pious purposes. As William J. Brown and Benson P. Fraser explain, hip-hop music provokes suspicions and promotes such values as materialism and hedonism, which the church has traditionally struggled against.

Christians question whether music that so openly glorifies sex and violence can offer anything redemptive. I believe there is a way to reconcile these differences of opinion. Despite rap's black urban roots, white Christian rap is a legitimate form of resistance against marginalization from the secular culture and temptations many Christians believe that secular tradition poses.

More compelling are the studies and arguments that contend that rap, in all forms, is valid despite its African American origins. George Lipsitz, for example, argues that the black Atlantic world has now formed into a system of global communications. Paul Gilroy similarly posits that the black Atlantic world has now morphed into a system of global connections. But where is the justification for the appropriation of rap by Christians? One of the logical reasons for the existence of white hip-hop is that some of the roots and goals of gangsta rap also apply to Christian rap, with an admittedly unique twist. Bakari Kirwana outlines the development of gangsta rap, which grew out of the black segregation that created a subculture and spawned low unemployment rates, police brutality, and drug use. White Christian rappers also see themselves as a marginalized subculture within the larger American culture. Daniel Radosh refers to Christianity as a "parallel universe" whose followers suffer from an inferiority complex, realizing that their faith is seen as subservient and sometimes sporting T-shirts with slogans like "Arrest me. I prayed at school today." Because of the ever-increasing laws and judicial decisions separating church and state, many Christians feel as if they are being discriminated against, unable to read a Bible at school, pray at a graduation ceremony, or wish "Merry Christmas" to a stranger who may have another belief system.

Christianity as a subculture, then, has much in common with hip-hop as a subculture. The original hip-hop culture, of which rap is a part, signals cultural resistance and social protest to varying degrees, with variations of status rap, gangsta rap, and progressive rap. Christian rap also promotes social protest, but with its own definition of social change; however, uncovering similarities between the two groups of rappers is not enough justification to allow white Christians to appropriate a style created by African Americans. For that, African history itself provides vindication. The history and philosophy embedded in black music and speech encourages their dissemination to other cultures. This dissemination has allowed Christians to use the power of rap for their own purposes to create a new religious discourse, one that would not have been possible without rap's influence.

Africa's connections to the roots of hip-hop are readily acknowledged and should not prove a barrier to any culture seeking to participate in the global hip-hop phenomenon. Hip-hop originated in the 1970s as a black cultural expression as part of hip-hop culture. Along with graffiti art and break dancing, rap was created on the margins of society to articulate the problems of black urban life. Layoffs, the depletion of social services, and the loss of public spaces for black recreations in U.S. inner cities provided the setting for the creation of hip-hop. The renowned cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson writes, "Hip-hoppers joined pleasure and rage while turning the details of their difficult lives into craft and capital." In a similar vein, Tricia Rose argues that rap's origins reflect thematic elements deeply wedded to black storytelling forms, including toasting, the blues, signifying, and other African oral traditions. The African diaspora has inspired cultures from around the world, and it serves as the "bedrock of African American culture's survival in the United States. It continues as the foundation of global hip-hop culture." These older elements are contemporized in rap with an emphasis on one's neighborhood ("the hood"), one's group of friends ("the crew" or "the posse"), hypermasculinity, misogyny, and racial entourage.

Baruti N. Kopano examines the oft-repeated slogan of rap, "keepin' it real," as being true to the rich legacy of rap music. He explains that rap belongs to a rich African American tradition, expanding the rhetorical styles and strategies of black language as a form of cultural resonance to the dominant, oppressive white culture. According to this argument, rap belongs only to African Americans. The origins of rap may be African American; however, just as other facets of African American culture have spread through the diaspora and to all races and cultures, rap is a universal medium.

Progressive mainstream rappers, as they critique social structures, advocate positive black self-expression to improve the system. Christian rappers also critique social structures, but they do so as a way of calling attention to the danger and emptiness of what this world has to offer in order to propose a godly alternative. They use rap as an evangelical tool, seeing themselves as missionaries. Just as missionaries to a remote Indian tribe in South America would learn the language and lifestyle of that tribe to form relationships with them, Christian rappers use the language and musical style of the youth they want to reach with the gospel. The population they want to reach recognizes rap as a creation of African American urban youth. Simply explaining that these creators of rap have marked similarities with white Christian rappers provides some justification for the legitimacy of white Christian rap as a form of hip-hop.
Furthermore, one only has to look at the African American history that led to the creation of rap. The history of black speech offers a compelling argument for the extension of any speech or musical style, including rap, to other groups. Ancient Egyptians understood the divine potential of speech, recognizing that people "could choose between good speech and not-good speech." Today's rap lyrics continue that choice. Words can be positive or negative, good or bad. They can be a tool for both gangsta rappers and Christian rappers. DC Talk's Toby McKeehan declares, "hey, if they can make it explicitly positive and Christian, I can make it explicitly positive and Christian!"

In a similar vein, Lawrence Levine shows that enslaved Africans were forced to adapt to changing conditions. They were compelled to learn that "culture is not a fixed condition but a process, adapting itself creatively and responsively to new situations." The only alternative for these Africans was to lose their culture altogether. So when Africans found themselves in a new condition as slaves in the New World, their culture and speech adapted as they learned to survive and even thrive in an oppressive environment. African slaves protested the only way they safely could, by encoding symbolism in their speech and songs, verbalizing secretly what could not be said to a white person's face. That protest symbolism continued after emancipation, when a postcolonial culture was created, along with new forms of subversion.

Along the same lines, bebop was a form of resistance to white America because of its improvisation and highlighting of drums. Resistance continued through jazz, the blues, and the New Black Poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. Rap continued the rhetoric of resistance, while modern technology accelerated its spread from small neighborhoods in inner cities to the larger world population as a continuation of the African diaspora. As rap spread between cultures, it continued to adapt and develop because of its flexibility, which encourages innovation, including the originality of white Christian rap. The postcolonial African culture has contributed to the rise of globalization and its new social movements, taking local identities from New York and Los Angeles to a global consciousness.

The first step in rap's spread around the globe was its integration in African American churches. Using the same rhythm and style, but changing the lyrics, black Christian rap, also termed Holy Hip Hop, reached a new audience and was embraced, not just by youth on the streets, but by those in churches as well. For the young, "if the music is banging, the service was a success" because music is a shared experience of "hope, pain, injustice, and restoration." For the young who are already in church, rap allows a contemporary form of worship, one that they enjoy participating in as part of a religious service. For evangelical purposes, rap is a tool that reaches out to non-Christian youth, especially those on the streets who are attracted to it because of its similarities to music they already know.

This kind of evangelistic mission is clear in Ambassador's "Thesis Pieces," where the singer says, "we wanna represent Christ to the culture" because the "gospel's never been preached to them like it's supposed to." Tupac had the same mission with his piece "Black Jesus," which puts Christianity in terms young people on the street can understand. He explains that Jesus hurts just like thugs hurt and that he hangs out with those who are involved in illegal activity, trying to draw the lost in. Tupac declares, "I feel like Black Jesus is controlling me... only a nigga that know where I'm coming from, could be, like, 'You know what? He's gonna end up doing some good.'" Tupac recognizes the power of identifying with Jesus, who, while he was on Earth, hurt just like we hurt, who was homeless, who ate with and associated with criminals, and who was eventually executed as a criminal. Tupac's words match the experiences of many youth on the street. The words match their lives. Tupac's words have a powerful impact and demonstrate that African American roots are at the forefront of black Christian rap. African Americans invented the phenomenon of hip-hop. It is only natural that African American pastors utilize that hip-hop for their own evangelistic purposes. The progression makes sense.

But the progression of rap did not stop here. Appreciative white audiences provided the next step when they became the largest consumers of this music in the United States. Since Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" was released in 1979, white listeners have outspent black listeners in buying rap albums, comprising 70 percent of all sales, according to The Source, a leading hip-hop magazine. Some white audiences genuinely identify with the black creators of rap. Ian Chambers argues that the "common social experience of black ethnic minority groups and white working-class youth... enabled the easy translation of black musical and stylistic resources into white terms, resulting, for example, in Skinheads rewriting 'black pride' lyrics as 'white pride' [lyrics]."

But for most white listeners, genuine empathy and identification with the artist's social condition are not the major factors that attract them to rap. Instead, rap's rhythm and spirit provide an exotic "otherness" and rebellion against authority that are the key elements driving white listeners to the music. Ronald L. Jackson argues that white listeners "associate blackness with civil disobedience, criminal habits, psychosexual dysfunction, dependency, as well as the ghettoized underclass." The idea of doing something "disobedient" or "bad" increases the fascination and pleasure of hip-hop for many white listeners, who otherwise have no connection with the American inner-city culture that created rap. Some white listeners are even more rebellious than their role models, conspicuously displaying a black taste so that they can advertise their difference from mainstream culture, reducing the music to a fashion statement.

Many African Americans find the reasons that drive whites to rap offensive and vehemently disagree with the performance of black creations for white audiences. As Rose explains, "rap music, more than any other contemporary form of black cultural expression, articulates the chasm between black urban lived experience and dominant, 'legitimate' (e.g., neoliberal) ideologies regarding equal opportunity and racial inequality." Black rap artists see their music and lyrics as a form of black protest; a discursive resistance to structures of white domination; therefore, black artists who cross over and deliberately market themselves to a white audience have sold out the black community. They have allowed their personal cultural form to be exploited, absorbed, and even stolen by privileged white consumers.
If white audiences are distasteful to some African Americans, white rappers are even worse. Many see white rap artists as diluting and stealing black culture. Because African Americans are a target of discrimination in the United States, white appropriation means that whites who copy the African American style have more economic opportunities in exploiting and profiting from it. The black originators, then, are further marginalized. And if white rappers are reprehensible, the next inevitable progression to white Christian rappers is downright offensive to some. It is difficult to think of two groups—black urban youth and white Christian youth in suburbia—as more distinctly different. As the lyric excerpts opening this chapter illustrate, the words are polar opposites, with killing, sexual violence, and shock value at one end, and worship, love, and Christ's sacrifice at the other extreme. Can the chasm dividing these two extremes be traversed? I believe they can, at least to a certain extent. The two poles will certainly never be mistaken for one another, but there are some similarities between the two ends that can mark a beginning in the justification of white Christian rappers. Like the black urban youth who created rap, white Christian rappers see themselves as forming a subculture that is distinct from the larger culture. And by producing its own responses to each style of black mainstream rap, white Christian rappers construct their own style of social protest, creating a new religious discourse.

Black urban youth are marginalized from the dominant white culture. From such marginality emerged hip-hop culture, including rap. Jackson suggests that "hip-hop artists have become the leading popular-cultural voice of underrepresented and marginalized youth in the United States."28 Similarly, Christian youth have become a subculture within a dominant secular society. Despite the prevalent rhetoric that the United States is a Christian nation, the term Christian, for most people, simply means a Judeo-Christian heritage and worldview, not the narrower fundamentalist, evangelical beliefs that Christian youth espouse. The latter see themselves as a subculture that must resist the larger secular culture that poses a threat to their beliefs and sometimes discriminates against them. According to a study conducted by the United Nations ad hoc Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2009, Christians in Europe and the United States are victims of anti-Christian discrimination.29 The committee concluded that Christians suffer "violent attacks against persons, property, and places of worship, as well as restrictions to the right to freedom of religion or belief."30 Christians, especially fundamentalists and evangelicals, face ridicule, discrimination, and persecution at times, as the group Manifest says in their song "Dreams": "My buddies all laughing at me about that Christ Jesus stuff."31 Trying to resist the secular influence and hostility of the dominant culture has led to a sense of inferiority and loss of participation in cultural forms. Romanowski asserts that, "Clinging to particular religious convictions and cultural assumptions meant isolation in an evangelical ghetto, limited resources and rewards, and an inferior status in the dominant culture."32

Because white consumers found rap so appealing, it was perhaps inevitable that white Christians would also appropriate the rap style into Christian lyrics. Changing the lyrics for their own purposes exemplifies lifestyle theory in action, a theory first conceptualized by Max Weber and then expanded on by Richard Jenkins, Iain Chambers, and Paul Willis.33 According to lifestyle theory, "young people take the cultural resources provided by the popular culture industries and use the prescribed meanings attached to such resources as templates around which to construct their own forms of meaning and authenticity."34 The music then becomes their own, and helps to cement their identification with their peer group, bolstering the self-worth of that peer group, while alienating the group from the larger culture that does not buy or listen to the subculture's music. For themselves, the whole group's identity is "changed, established, renewed."35 Recognizing music's enormous emotional power, Christian youth, referred to as an "underground group" by Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, have actively modified the rap musical style for themselves and given it their own meanings, while retaining a sense of connectedness with the larger culture.36

Because both black urban youth and white Christian youth share a sense of marginalization and alienation from the dominant culture, both groups protest the social wrongs of that larger culture. African Americans, a postcolonial society displaced from their native continent and now living in neighborhoods with less power and fewer resources than the wider community around them, have contributed rap as an important subtext to world culture expressing a form of politics for the postcolonial era. These politics are first expressed through rap's form and rhythm. Max Roach, the great jazz drummer, argues that "[h]ip-hop lives in the world of sound—not the world of music—and that's why it's revolutionary."37 More specifically, Roach argues that the rhythm defining rap is militant "because it was like marching, the sound of an army on the move" with the "militancy [that] is there in the music."38 The style, sounds, and rhythm of rap violate social norms, deliberately protesting the dominant and mainstream American culture's definition of appropriate music.

In addition to sound, rap lyrics are also used as subversion, a form of cultural resistance that takes different forms. Anthony Pinn categorizes rap into three types: status rap, gangsta rap, and progressive rap.39 Status rap asserts the self in opposition to a society that marginalizes the artist. It creates a sense of importance and self-esteem, celebrating black attitudes and lifestyles, while also earning a lucrative income. Rap titles like "The Day the Niggaz Took Over" by Dr. Dre, "Hot Shot" by Nelly, "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio, "Can't Nobody Hold Me Down" by Puff Daddy, and "Ghetto Superstar" by Pras Michel demonstrate the sense of empowerment and entitlement the rap writers experience. Status rap serves as a tool for the assertion of self in defiance of the larger culture, which would marginalize them at best and erase them altogether at worst.40 Gangsta rap, Pinn's next category, responds to the dehumanizing practices of the larger society with anger and violence. It is the most aggressive form of rap, advocating violence toward women and whites, particularly police officers, whom they see as the most visible form of white oppression.41 Progressive rap, Pinn's final category, addresses social concerns directly, eliminating heightened aggression and replacing it with a constructive agenda of education and
black pride. Progressive rap seeks to change the social system itself by supporting
black identity and exposing the hypocrisy of white America.62

Christian rap borrows elements from all three forms of rap, appropriating the pro-
test style of mainstream rap with its own variations, for its own purposes. Christian
rappers use status rap for their own two-part agenda. Like mainstream rappers, they
protest what they perceive as a social wrong, and then they change the definition of
status rap to one of their own making. First, they criticize the self-promotion that
is prominent in mainstream hip-hop and society as a whole, as John Reuben
demonstrates in "Hello Ego." Reuben declares that, "it's a displeasure to meet" another's
ego and criticizes it for "thinkin' you're / Fresher than all else."63 Reuben's protest is a
direct rebuff to rappers who hype their masculinity, sexual prowess, and social
dominance. He criticizes their "never-ending battle for status, prestige, and group
adoration."

The Christian concept of humility counters the appeal to power and the
meaningless "blah, blah, blah" of the egotistical to reject the search for power and
instead strive for humility, as in Shachal's "Deliver Us" (Let the Light In, 2009),
in which the lyrics read, "I'm feeling like Moses not eloquent to speak,"64 and Tobymac's
"Momentum," which includes the lyrics, "But I ain't here to seek no glory."

Christian rappers' second response to status rap is to give all the status, power,
and glory to God, rather than themselves. In "Revive Me," for example, Shachah writes,
"You're the only one, the perfect / Righteous, holy one seated in the heavens and
on the throne."65 Christian rappers respond to the status theme of mainstream rap
by criticizing its self-assertion, declaring humility for themselves and glorifying God.
Christian status rap is about God's status, not man's. In "Revive Me," the power that
mainstream rappers claim for themselves is attributed to God instead. He is the rock,
the perfect, righteous, holy one. Shachah does not claim social power over others for
himself, but gives them to God. He is the only one worthy to claim glory.

Just as Christian rappers adapt status rap to serve their own two-part purpose,
they do the same with gangsta rap. First, they challenge the sex and violence in-
cluded in most gangsta rap, as T-Bone does in "Let That Thang Go," where he says,
"I'm trying to change this music."66 He is tired of the pistols, the tripping, and the
cursing. In fact, he is "sick of this rap."67 The gangsta rap that T-Bone critiques does
contain aggression and violence toward social inferiors and women, but the violence
it portrays is only an exaggeration of what is already promoted by the secular world
at large. Self-aggrandizement, violence, drugs, and misogyny exist in the real world,
not just in rap. The group NWA claims that the "anger and violence expressed in
gangsta rap is reflective of American society in general. In other words, violence and
crime do not originate with rap music, but are part of the American fabric and are
merely magnified by musical expression."68 Dr. Dre agrees with this point when he
says, "you know, if it weren't going on, I couldn't talk about it."69 When Christian
rappers like T-Bone directly protest the lyrics in gangsta rap, they are also protesting
the evil they see in American culture. So Christian rappers' first response to gangsta
rap is social protest: against violence and crime, both in the rap lyrics themselves and
the larger American society.

The second stage of Christian rap's response to the violence in gangsta rap is to
generate violent lyrics of its own, but the violence does not serve the purpose of
shock value, and it is not directed toward another person. Instead, Christian rappers
ask God to use violence on unredeemed aspects of themselves so that they can
be better used in his service. In "Replace Me," Family Force 5 asks God to "Shatter
me into a million pieces."70 Further, the request is to "[C]rush me, tear me, break
me, mold me" so that God can "make me what [He] want[s] me to be."71 Such
images of violence are taken directly from the Bible, as in Jeremiah 18:6: "Like
clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."72 This
is not the same kind of violence seen in gangsta rap, in which violence is used to
demonstrate dominance over another person. This is a plea to destroy sin wherever
it is found. It is a willingness to fulfill Jesus's command in Mark 9:47: "And if your
eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God
with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell."73 For a Christian,
violence against one's own body is less important than serving God with purity.
In "D-I-E-4-Y-O-U," Family Force 5 writes about another kind of violence, the
willingness to die in God's name: "I'd take a bullet for you"; I would "[be]executed
for you."74 This is not asking for sin to be plucked from one's heart, but an expres-
sion of one's willingness to fulfill the paradox of Mark 8:45: ("For whoever wants
to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and my gospel will
save it"), or the maxim in John 15.13: ("[g]reater love has no one than this, that
he lay down his life for his friends"). The writer is expressing the wish to follow all
of God's commands, even if it means death. The violence in Christian rap, then,
serves a very different purpose than in gangsta rap. In Christian rap, violence de-
clares eagerness to rid one's self of sin, no matter what the cost, and it gives consent
to die in God's cause, if necessary. Christian rappers have appropriated the style of
gangsta rap only to harmonize it with their own beliefs.

In a similar fashion, progressive rap, the type of mainstream rap that educates
and critiques, offers a constructive agenda to fight against the hardships from which
much of black America suffers. This agenda, which includes "self-respect, knowledge,
pride, and unity,"75 is wholeheartedly imitated by Christian rappers. Black secular rap-
ners protest all kinds of social wrongs, especially racial discrimination. For example,
Public Enemy's lead rapper, Chuck D, "sees the meaning of American society as
centering around the control and destruction of Black minds and bodies."76 In "Fight
the Power," Chuck D tells his listeners to fight this control of African-Americans by
knowing that "we got to fight the powers that be."77 Chuck D's progressive rap not
only lists social evils, it recommends steps to take to fight against them.

Likewise, Christian rappers criticize social wrongs. As a subculture resisting
the temptations and evils of the larger culture, protests against those evils are prominent
in Christian rap. For example, the Christian rapper Lyricist lists some of the evils,
for example, guns, knives, verbal scarring, alcohol, drugs, and unprotected sex, that
he sees in the world around him. In "Get Along," "it's no wonder," he claims, that
"we look to pills for all rest," but the pills make everything worse.78 B. Reith is more
specific in his listing of social ills in "Cold World." Several social evils are attacked, especially world hunger and malnutrition, "while the rest of us take every meal, breath, and step for granted." B. Reith sees his rap as a public forum, a place where he can describe the world as he sees it, drawing attention to its wrongs with statistics and research. He describes this world as "cold" and cautions against loving this world too much. He does not directly mention God, which makes it possible for a secular audience to respond to his description of the world as one they can identify with without being frightened away.

Lyricist and B. Reith's listings of corruption and depravity merely point a finger but do not offer any solutions. Shachar picks up these themes by describing the dangers of television, to the world and to himself, and then asking God for help. He calls television "hella-vision" and "HD high death channels." Lyric like these serve many purposes. Shachar sees some television choices as teaching evil to the world at large, an evil for all people who choose to watch unwholesome television, and he acknowledges the power that popular media have over individuals. But he does not exclude himself from it; he does not judge others with a self-righteous attitude. He pointedly uses the inclusive pronoun "we" because he realizes that he is also a victim, and he knows that the dominant culture offers temptations to his faith. Finally, he asks God to solve the problem, "to break into the system" and effect real change.

T-Bone is more specific than the other rappers, since he targets social problems generally associated with the inner city, for instance, the "generational curse" as he watches "these young brothers getting hauled off in a hearse." T-Bone does not blind himself to the world he lives in. In fact, he grew up in the world he critiques. Raised in the Mission District of Northern California, he was surrounded by the gangs, drug dealers, and pimps he describes in his rap. He knows the violence and sees it as a generational curse, as children learn from the previous generation and then repeat its mistakes in their own lives. He describes the world as a "war zone." T-Bone sees rap as a mission field, claiming that his message "emanates from another dimension" as he explains on his website:

If you walk into a well-lit room and turn on a flashlight, it makes no difference. If you take into a dark room and turn on that same flashlight, it's going to illuminate the whole room. That's what I'm trying to do. I'm not coming in the game to make enemies, point fingers, or judge people. I'm just fighting for what I believe in and trying to pull everyone over to my side... Hip-hop is the language of the streets. God is the language of love. I mix the two together to see amazing results take place.

T-Bone knows his audience, and he knows how to reach them. He heeds the following advice of sociologist Serge Denisoff: "If you want to reach young people in this country, write a song, don't buy an ad." In addition, rap can no longer be considered the sole property of African Americans. It is not even American only because it is now global and cosmopolitan. Because seemingly regional culture barriers are, in reality, permeable, any consumer item, whether it is rap, soul food, or FUBU shirts, will spread beyond the group of people who first made it popular. Any commodity will be sold as long as there is a demand, whether that commodity represents a particular culture or not. As David Samuels writes, "The truth of the matter is that no one can steal a culture." The culture that rap represents transcends artistic and ethnic boundaries. James Lull refers to this kind of social mobility as "interculturalization." Cultural forms, he explains, are malleable and can be recreated with new meanings in new contexts to "create local versions of distant cultures." To put it more informally, one British rapper stresses that, "hip-hop isn't a black thing, it's a street thing you know."

For their own purposes, both street rappers and Christian rappers use the effects that music has on us physically and culturally. Claude Lévi-Strauss explains that music works on us both physiologically and culturally. Our bodies and minds are like two intersecting grids, and music keeps these two grids in tension. Musical emotion arises in listeners as the composers of the music stop or reduce intervals in melody and rhythm. Composers withhold from or add to what the listeners anticipate as the intervals are "missed out or extended, anticipated or caught up with after some delay." It is this tension between what is expected and what is unexpected, Lévi-Strauss contends, that gives us pleasure when listening to music.

Mark Lewis Taylor, who applies Lévi-Strauss's theory to rap music, argues that the complex polyrhythm of rap fulfills Lévi-Strauss's theory, thus creating pleasure. That rhythm is created through scratching (one record is scratched with the needle against the groove while another record is being played on a second turntable), providing back spinning and backbeats. Breaking the beat in this way creates a "sensation of suspension" in listeners, the tension Lévi-Strauss refers to. Sampling (taking a sample from one sound recording and using it in conjunction with other samples) intensifies the complexity of alternative musical sounds so that "the oral and the musical interact in ever greater and unexpected ways." It is this complexity and tension that make rap music powerful as lyrics and music are deconstructed and reconstructed. It is a radical creation that mainstream rappers use to assert their own power as African American musicians, creating their own unique sounds that are fundamentally different from the music composed by the white, dominant culture. Rap artists use that radical power for their own purposes.

Christian rap broadens Christianity's appeal and religious discourse. Christianity has traditionally emphasized complete obedience to a system of rules and regulations, for example, rigid church services containing old hymns, judgmental preaching, and the use of the King James Bible, which provides beauty, but little contemporary understanding is gained from these boundaries because of the religious text's unfamiliar sentence structure and use of such obsolete words as "thee" and "thou." Contemporary praise songs take these traditional institutions and rejuvenate them by updating the lyrics and style to those that most youth respond to. Those lyrics are full of praise, love, and worship, and they present Christianity relationally. Rap takes that renewal one step further, to a more radical change, by incorporating enough mainstream topics to give the lyrics an edge. Ralph C. Watkins describes the process as one of "semiosis." In Christian rap, there is a circular relationship in the semiotic
process: “There is (1) the rap music; (2) the appropriation of religious symbols and signs; and (3) the interpreters seeking meaning within the context of the social arrangements.” Watkins call this “sociological semiotics,” the process of taking familiar religious symbols and using them as platforms for religious expression, reinterpreting them, and representing them with their own meaning.40

Christian rap appropriates the language of gangsta rap and reinterprets it for postmodern youth. It takes the blood, seen all too often on ghetto sidewalks and alleys, and speaks of God’s blood. It sells women who are defined by gangsta rap as “bitches” and “hoes” that they have value in God’s eyes. It explains how the violence that surrounds us can be battled with God’s love instead of with guns and knives. Old religious signs are given new interpretations that are contextually relevant. In other words, the Christian expressions of worshipping God and sharing God with others have been contempered into an expanded religious discourse to fix a new postmodern culture. The chaos of inner-city life is given meaning within a religious context.

Many Christians wonder if a music and culture so audacious and meretricious can offer anything redemptive, because hip-hop and its origins are not easily separated. Opponents of Christian rap argue that musical style should match the words. If the style and rhythm of rap are associated with antisocial elements, then changing the lyrics to their goal of worship and evangelism does not rectify the antagonistic elements. Some critics argue that the style of rap music and the words of Christianity cannot be combined. As one gospel executive terms it, “tried to blend the mainstream culture and the church culture into one . . . [is] like metric and standard.”

The response to this apparent logic lies partly in the similarities between the original black rappers and current Christian youth. Yes, the creators of rap did create an original style, one alien to mainstream youth. The beat and lyrics were meant to be subversive. Christian doctrine is also seen as subversive. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI stated that, “at present, Christians are the religious group that suffers most from persecution on account of its faith.” This goes along with the OCSE’s 2009 statement that Christians are often denied rights, even in the United States. When the pope and the United Nations declare Christians minorities who are discriminated against, is not Christian doctrine also alien to secular mainstream America? Is it not subversive in a world where materialism, sex, and violence rule? Perhaps the rebellious origins of rap are not so antithetical to Christianity, whose central figure, after all, was executed as a criminal.

CONCLUSION

In today’s postmodern culture, the youth question everything, believe that truth is relative, and place high value on emotion and experience. Rap’s creators questioned their place in American society in the context of urban ghettos. They questioned class differences; democracy; and the causes of poverty, ignorance, and violence. Christian rappers also ask important questions about the inequities of this world and our purpose for being born. They answer these questions with the truth as they know it. Today’s youth value relationships over institutions, and Christian rappers use that quality. The presentation of Christianity through rap explains a relationship with God outside of a religious institution seen by many as obsolete and irrelevant. Mainstream rappers explain the world and our place in it with self-affirmation, social protest, and consciousness-raising. Christian rappers explain the world spiritually, attempting to satisfy the souls of their listeners.

NOTES

Chapter 4

63. Shachah, “Deliver Us.”
65. T-Bone, “It’s OK.”
70. Lull, Media, Communication, Culture, 253.
71. Quoted in Bennett, Popular Music and Youth Culture, 159.
73. Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, 17.

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24. Quoted in Bennett, Popular Music and Youth Culture, 28.
27. Rose, Black Noise, 102.
28. Jackson, Scripting the Black Masculine Body, 140.
34. Bennett, Popular Music and Youth Culture, 27.
36. Smith and Jackson, The Hip-Hop Church, 143.
44. Rose, Black Noise, 36.
47. Shachah, “Revive Me.”
49. T-Bone, “Let That Thang Go.”
53. Family Force 5, “Replace Me.”


“A Horrible Force Called Music”: 
Frank Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage* as 
Critical Dystopia

*Alexander Charles Oliver Hall*

Although it comes slightly before the widespread reappearance of the dystopian genre in American culture during the early 1980s—the period during which dystopia came into its “critical” period—Frank Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage* adheres quite faithfully to the conventions of the critical dystopia. Of course, there are some problems with such a characterisation of Zappa’s three-act rock opera on the surface, notably that it does not end on a hopeful note, in conjunction with a grounding in the politically conservative turn of the 1980s, to distinguish itself as a critical dystopia and not a “classical” dystopia. However, closer attention reveals a more hopeful ending than listeners might first realise: By dropping the persona of the “Central Scrutinizer”—the narrator and enforcer of the story—and performing the final song, “A Little Green Rosetta,” as himself, Zappa includes a utopian impulse by reminding the audience that the imaginary world of *Joe’s Garage* has not yet come to pass, and that it need not do so, since people can still take action in the present to prevent such an outcome.

**POSITIONING *JOE’S GARAGE* AS CRITICAL DYSTOPIA**

Of course, this utopian impulse must be extrapolated from Zappa’s album, thus it exists outside the “text.” But there is hope within the text as well: Music, the “horrible force” that drives so many to crime, according to the Central Scrutinizer, still exists “in the mind of The Imaginer,” suggesting an ineradicability of the medium that, for Zappa, has the most critical potential in culture. In addition, while hope remains in *Joe’s Garage*, the album still comes before the generally accepted period during which the critical dystopia appeared in American culture. Written and recorded between March and June 1979 and released later the same year, it cannot be influenced
by the American conservative turn of the 1980s, which was marked by the election of Ronald Reagan as president in November 1980. However, Zappa had been a California native for some time, and he made a permanent home in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles, in 1968—just one year after Reagan became California’s thirty-third governor. Living in California under Reagan’s gubernatorial administration surely had some influence on Zappa and his music, as did witnessing Reagan’s ascension to the presidency. Other factors, however, would more significantly influence the production of Joe’s Garage, especially the suppression of music by the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late 1970s. The album’s critique of this development, along with its (somewhat ambiguously) hopeful ending and political prescience, make it an early example of the culturally ubiquitous critical dystopia that rose more recognizably in the early 1980s and continues to appear today.

Grounded in literary/cultural theory rather than music theory or, say, musicology, this “reading” of Joe’s Garage will surely strike some as problematic, since it does not take things like timbre and musical form into account. Robert Walser, for instance, goes so far as to argue that “any cultural analysis of popular music that leaves out musical sound . . . is at least fundamentally incomplete.” Then again, as Marie-Laure Ryan points out, a “conversation between music scholars will lose the layman in a way that a conversation between literature specialists will not, unless the speakers are narratologists.” Moreover, there is certainly space for a cultural analysis of Joe’s Garage in what has come to be known as critical music studies, which has also been referred to as “new” or “critical musicology.” Included in this field of inquiry is an amalgam of disciplines that, according to Richard Middleton, share a “position against pure musical autonomy.” Middleton continues, saying, “music is more than notes” represents the bottom line, an idea whose seeming banality today perhaps signals its triumph.” This approach to music studies has generated a whole range of characteristic impulses: attacks on “the canon,” on “great composer history,” and on “transcendental” aesthetics; critiques of “positivist” histories and analytical methods; deconstruction of patriarchal, ethnocentric, and other “ideological” interpretations; valorization of popular music cultures; relativizing of differences between musical systems; and so on.

Since the critical dystopia is a cultural narrative form, and since the present analysis will be interested in identifying Joe’s Garage as a critical dystopia, its scope will be narratological in nature, which should come as no surprise, considering that “in recent years critical music studies have been swept by the phenomenon widely known as the ‘narrative turn’ in the humanities.” Still, here narrative does not refer to Ryan’s characterization of music’s “deep narrative” as “an essentially metaphorical phenomenon” so much as musical narrative in terms of “dramatic scripts or narrative texts set to music.” After all, Joe’s Garage is, at its very core, a rock opera, which John Rockwell defines generally as an “operatic work in which the musical idiom is rock and roll.” This is not to be confused with the concept album, out of which the rock opera apparently grew, since Zappa does include a complete libretto and appa-
information about their recording histories, as well as information on band members, before concluding that "in many ways it works best as a sort of annotated Zappa; if one is looking for a collection of conceptual continuity clues or general readings of certain songs, this book is an interesting place to start."20 Lowe's book is itself quite a good volume of serious scholarly criticism of Zappa's work, and perhaps the most accessible, for it lacks the unnecessary density of Watson and yet provides an excellent critique of Zappa and his work. Lowe first sets out to "look at [Zappa] as both a writer of art songs and a satirist on par with Jonathan Swift and Lenny Bruce, two writers who, through their humor, forced their audience to take a much more critical view of the world around them."21 Lowe then looks "at Zappa's work, especially his rock/pop songs, and offers a cultural and rhetorical analysis of his music that makes the argument that Zappa's music offers up a fairly caustic and prophetic critique of the American dream."22

Apart from these three studies of Zappa, there are a number of musicological approaches to the artist's music, as one might expect, and a host of essays written from a wide variety of perspectives. One essay that should be of special importance to the present analysis is Michael J. Prince's "The Science Fiction Protocols of Frank Zappa: Problems of Genre in 'Billy the Mountain,' Joe's Garage, and Thing-Fish," which touches upon the idea of Joe's Garage as dystopia but fails to see the idea through.23 In fact, Lowe also alludes to the dystopian nature of Joe's Garage but, unfortunately, only mentions the idea.

SOME CONTEXT

As is been noted extensively in works about Zappa and his music, Joe's Garage did not start out as a rock opera. Barry Miles quotes Zappa as saying that the "bunch of songs the band had entered the studio to record in March 1979 turned out to look "like they had continuity," so Zappa "went home one night midway through recording, wrote the story, and changed [the album] into an opera."24 Miles also points out that the "opera was inspired by the fact that the Islamic Revolution in Iran had made music illegal,"25 which is specifically mentioned in the libretto's preamble.26 Zappa summarizes Joe's Garage as a "stupid story about how the government is going to try to do away with music (a prime cause of unwanted mass behavior)."27 The title character, Joe (like Willis), then, becomes the subject of the Central Scrutinizer's propagandistic presentation about the ills of music.

After a run-in with the law resulting from a neighbor's complaint about the volume of the music coming from the titular garage, Joe is encouraged to "stick closer to church-oriented/social activities,"28 which he does, meeting his girlfriend, Mary (Dale Bozzio); however, Mary fails to show up at church one evening because she is busy servicing the crew of a touring rock band in exchange for a free ticket. She ends up on the crew's tour bus as a "Crew Slut," before she is dumped in Miami when the group tires of her, leaving her to enter a wet t-shirt contest to

get enough money to buy a bus ticket home. When Joe hears of Mary's exploits, he becomes extremely distraught, and he himself engages in debauchery, contracting a sexually transmitted disease from a girl named Lucille. In a state of helplessness, Joe decides to get help at a different church, this time meeting L. Ron Hoover (Zappa) at the "First Church of Appliantology," who, for fifty dollars, tells him that he can safely satisfy his now unquenchable desire by admitting that he is a "Latent Appliance Fetishist" and going to a club called "The Closet," where he can find a sex robot to fulfill his sexual needs. Following Hoover's advice, Joe goes to The Closet and finds a robot named Sy Borg (Warren Cucurullo/Ed Mann), which is apparently a "government-sponsored recreational" service robot, a "model XQJ-37 Nuclear-Powered Pan-Sexual Roto-Plooker."29 Unfortunately, during the sex act, Joe accidentally breaks the robot and has no money to pay for the damage, so he is arrested and sent to jail, where he is gang-raped by "other criminals from the music business."30 To comfort himself, Joe imagines playing lush guitar solos, which keeps him in a dreamlike state for the years that he remains incarcerated. Upon his release, Joe finds the world "expoxid over"31 with no music, and life mundane beyond imagination. He again reverts to imaginary guitar solos for comfort but begins to go insane, imagining rock critics writing about his imaginary guitar solos and even "imaginary vocal parts to a song about the imaginary journalistic profession."32 Finally, Joe imagines his last guitar solo, before taking a job at a muffin factory, where he monotonously puts icing on muffin after muffin, giving in to complacency once and for all.

To a certain extent, Joe's Garage is inspired by Zappa's own experience with the music industry; however, Barry Miles says "the events were universalized,"33 citing Zappa:

I've been in a garage, but so have a million other people. That's a highly romanticized, fantasy garage situation, you know, where the teenage girls all walk in and clap their hands and dance and stuff. Well, it isn't like that in a garage. No matter how much beer you drink, it's still out of tune, and there's only so many hours a day you can strum that E chord. That's an idealized garage that is probably more accessible to other people's idea of the garage. If I wrote a song about the way it really was in the garages I played in, it would be totally disgusting. . . . I'm talking about a character named Joe, and there are a lot of Joe's out there who have trouble with record companies and run up against bullshit every day.34

Dismissing the autobiographical nature of Joe's Garage, it becomes clear that although Zappa is in a position to undermine his listeners' idea of the romanticized garage and his own role in it, he seems to be more interested in indicting the music industry itself, an indictment Watson sums up when he writes that the "use value of art is conceptual: [T]he music industry is built around guaranteeing that product has meaning, when precisely being made a product devalues it."35 Nonetheless, there is an even more specific concern in Joe's Garage that has already been mentioned: the illegalization of music by the Islamic Revolution in Iran.
The dystopia of Joe's Garage is predicated on the possible extension of the prohibition of music to entities outside Iran. Zappa notes that the idea of the government trying to "do away with music" is not particularly far-fetched when he writes, "if the plot of the story seems just a little bit preposterous, [. . .] just be glad you don't live in one of the cheerful little countries where, at this very moment, music is either severely restricted . . . or, as it is in Iran, totally illegal." Indeed, as Watson points out, Ayatollah Khomeini "cultivated popular opinion" once he arrived in Iran from exile by condemning all aspects of the Western decadence, which included cabaret pop, the Turkish-influenced Euro-disco played in more than 500 nightclubs in pre-revolutionary Tehran. This suppression of music, according to Watson, "showed how suspiciously music is viewed by authoritarian regimes." Zappa likely associated the conservative turn that he saw coming in the United States (the logical result of the political maneuvering of Ronald Reagan) with Christian fundamentalism, and, as Watson argues, connected the "Christian variety" to Islamic fundamentalism, thus leading to his "critical, antinationalist stance." Zappa had come to view the U.S. government itself as being in danger of becoming authoritarian should the course of Joe's Garage's contemporary moment be brought to its logical conclusion in the United States. That conclusion, Zappa opined, could include the suppression of music, and it did, in fact, result in the regulation of music several years later. Moreover, the rise of right-wing ideology that Zappa had the foresight to resist had many more dire consequences. According to Tom Moylan, 

Massive upward redistribution of income became the norm; working people steadily lost the measures of social wealth and rights they had won through years of struggle; homelessness and the deprivations of unemployment and underemployment became the common lot of increasing numbers of people; violent attacks on those with little or no social power multiplied and intensified (with harassment, battering, and rape of women and similar psychological and physical assaults on people of color, gays, and lesbians); and quality medical care, universal education, and safe and supportive work and living spaces were sacrificed to the draconian policies of neoconservative and neoliberal "reformers."

Nevertheless, these social ills were the result of the conservative turn that largely imposed itself after Reagan took office in January 1981. Zappa was connecting the dots that were available for him to link in March 1979, and yet the critique of his critical dystopia was as potent as that of any of the critical dystopias that followed.

THE CRITICAL DYSTOPIA

In 1967, Lyman Tower Sargent published his article "The Three Faces of Utopianism" in the Minnesota Review, setting the stage for the academic field of utopian studies. In the article, Sargent identifies the three major veins of utopianism as utopian thought or philosophy, utopian literature, and the communitarian movement. In 1994, Sargent returned to the subject with "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," which, in part, gives more in-depth explanations of the various forms of utopian literature. Among these is the term critical utopia, coined by Tom Moylan in his Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination. According to Moylan, the critical utopias were those utopian works of the 1970s that contained "expressions of oppositional thought, revealing, debunking of both the genre itself and the historical situation," and the "nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction." Sargent extends the adjective "critical" to the dystopia in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," asking, is a 'critical dystopia' plausible? Is it simply an oxymoron because all dystopias are 'critical' in Moylan's sense? . . . At present, I still think that 'critical utopias' in Moylan's definition were written, are currently being written, albeit rarely, and may well be written again and that we need to think more seriously about the possibility of a 'critical dystopia'.

Moylan reads this statement as a suggestion that "these new works might usefully be understood as 'critical dystopias' that interrogate both society and their generic predecessors in ways that resemble the approach critical utopias took toward the utopian tradition a decade or so earlier." Moylan expands upon the idea of the critical dystopia in his Scraps of the Unwanted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia, positing that this new narrative framework was a way for writers to "come to terms with the changing, and encroaching, social reality" brought about during the conservative turn of the 1980s, which fostered an "era of economic restructuring, political opportunism, and cultural implosion. As a result, Sargent adds the critical dystopia to his list of the types of literary utopias, defining it as a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one utopian enclave or holds that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a utopia.

The term eutopia simply means "good place"—a combination of the Greek words "eu" ("good") and "topos" ("place"). The title of Thomas More's Utopia—the work after which the utopian genre is named—is a pun built on the ambiguity achieved by combining "eu" and "ou" ("no" or "hot") with "topos."

Indeed, as Moylan argues with Raffaeella Baccollini in Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination, the dystopia is "traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story," but the critical dystopia

Allow[s] both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective "ex-centric" subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule.
Thus, the critical dystopia is a reaction to the social ills that resulted from the conservative turn of the 1980s, a reaction that worked "against the fashionable temptation  to despair."94 The critical dystopias challenge the classical dystopias by including a utopian impulse within the works, allowing for a route out of their dark worlds. Despite its seemingly bleak ending—complete with the seeming subjugation of its protagonist—and appearance before the recognizable conservative turn of the 1980s, however, Zappa’s _Joe’s Garage_ adheres to the conventions of the critical dystopia.

**THE CRITICALLY DYSTOPIAN CONVENTIONS OF JOE’S GARAGE**

Appearing at the tail end of the critical utopia’s heyday, _Joe’s Garage_ is one of the first texts that “revive the dystopian strategy to map, warn, and hope.”90 According to Moylan, these texts—the critical dystopias—use “new textual tricks” to “expose the horror of the present moment. Yet, in the midst of their pessimistic forays, they refuse to allow the utopian tendency to be overshadowed by its antieuopian nemesis.”91 Sargent defines the “antiutopia” as a “nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.”92

In terms of mapping, Zappa takes the possibility of the illegitimization of music to what he sees as a logical conclusion: Without music the world would become “totally eutopian.”93 In addition, Zappa fully intends _Joe’s Garage_ to be taken as a warning: he likens the story to “those lectures that local narks used to give (where they show you a display of all the different ways you can get wasted, with the pills leading to the weed leading to the needle, etc., etc.).”94 For Joe, this progression seems to move from the music leading to the debauchery leading to incarceration, whereas for society the progression might be more along the lines of conservative ideology leading to the suppression of music and other art leading to mindless complacency. Still, there is hope implicit in works as rife with critical potential as _Joe’s Garage_ and other critical dystopias. According to Moylan, they “adopt a militant stance that is informed and empowered by a utopian horizon that appears in the text—or at least shimmers just beyond its pages.”95

Although _Joe’s Garage_ does not seem to reject the traditional subjugation of the protagonist at the end of the work, Joe does grant that music still exists in himself, and thus it cannot be taken away from him, and this despite his pessimistic proclamation, “Who gives a fuck anyway?”96 Zappa’s listeners can bring this logic into their empirical world, which gives rise to an emergence of the utopian imagination—Zappa shows that the possibility of the suppression of music by the government is not necessarily unlikely, first, and follows this with an admittedly exaggerated picture of what the future could hold if that suppression were to be carried out. Wishing to avoid such an outcome (however outlandish), listeners might recognize the value (or utopian potential) of music and other art and take action to ensure that it is never suppressed, much less made illegal in service of the “Total Criminalization,”97 which, in the world of _Joe’s Garage_, is the government’s way of making everyone “uniform / To some degree / In the eyes of / The Law” by passing “disgusting pieces of legislation”98 that make it easy to break the law and thereby surrender one’s freedom.

It should be noted that the critical dystopia, according to Moylan, specifically appeared “within the formal parameters” of science fiction,99 and _Joe’s Garage_, according to Prince, “stands up surprisingly well to the criteria” for science fiction.10 This is because the acceptance of the Central Scrutinizer is cognitive, and, according to Prince, “talking surveillance devices and sexually attractive vacuum cleaners are sufficiently defamiliarizing to invoke prolonged consideration about possible analogs in mundane reality.”101 Moreover, Prince identifies the Central Scrutinizer as a novum—an innovation that confirms the work is science fiction because of its nonexistence in the reader’s actual world102—if one includes the entire power apparatus behind him.” Like Lowe, however, Prince dismisses _Joe’s Garage_ as a mere cautionary tale, which, although it certainly contains cautionary overtones, falls short of grasping the complexity of Zappa’s rock opera. This complexity lies in its use of the critically dystopian narrative framework, which, however cautionary, is more concerned with a critique of its “economic, political, and cultural” context.103 Doubly important is the inclusion of a figure of hope within the work. Zappa includes both an effective critique and a figure of hope in _Joe’s Garage_. Although the critique is of the conditions of life before the pronounced conservative turn of the 1980s, and although the hopeful ending must be rescued by listeners because it is not clearly highlighted in the “text,” _Joe’s Garage_ holds up as a critical dystopia.

**CONCLUSION**

Although it comes before the American conservative turn of the 1980s that brought about the critical dystopia in the cultural production of that decade and beyond, Frank Zappa’s _Joe’s Garage_ can be considered an early example of the critically dystopian genre. Its appearance prior to 1980 notwithstanding, the album’s ending seems at first to be more akin to the pessimistic endings of such classical dystopias as Orwell’s _Nineteen Eighty-Four_, which would suggest that it is more in the classical vein of the dystopian genre, but there is still hope. Even though Joe himself seems to lose all hope, music cannot be abolished in his imagination, which acts as a comfort to listeners and provokes an emergence of the utopian imagination. This is especially effective in light of the fact that the suppression of music is not a fantastic idea; around the time the album was recorded, the Islamic Revolution in Iran had made music illegal to bolster its influence on a fundamentalist control of the Iranian people. Zappa simply brought this idea home and followed its implications through, albeit in his own unique way. The result is a critically dystopian rock opera built upon a critique of the conservatism that was on the rise at the time and would be fully realized in the years to come.
Despite an unusual amount of scholarly work on an artist as esoteric as Frank Zappa, there has been no in-depth analysis of the dystopian theme of Joe's Garage. Lowe merely mentions the possibility of Zappa “creating a musical equivalent of a dystopian future” in the context of a discussion of the song “Outside Now,” during which Joe sees what has happened in the outside world during his time in prison. Although this is indeed where the dystopian landscape is most prominent, with the world “epoxied over,” Lowe says nothing of the implications of the dystopian theme. Michael J. Prince comes slightly closer to a thoughtful investigation of Joe's Garage as dystopia but reverts to Nineteen Eighty-Four comparisons and suggests the album’s “cautionary projection.” The scholarship shows a disconnect between the dystopian conventions of the album’s narrative and its critical foci, chief amongst which is the suppression of music in Iran; although the influence of the Islamic Revolution’s policy toward music is granted, it is not explicitly attributed to the dystopian formalities of Zappa's rock opera. Furthermore, the evolution of the discourse surrounding dystopia in the field of utopian studies has helped to articulate the identification of the critical dystopia, as well as other types of dystopias, which is not acknowledged alongside any mention of Joe's Garage as a dystopia.

The critical dystopia reacted to the conservative turn in the United States during the 1980s, acting as a place for artists to voice their fears, while maintaining hope for the future despite those fears. Critical dystopias, like their classical predecessors, are cautionary, projecting the evils of the system they are produced under onto the future, but they include a figure of hope that can be extended into the consumer’s world, thereby resisting a realization of the conditions that lead to the dystopia of the cultural product. Again, Zappa's Joe's Garage adheres to these conventions, albeit not in the most obvious ways.

The album comes slightly before the period during which the critical dystopia is thought to have first appeared, but the conservatism of that period was on the horizon, and fresh in Zappa's mind was the suppression of music in Iran. Also, Joe's Garage cautions against something Zappa saw as a threat to society by seeing it through to a possible conclusion, but it includes a figure of hope in that music remains with the people. People in Zappa's future world are not brainwashed to forget about music's existence in the way that Winston Smith is convinced that two plus two equals five when it suits the party. They may be tricked into becoming criminals, and they may even resolve to give up music because it is easier than dissention, but the possibility of dissent remains and may go on without anyone else even knowing, for music can play in the mind and keep the dissenter from outright abandonment of dissension. Thus, utopian possibility is kept alive via a provocation of the utopian imagination, which, in the context of a dystopian cultural product inspired by the American conservative turn that was most recognizable in the early 1980s, but well under way by the late 1970s, makes it a critical dystopia. Thus, Joe's Garage is an example of such a cultural product.
REFERENCES


II

AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS
In a 2002 issue of The Beat magazine, Dave Hucker describes "Yayeboye" as "one of those deceptive grooves [that] starts with a gentle jazzy piano and funky bass then grabs your attention as Aminata [Fall] starts to let rip with her scattered vocals, and pushes the perimeters of the song in all directions." "Scattered out vocals" and "gentle jazzy piano" sounds are also heard in Mahalia Jackson's gospel blues songs. Both Fall and Jackson use their guttural and maternal voices to cross vast oceanic spaces and emit powerful spiritual and emotive sounds about the filial bonds between mothers and their children. Such theorizing of the word sound stresses the important role music plays in Pan-African cultures, in which spiritual, aural, and verbal rhythms that Europeans considered as signs of the inferiority of blacks are evidence of these people's humanity and modernity. Peter Wade explains the following:

If blackness was linked to modernity, or more precisely modernism, it did not thereby lose the negative connotations of primitiveness, backwardness, lack of culture, and so forth. But, within the national and transnational frames of reference, such associations, if suitably distant or "whitened," could also be reinterpreted in a positive light. One of the perceived threats of modernity was loss of tradition, the decline of the authentically national in the face of modern and fashionable 'foreign' culture. One columnist saw 'African-sounding' music as the foreign threat in this context, while, ironically, "carols" were construed as authentically Colombian.

"Sounding" involves a recuperation and analysis of the extraneous, unconventional, and unfamiliar elements in black voices, for example, the guttural, instinctual, and unrestrained motherly tunes that characterize Jackson and Fall's gospel blues. With a majestic presence on stage, the two singers vocally and spiritually sounded back and forth to one another across the Atlantic, expressing the same kind of synergy, hope, and survival against all odds that characterized the struggle of black
mothers who made the safety of their children their priority during slavery. Unfortunately, both singers died at about the same age, Jackson at 59 (from cancer) and Fall at 60 (from paralysis). Although it is tragic, the premature death of these black women at about the same age marks their recuperative, spiritual, and physical communion after the long oceanic journey that has physically separated Senegambians and African Americans since slavery.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE SCHOLARSHIP ON THE BLUES

The study of the relationships between African American and African music is by no means recent, since many books have partially examined some of these connections. Such works as John Storm Roberts’s Black Music of Two Worlds (1972), Paul Oliver’s Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues (1970), Samuel Charters’s The Roots of the Blues: An African Search (1981), Alan Lomax’s The Land Where the Blues Began (1999), and Banning Eyre’s In Grio Time: An American Guitarist in Mali (2000) explore some African elements in African American music. Yet, these books only provide us with a general understanding of these Africanisms, since they do not examine specific songs in which the survivals are found. Furthermore, the studies of African American blues tend to be too focused on the United States and do not usually compare such music with its African counterparts, leaving huge gaps that scholars could fill by analyzing the vast repertoire of blues lyrics from the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In an attempt to help bridge this gap, this chapter compares the gospel blues lyrics of the African American artist Mahalia Jackson with those of the Senegalese singer Aminata Fall in an attempt to suggest the links between two distinct kinds of black music from the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean that continually sound on one another despite the tragic effects of slavery and colonialism on people of African descent. This comparison reveals the oral, cultural, and historical meaning of a black musical poetry that reflects mutual exchanges between African American and Senegalese cultures connected in a porous and hybrid circum Atlantic space.

Many scholars overlook blues lyrics because they have the impression that such texts are not valid literature. In this vein, blues literature is often considered as “folk literature,” which is a term that Lee T. Lemoen’s A Glossary of the Study of English (1971) defines as the “literature of the people,” which is often viewed as “unsophisticated, anonymous, and transmitted, at least at first, orally.” Such a limited definition of blues lyrics stems from the trivialization of the music in academic disciplines. In their 1974 essay “Hearing the Blues: An Essay in the Sociology of Music,” D. J. Hatch and D. R. Watson argue that many disciplines, including ethnomusicology, anthropology, history, and sociology, “have ignored blues music and perhaps music in general—or have relegated such concerns to marginal status.”

This neglect of blues music also originates from the racially influenced societal prejudices toward its lyrics. In the essay “Blues: A Continuum from Africa” (2008), Delbridge Hunter writes,

As the [blues] music became more accessible to white audiences, many of the old, catchy lyrics were looked upon with disfavor by blacks and whites. The new strippers’ class of African American religious communities often found themselves in agreement with their white oppressors’ belief that these devil songs with profane language (“curse” words) reflected a base philosophy of these lyric poets.5

In addition, blues is often dismissed in highbrow circles, since its musicians are not considered as “intellectuals” who should benefit from the elite recognition that is accorded to literary and political figures who express their feelings and ideas in a more fluid style than do writers of verse.6

Acknowledging the importance and complexity of blues also requires us to go beyond the trend that Robert Walser represents in his essay “Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances” (2003) as the “aestheticizing” of music, whereby people who have greater authority, cultural capital, or rhetorical skills (teachers, critics) tell others (students, fans) what they ought to be listening to.7 According to Walser, this presumption is wrong, since it does not value the “moral and ethical commitments” that lead people to listen to a particular kind of music.8 Attacking this “high-culture” approach to music, Walser proposes a bottom-up method that consists of exploring the relationships between “selves,” “culture,” and history in the study of music.9 Walser writes, “Instead of aestheticizing popular music, we should be historicizing all music and accounting in each case for the particular pleasures that are offered and thus for the values on which they depend and to which they appeal.”10 Such “particular pleasures” that surface in the relationships between “selves” and “culture” reveal the historical links between African American and African music that few critics have attempted to find. This scholarship can be traced back to Roberts’s Black Music of Two Worlds, which shows strong connections between black folk songs from the United States and Africa. Roberts states the following:

Some Jamaican hymn-singing occupies a position halfway between the British and black U.S. styles. However, a host of differences are there all the same: vocal tone, fractions of timing, backing—a whole developing tradition. Also, some African singing, especially Muslim prayer songs such as the Guinean “La llah t’a Allah,” available on Vague Exotique, makes equally striking use of long, highly decorated notes.11

Roberts's argument that Muslim prayer songs and spirituals have structural similarities can be corroborated when one analyzes a slave hymn Michael A. Gomez discusses in his Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (1998). According to Gomez, the words “Ashe lai lai lai / Shang wani go Dinn” come from a song that was chanted by Tony William Delegal, a 100-year-old African who lived in Currytown, Savannah, in the 1930s.12 Delegal’s song might have come from an African Sufi psalmody, since his repeated words “lai lai lai” are similar to the Senegambian Muslim invocation “La I Laa I Laa [There is no God but Allah].” This Muslim verse is commonly heard in the
religious revivals of the Senegalese Islamic sects known as the Qadr, Tijani, Murid, and Layyina, and it is a form of praise poetry that can be traced back to slavery and, specifically, to a passage in which Ayyub b. Suleiman (also known as Job ben Solomon), a royal Senegambian Muslim who had been enslaved into the United States in 1730, used these words to thank God for his freedom. In his book *Disfiguring the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (1993), Ronald A. T. Judy discusses a letter in which Suleiman said, "All praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds. . . . Allah is best."13

The similarity between Delega’s invocation and Solomon’s praise words suggests that the expression “lai lai lai” in the United States could have come from Senegambia or other parts of West Africa, where Islamic Sufi culture was influential during the Atlantic slave trade.14 According to Gomez, “The fact that Delega (a form of Senegalese) could remember these words is itself testimony that African languages were kept alive by the African-born and passed on to descendants in certain instances.”15 Indeed, Delega’s song shows that some African Americans in the southern United States were somewhat able to remember traditional African songs in the early twentieth century. Such a remembrance of ancestral melodies reveals these African Americans’ capacity to retain and transmit African culture through songs that had been passed down between successive generations of slaves. Songs were instrumental in the preservation of African culture in the United States because they allowed slaves to safely and subtly criticize their masters indirectly. As Sterling Stuckey argues in *Going through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History*, one factor that eased the survival of African languages in slave culture was that the African slaves used them to send “unspoken” information safely in songs, tales, and conversation while avoiding the reprisals of the planter.16

Another influential book in the scholarship on African traditions in American music is Paul Oliver’s *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues* (1970), which stresses the Senegambian origins of blues. Oliver argues that the “blues was a product of acculturation, of the meeting of African (notably Senegambian) musical traditions with Euro-American (notably British) ones.”17 Likewise, Debra DeSalvo argues, in *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zulu* (2006), that Wolof people from Senegal who had been brought to the United States in “large influx” in South Carolina between 1670 and 1750 were the “first contributors of African words to American English.”18 According to DeSalvo, Wolof words that passed into American English include “yarn,” “banana,” “bug” (from bugal, “to annoy”), “chigger” (from jigs, for “insect” or “sand flea”), and the use of “guy” as a personal address (from the word gay, meaning “fellows” or “persons”).19 These examples suggest the influence of Wolof language on American English, which scholars could explore by comparing Senegalese and African American oral and musical traditions. But the linguistic parallels between Wolof and American English should not be regarded as the only evidence of connections between African and African American cultures. Relationships between these cultures can also be found in the “nonverbal performance” of Africans and African Americans, which critics have neglected. Alan Lomax explains the following:

The error in African American studies had been to look at print and to language for evidence of African survivals. For instance, musicologists discovered that American blacks performed many European-like melodies, but failed to notice that the whole performance context—voicing, rhythmic organization, orchestration—remained essentially African. Such scholarship turned university-trained black intellectuals and writers away from the heritage of their parents, who had a nonprint, nonverbal heritage that the educated falsely labeled ‘ignorant.’ Nonetheless, it was because of this culturally biased ‘ignorance’ that African culture had been largely passed on in America—that is, through nonverbal and oral channels, out of the reach of censorship.20

Paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal elements of selected African American and Senegalese blues songs, I examine linkages between the music of blacks from the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These connections are not fully known since there is no comparative study of African American and Senegalese blues song lyrics. In his influential work *The Roots of the Blues: An African Search* (1981), Samuel Charters translates into English the lyrics of a classical Senegambian Manding song called “Ceddo,” which was told to him by Jali Nyama, a griot (traditional poet, healer, and historian), during a fieldwork in Senegambia. One line from this song, which warns against the dangers of war and rivalry between two families, the Sanka and the Manneh, reads as follows: “War is not good, it is filled with death.”21 A classic version of this song is Koyat Kandia’s “Kedo.”22

By transcribing this song from Manding, Charters suggests the importance of epics in the study of the oral traditions that Senegambians brought to the Americas. Yet, Charters does not compare the African oral literature with its equivalents in the United States since he denies any direct relations between the Manding epic and African American culture. He argues that, “nothing like” the “range of history or depth of expression” of the “Cedo” Manding griot repertoire “made its way into African American music.”23 While I use Charters’ effective method of transcribing African musical lyrics into English, I do not ignore the similarities between such oral literature and African American blues lyrics. Some twenty-one years after Charters published his book, we now have a sufficient quantity of African American and African songs that can provide us with analytical evidence of the relationships between the blues music of blacks from the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Such evidence is corroborated in Banning Eyre’s *In Gritty Time: An American Guitarist in Mali* (2000), in which Ali Farka Touré, the deceased blues legend from Mali, states the following:

John Lee Hooker plays tunes whose roots he does not understand. . . . He understands the spirit, but it is never Western. Never. It comes from Africa and particularly from Mali. [Hooker] talks about things coming from alcohol, but that’s not it. It’s the land, nature, animals. The music comes from history. How did it get here? It was stolen from African.”24
Such a strong testimony from a renowned African musician motivates us to compare selected African American and Senegambian songs in which similar singing patterns and ideas of identity, culture, and spirituality are apparent. These songs reveal the complex trajectories of a blues tradition that originated from Africa and travelled to the Americas, before returning back to the continent where it was first conceived. Charting the routes of this music necessitates a conception of the Atlantic world as an interconnected Oceanic space that witnessed not only the migrations of cultures from Africa to the Americas, but also the circular movements of New World traditions into Africa, where contacts between various music and people occurred within a "circumatlantic" world. As Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi argue in their essay "Black Bodies, Practices, and Discourses around the Atlantic" (2008), from a "circumatlantic" framework, the

Atlantic becomes a discursive space of interesting perspectives because it is crisscrossed and travelled in ways that speak of exchanges among the cultures that define its borders, or of modes in which the cultures of Europe, Africa, and the Americas respond to one another, collide, or converge.  

To understand this connected, yet often disrupted, violent, and troubled circumatlantic space, this chapter interprets the blues songs of Jackson and Fall as resistances against the exile, suffering, and poverty that slavery, colonialism, and other forces of modernity created in the lives of African American and Senegalese people.  

The porous and interconnected nature of the circumatlantic world is apparent in the ways in which the phonograph carried African American blues into Fall's ears when she was just a child living in the fisherman's district of Gued-Ndar, Saint-Louis, Senegal, near the shores of the Atlantic. In her biography of Fall, Nago Seck writes,

Born in 1942 in Saint Louis [Senegal], Aminata Fall caught the virus of jazz and blues at a young age. When, as a child, she was selling groundnuts in front of the Vux Cinema of the Sindoné district, she was mesmerized by the voices of American singers Mahalia Jackson and Billie Holiday, which echoed from the moviehouse.  

Jackson probably had the strongest impact on Fall since, like the Senegalese vocalist, she was influenced by both blues and spirituals at a young age. Even if she sang spiritually and was generally known as a gospel singer, Jackson was strongly immersed in blues. In The Golden Age of Gospel (2000), Horace Clarence Boyer writes,

As Mahalia's voice changed from soprano to alto, she listened for hours to recordings of popular blues singers Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, and Ma[el] Rainey and attempted to capture their nuances and volume. She then blended this sound with that of the sanctified singers, and by the age [of] fifteen her vocal style was formed.  

In her essay "Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 30s" (2009), the distinguished scholar Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham describes Jackson's music as "gospel blues," which is a musical form that "incorporated the rhythmic patterns and sounds of secular blues, ragtime, and jazz."  

In a similar vein, Fall's songs could be called "gospel blues" since they integrate blues and jazz sounds in original syncopations that remind us of the sad melodies of the compositions of both Jackson and her role models. In his essay "Senegal" (2000), Manthia Diawara remarks that through her songs, Fall "emerges, bigger than life, speaking a hybrid of Wolof, French, and American English, before bursting into a blues song that echoes a catalogue of hits from Mae Rainey and Bessie Smith to Billie Holiday. Absorbing the vocal sounds and rhythms of such African American blues legends, Fall became their perfect Senegalese double. The simple mention of Fall's name in Senegal reminds people of these African American blues icons, whose singing styles are similar to hers. Fall often agreed with this popular opinion since, as Frank Schneider's documentary film Système Cinéma: Cinéma d'Afrique/Les Musiques (1997) suggests, she joyfully accepted to be called "American African" by American visitors who refused to believe that she was not born in the United States. Yet, the extent to which Fall's songs resonate with those of African Americans is unknown, because such relationships have not been fully explored. In an attempt to fill this gap, this chapter discusses the ways in which the blues lyrics of Jackson and Fall are comparable, since they reveal the agony of motherlessness, exile, and separation from one's home.

MAHALIA JACKSON AND AMINATA FALL

Richie Unterberger identifies Mahalia Jackson as a singer who has been "often rated as the best gospel singer of all time." While her influence on American music is often mentioned, Jackson's impact on African music has been unexplored. This oblivion is due to the contributions of a major American icon to modern black culture on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. While, as Boyer argues in The Golden Age of Gospel, "Jackson, more than two decades after [her] death, is the world's greatest gospel singer," another major, yet unknown, accomplishment of Jackson is her strong imprint on Aminata Fall, whose melodies reflect rhythmic patterns similar to those of her American muse. Although she did not have a personal relationship with Jackson, Fall spiritually and culturally established contact with her through the medium of the gospel blues from the other side of the circumatlantic waves, blues she often heard while growing up in Senegal. Thus, blues music served as a tool that Fall used to have spiritual contact with another black female singer, who was physically, linguistically, and chronologically separated from her, but was circumatlantically close to her. Blues allowed Fall to establish a parental relationship with African American culture through the melodic waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Such rhythmic and telepathic sounds evolved from the complex history of the Atlantic world that Phillips Wheatley, one of the first Senegambians to be enslaved in the United States, remembered well as the rhythm of unsettling wind that was rocking the troubled sea waves of the Atlantic shores at the same time America was fighting...
for its independence from Britain. In her poem “To His Excellency General Washington,” written on October 26, 1775, Wheatley writes the following:

Muse! Bow proptitious while my pens relates
How pour her armies through a thousand gates,
As when Eolus heaven’s fair face deformes,
Eauwrapp’d in tempest and a night of storms;
Astonish’d ocean feels the wild uproar,
The reflex surges beat the sounding shore;
Or thick as leaves in Autumn’s golden reign,
Such, and so many, moves the warrior’s train.
In bright array they seek the work of war,
Where high unfurl’d the ensign waves in air. 55

Wheatley’s allusion to an “Astonish’d ocean” that “feels the wild uproar” as “The reflex surges beat the sounding shore” is one of the first records of the beating of salty waters on expansive shores and slimy rocks of the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean, signifying the tragic history of slavery that unfolded on such circumstantial space during the late eighteenth century. Some 200 years after Wheatley first set foot in the New World, Jackson, a likely descendant of the same Senegambian shores, was sounding music that attempted to heal this brutal memory of African Americans by reverberating the same kind of oceanic memory of the slave trade that Fall also captures in her songs. Blues is a fertile ground where such kinds of oceanic and spiritual contacts between African-descended people occur. Writing in Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory (1984), Houston A. Baker argues that blues has a “matrix” that “provides suggestive sound, vision, and space for expressive cultural theory” and characterizes the “fluid, mediating vernacular of the New World.” 56 The blues matrix’s capacity to provide a contact space to modern blacks is noticeable in Jackson’s “suggestive sound[ing]” of the relationships between black mothers and children in the New World. This filial bond is apparent in Jackson’s rendition of the traditional African American gospel song “Down by the Riverside,” in which the narrator looks forward to meeting her mother “down by the riverside” and living in a world without turmoil. 55

According to Daniel R. Katz, “Down by the Riverside” comes from a civil war slave song that was inspired by the following biblical text from the book of the prophet Isaiah: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” It was popular during the Civil War and, later, the Vietnam War, “when it became an anthem of the antiwar movement.” 57 In this sense, “Down by the Riverside” is a humanistic song about the right of all people to live free from violence and oppression, an idea that resonates with Jackson’s use of sounding as a means to resist segregation and racism in the United States during the middle of the twentieth century.

In her essay “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality” (2004), Farah Jasmine Griffin says that, “Jackson was a voice insisting on a hearing, standing between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial as the illegitimate daughter of the American Revolution, demanding a seat at the table.” 58 This feminization of black vocality is important since it helps us understand the significance of motherhood in “Down by the Riverside” that the narrator stresses by repeating her hopeful wish to “meet [her] dear old mother” when the war ends. By anticipating a reunion with her mother, the narrator emphasizes the power of filial bonds in African American oral and religious traditions that one can further understand by briefly examining its resonance throughout the song “Mother Bowed,” by Houston’s legendary mid-twentieth-century gospel group The Pilgrim Travelers. 59

This song, which also appears on a selection of Jackson’s songs entitled The Glory of Gospel, was originally sung in 1948 by the black a capella and spirituals band (The Pilgrim Travelers) and, according to the critics Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Thomas Erlewine, sold very well during a peak period of the band’s success. 60 In his online essay “A Not-So-Brief History of Black Gospel Music” (2011), Michael Corcoran argues that this song created a huge “mother song” sensation in the United States when it was first released in 1948. 60

“Mother Bowed” is about a person who remembers how her mother “bowed” and “prayed” for her at a time of trouble. This song could be contextualized in slavery time, when religion served as a major tool for blacks to strengthen their families and keep them alive. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie McKay argue in the Norton Anthology of African American Literature (2004) that the “spirituals offered them slaves much-needed psychic escape from the workaday world of slavery’s restrictions and cruelties.” 61 Moreover, “Mother Bowed” is about a search for freedom, as is apparent in the passage in which the speaker says, “Mother prayed / that I may be free / Lord I may be free.” 62 Such a quest for freedom was revisited during the first part of the twentieth century, when W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and other prominent African Americans used it as a means to fight for a world free from racism and segregation. Kimberly Rae Connor writes,

He [Du Bois] came to see them [spirituals] as reflections of the African American struggle to merge a double self into “a better and truer self” that held out “a faith in the ultimate justice of things . . . that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins.” 63

“Mother Bowed” conveys this vital role of faith in the African American community by hoping for a time when the “victory” that was prophesied by “King Jesus” and was told “from the Bible” would come true. Jackson’s allusions to “King Jesus” and the “Bible” suggest the significance of Judeo-Christian imagery in her gospel blues where they express African Americans’ belief in salvation. Such redemption was especially needed during slavery when, as Arthur C. Jones argues, black mothers kept the hope to be “alive” and be able to “fly into Egypt land.” 64 Spirituals allowed these black mothers to maintain their faith, which was their only solace against the cruelty of slavery. Jones explains the following:

In this hope, African mothers could somehow dim the painful sounds of their crying children, children to whom they could not give enough to eat, could not be with as
“Mother Bowed” also reveals the filial bond between a mother and a grown child who is about to either be enslaved or forced to step out into a faraway world. Like Jackson’s “Down by the Riverside,” “Mother Bowed” is a song in which bondage is a possible subtext, since both songs allude to a black mother’s fear of a looming danger, which could be either slavery or other kinds of forced separations from one’s offspring. Racial segregation is another possible subtext of “Mother Bowed,” since this song could have evolved from the history of either the Underground Railroad or the Jim Crow era, when black mothers’ fear of the personal and societal perils against their children reinforced their nurturing instincts toward these infants. Such a filial bond is noticeable when the speaker of the song remembers how her mother “bowed” and “prayed” for God to protect her against “damnation.” This song represents the important role of nurturers, caregivers, and providers of safety and spiritual sustenance for their children that women have in African American culture. Stressing the “strong bonds that existed between parents and children (notably between mother and child) during slavery,” Joyce A. Ladner argues that, “contrary to popular myth, black parents had a tremendous capacity to express grief when separated from their children.” According to Ladner, the “institution of slavery only acted to reinforce the close bond that had already existed between mother and child in African society.”

In addition to having close relations with their children, slave women also had strong ties with the nurses who sang African-derived lullabies to their infants. According to Irene V. Jackson, Henrietta Grady Daingerfield, who was a mid-to-late nineteenth-century southern white folklorist collector, described the lullabies of black nurses, or “mammy[s],” she heard in the South as having a “crooning sweetness about them, a tenderness as manifest in the tones as in the words.” As Jackson points out, Daingerfield also discerned in these songs “something more than ordinary motherlove . . . a racial mother heart [that] can take in not only its own babies, but those of another, dominant race as well.” “Mother Bowed” conveys this filial instinct of black mothers by reflecting the kind of painful emotions these mothers experienced in the circumatlantic world as they prayed for the safety of their families, who were at the mercy of slaveholders during and after the Middle Passage. In his “Keynote Address” at the “Celebrating African American Literature: The Novel since 1988” conference in 2009, Baker alluded to this troubling history of the Atlantic slave trade by referring to its “oceanic complexity,” which “conquers the rhythms of the sea and hints of African return.” “Mother Bowed” revisits this “oceanic complexity” by representing the unsettled emotions of a descendant of an enslaved African who painfully recalls the humbling and desperate image of a mother who “bowed” to keep her children safe from harm.

A similar reflection of the complexity of the circumatlantic world is noticeable in the Senegalese blues song “Yayeboye” (Dear Mother), in which Fall sounds back to Jackson’s voice by expressing a concept of motherhood that is analogous to her own. Fall’s song reveals the strong bonds between mothers and children in a modern Senegalese society that is a product of the restless circumatlantic history from which it stems. Like Jackson, Fall uses the blues as a music that signifies black mothers’ use of religion as an instinctual act that allows them to resist oppression. Baker describes this creative ability to cope with suffering as a part of black modernism. In his keynote address, Baker defined modernism as a “resistive black act for survival [that has existed] since before the Atlantic slave trade.”

Stressing the importance of sound in this creative process, Alexander G. Weheliye uses the concept of “Afro-modernity” to recognize how the “complex interweaving of modern black culture and sound technologies grants the venue for imagining and producing a variety of [global] cultural practices” and “modern black sounds.”

Fall’s “Yayeboye” plays a major role in this Afro-modernity, since it suggests the agony that children who depend on their mothers’ nurturing feel when they are compelled to be expelled from the Atlantic shores. Such a desperate reliance of black children on motherly bonds is noticeable in “Yayeboye” when Fall sings, “Yaye booi yam te lele jude, ngir ndinga yani [Mother you made sure I was always safe, well cared, and educated].” The passage from “Yayeboye” reflects a Senegalese cosmology in which children view their mothers as sacred beings who make numerous sacrifices to bring them to life and raise them. In Senegalese traditions, a child’s life is considered as determined by the feelings and memories that a mother has about her experiences of giving birth to him or her. Such belief is so strong that the most dreaded experience of a person is when his or her mother undresses in front of him or her. Such behavior would mean that the mother has cursed the person to whom she gave birth after carrying him or her for nine or ten painful months.

In this vein, it is the Senegalese view that mothers give power to their offspring, recognizing the unimaginable price mothers pay to bring their children into the world. Such high valuation of mothers in Senegalese culture is visible in David Arne’s argument that the Wolof refer inheritance to matrilineage, or “mother’s milk,” as the medium “through which the power is conveyed,” while they designate “patrilineage,” or the “genos,” as the way by which “inheritance of property” is given. In Wolof society, mother power is so great that a Wolof child cannot survive in the world without seeking or invoking it. Such priceless importance of mothers is evident when the narrator in “Yayeboye” portrays her mother’s prayer as a “galathe” (or “shield”) that protects her against harm. She says, “Ngir dom-wajur dokukule nianum wajur dom takoy teral da galathe ilu iilakitra [The parents’ prayer is priceless because it protects the child forever].”

The narrator’s representation of prayer as a “priceless” shield for a “child” is a Wolof Islamic belief similar to the religious worldview that Senegambians brought to the United States during slavery. In his book *Phillis Wheatley’s Poetics of Liberation: Backgrounds and Contexts* (2008), John C. Shields describes how Wheatley’s mother
“poured out water before the sun at his rising’ and would then be ‘prostrating herself’ just outside her hut toward the sun at his rising.” This ritual that Wheatley’s mother used to perform in Senegambia was a form of prayer that probably served to protect her children from slavery. Returning to this circumatlantic memory, “Yayeboye” shows the humbling image of a child who desperately implores her mother’s protection on her journey into a distant world.

Like “Mother Bowed,” “Yayeboye” suggests the invaluable role of mothers in the Pan-African worldview. Such a priceless importance of mothers is apparent in the repetition of the word mother and the use of the sustained “oo” sound that one finds in both “Yayeboye” and “Mother Bowed.” In addition, both songs depict a grown-up person who desperately needs a mother’s prayer as a defense against forces outside a parental abode. Seeking protection against such forces, the narrator in “Yayeboye” suggests her imminent departure from her family’s compound by repeating the refrain, “ma ngini di dem [I am leaving]!” and begging her mother to pray for her. Like the narrator of “Mother Bowed,” the one of “Yayeboye” is serenely anxious as she anticipates her exodus from the parental home, where her mother has sheltered her for many years from the troubles of the faraway world. Since it was sung in 1992, “Yayeboye” is also a good commentary on the dire economic conditions that Senegalese women faced that year as a result of the devaluation of the French-sponsored CFA currency and the failed government policies that exacerbated the difficult social, political, and economic conditions in the region. Describing similar conditions, Gloria I. Chuku writes in her 2003 essay “African Women” that,

African countries are faced with a myriad of problems, including but not limited to political destabilisation, wars and conflicts, refugee problems, economic decadence, spiraling debt, disease such as AIDS, hunger and starvation, environmental hazards, and breakdown or lack of basic infrastructure and social amenities.

Furthermore, “Yayeboye” reflects Fall’s closest link with African American music because she sings this song with the strong kind of vocal power that characterizes Jackson’s “I’m on My Way to Canaan.” A passage of this song suggests the kind of representation of the mother as the way to salvation that one also finds in both “Mother Bowed” and “Yayeboye.” Jackson’s rendition of this major African American gospel song begins with a repetition of the following lines: “I’m on my way, oh to Cannan land / I’m on my way, yeh, Cannan land.” The beginning of Jackson’s recurring line, “I’m on my way” is similar to the frequent refrain, “I am on my way,” in “Yayeboye.” The first clause reflects the importance of repetition and call-and-response in Jackson’s music, which is one of the recurrent Africisms in African American music. In Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South (1978), Albert J. Raboteau considers repetition, “call-and-response, polyrhythm, syncopation, ornamentation, and slides from one note to another” as the “African heritage” that characterized the “singing styles of slaves” in Antebellum America.

Jackson’s “Canaan Land” is permeated with repetition and call-and-response, as the chorus frequently replies to the speaker’s repeated lines, “I’m on my way,” with the slight interjection, “on my way.” In a similar fashion, the chorus in “Yayeboye” constantly responds to Fall’s recurring line, “Sama yaye, ma ngini di dem [Mother, I am on my way],” with the recurring refrain, “Yayeboye yaye bulma mere [Please don’t be mad at me mother]” or “Yayeboye, bulma mere [Please don’t be mad at me mother].” Such a structural analogy between Jackson’s “I’m on My Way to Canaan” and Fall’s “Yayeboye” registers the power that circumatlantic black mothers have as the succor upon which a child can forever depend even if such a mother is deceased, as is the situation in Jackson’s song. Jackson sings, “My mother is gone, but I’m on my way,” and she later says, “I promised my mother, I’ll meet her over there.” Jackson’s filial representation of her mother attests to the invaluable importance of African survivals in her gospel, in which the deceased is considered to be still alive, even if he or she is physically in another world. For example, as Noel Q. King suggests, the Akan, among other African ethnic groups like the Yoruba and the Wolof, believe that the spirit of an ancestor revisits his or her living relatives. Recognizing the survival of this African worldview in African American culture, the late black historian Raboteau begins his major book, Slave Religion, with the classic poem “Forefathers,” by the Senegalese Wolof author Birago Diop, which reads as follows:

Those who are dead are never gone, they are there in the thickening shadow. The dead are not under the earth; they are in the tree that rustles, they are in the wood that groans, they are in the water that runs, they are in the water that sleeps, they are in the hut, they are in the crowd, the dead are not dead.

CONCLUSION

Mahalia Jackson and Aminata Fall used blues as a means for representing the invaluable role that black mothers fulfill by helping their children cope with alienation, de-personalization, separation, violence, and/or slavery. Spirituality permeates such melodies and provides succor, sustenance, and salvation to children whom forces of modernity take far away from their parental homes. Using gospel blues, the two black singers, who came from different parts of the Atlantic Ocean, reconnect with one another spiritually and vocally and express a sagacious modernity that reveals black people’s capacity to creatively cope with the fragmentation, suffering, and other dilemmas that slavery, colonialism, and other historical forces have created in their lives. Senegambians have uniquely experienced this modernity, since their lives have been shaped by traumatic historical forces, including, but not limited to, slavery, colonialism, postcolonialism, and a myriad of other involuntary migrations that keep them incessantly struggling to keep their families sane and safe in the troubled yet hopeful circumatlantic world.
NOTES


Chapter 6


42. Jackson, “Mother Bowed.”
REFERENCES


Recolonizing the Blues: The Paradox of the British Invasion of American Popular Music

Andrea Carasso

The Who's seminal 1973 rock opera Quadrophenia centers around the story of Jimmy, a young man "born in the war" who is torn between the drudgery of his working-class condition and fantasies of individual and class redemption. Jimmy holds a "dirty job" of driving for the local bus company in a mining town, where workers are "put down," "pushed around," and "beaten every day." Although he sees his life as "fading," he is confident that "things are changing" and is determined not to "sit and weep again." His racket "cut and slim and checked . . . with an open neck," Jimmy rides a "G S scooter with [his] hair cut neat?" and perfectly fits the profile of The Mod, the late 1950s sharp-dressing, amphetamine-pushing British rebel youngster. In Quadrophenia's version, Jimmy the Mod is less the turn-of-decade existentialist extension of the coffee shop beatnik than the precursor of the 1970s disenfranchised punk. Jimmy rides to Brighton, hoping to recapture the excitement of his teenage rebellion, but he soon finds himself on a rock in the sea, where he contemplates whether to jump in and drown himself or return to his working-class oblivion.

Loosely referring to the real-life events of Easter 1964 in Brighton, when battles between rival youth groups—the notorious Mods and Rockers—made national and international headlines, Quadrophenia could be read as Pete Townshend's artistic autobiography. In the opera, Townshend (Jimmy the Mod) revisits a pivotal moment in his career, circa 1964, when he and a legion of other British musicians became instrumental in taking the rock 'n' roll revolution of the 1950s (personified by The Rollers) to new heights (embodied by The Mods). This revolution was to shape the course of British, as well as American, popular music in the latter part of the century. The music scholar James E. Perone has described The Mods versus Rockers dichotomy in early 1960s British culture as a "metaphor for the development of British Invasion rock," a proxy for the cultural tensions out of which, from 1959 to
THE INDIGENIZATION OF ROCK 'N' ROLL IN BRITAIN

Mods and Rockers were youth subgroups in postwar Britain, emerging as the offspring of the Teddy Boys (and Teddy Girls), Britain's first self-styled teenage group. In the early 1950s, the "Teddy" had rejected the austerity of the postwar years by resorting to the fashions of early-century Edwardian-era dandies and established for the first time teenagers as a self-identified social subculture. Coming in 'The Teddy Boys' wake at the end of that decade, and amid a backdrop of exploding juvenile unrest throughout the country, The Mods and Rockers "represented two very different approaches taken by disenfranchised British youth." The Rockers were associated with heavy and powerful motorcycles and favored black leather, and their musical tastes ran in the direction of such white first-wave American rock 'n' roll as Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, and especially Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent, who played in the United Kingdom in a fateful 1960s tour during which Cochran was killed and Vincent was badly injured following an automobile accident. In contrast, The Mods were influenced by The Teddy Boys in manners of dress and made a conscious attempt to appear more in touch with the times (or "modern") by favoring Italian scooters, modern jazz, ska-influenced sounds, and rhythm and blues.

Musically speaking, the differences metaphorically staged by The Mods versus Rockers confrontation revolved around the development in Britain of distinct youth musical styles that had their roots in American popular music (rock 'n' roll and blues, in particular) but radically departed from these origins through a process that Jon Stratton has defined as "indigenization." American popular music arrived in Britain in the 1950s through the records that American servicemen and merchant seamen traveling to England brought along with them (this being one of the reasons why Liverpool—a major port—became such a hotbed of musical activity), and through the live performances of American rock 'n' roll artists and bluesmen on tour in the old continent. This stream of transatlantic sounds led to the development of a fervent, yet rudimentary, scene of young British musicians who adopted and appropriated American popular music and "indigenized" it. Some British artists reworked rock 'n' roll in the direction of a style closer to Holly, Cochran, and Vincent's rockabilly, favoring it over the harder-driving R & B-influenced rock 'n' roll of such African American artists as Little Richard, Fats Domino, and Bo Diddley. As a formula mixing the blues form with hillbilly's string and backbeat emphasis, and a favorite of southern white rockers (like Holly and Vincent), rockabilly better suited the playing skills of the British musicians, as well as the preferences of their audiences. In a similar fashion, others adopted the blues, leading to the birth of a local blues scene in late 1950s Britain that pushed the style to new realms of artistic innovation, emphasizing technical skill as well as a quasi-elitist and anticommmercial stance.

The first generation of homemade rock 'n' rollers emerging in Britain in the mid-1950s was driven by local artists who often became popular before the American originals they closely imitated. Leading the pack were such figures as Lonnie Donegan and His Skiffle Group, Cliff Richard, and Tommy Steele. These last two contended at length over the label of the "Elvis of Great Britain" and, like Elvis, soon moved on from music to movies. Another important group of artists was a phalanx of rockers the likes of Marty Wilde, Adam Faith, Bill Fury, and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, whose "Shakin' All Over" topped the charts during 1960.

A pivotal moment of the first generation of rockers occurred in 1956, when Lonnie Donegan, the acclaimed "King of Skiffle," became the first British artist to break through the U.S. pop charts. A genre originating in the United States and typical of urban rent parties in the 1930s, skiffle was extremely popular in the United Kingdom after World War II, where it became, in Robyn Stitwell's words, "essentially an acoustic, low-tech version of rock 'n' roll." Skiffle is a hybrid blend of American jazz, "negro" folk, blues, and country music. It could be performed with the makeshift instrumentation available through the penury of the war's aftermath and only required a guitar, a bass, and a washboard to fully equip a band. Skiffle was at the root of the Beat revolution of the early 1960s. Because it was homemade music, relying on cheap instrumentation, and based on simple chords and rhythms, it appealed to working-class teens with limited financial resources and basic, if any, musical skills who perceived it as the ideal formula for "instant music" and spontaneous musicianship. Critics estimate the number of skiffle bands in Britain in the late 1950s to have been anywhere from 5,000 and 40,000. Most British rock groups (including The Beatles) started out as skiffle bands and evolved into different styles of crews when budgets and technical ability allowed them to do so.

Cliff Richard was another major figure among the early British Rockers. Richard, in the words of the British Invasion historian Michael Bryan Kelly, the "rock 'n' roll in England, their Elvis . . . credited with getting rock 'n' roll off the ground." His 1958 hit single "Move It," credited to Cliff Richard and The Drifters (later renamed The Shadows to avoid clashes in the U.S. market with the much more popular R & B outfit of the same name), is often described as Britain's first rock 'n' roll record. In the lyrics, "Move It" proclaims, in such lines as the ethos of rock 'n' roll as youth music, "It's rhythm that gets into your heart and soul / Well let me tell you baby it's called rock 'n' roll." In addition, the song defied those on both sides of the Atlantic who were expecting its incumbent demise. The narrator says, "They say it's gonna die but honey please lets face it / Well we just don't know what's a going
to replace it.ii4 "Move It" also challenged the shallowness of the other styles that the music industry was pushing in the wake of rock 'n' roll's purported demise in the late 1950s. This challenge is visible in the following excerpt, in which the narrator says, "Well ballet and calypso's have got nothing on / Real country music that just drives along."ii5 Thus, "Move It" reveals a conception of rock 'n' roll as an unstoppable, inimitable, and irresistible fluid music that travels across spaces. By carrying this music with roots in Mississippi blues into England, Richard made an invaluable legacy to British music. John Lennon is reported to have claimed that "before Cliff and the Shadows, there had been nothing worth listening to in British music."i6

As the thrust of the early rock 'n' roll revolution was waning on both sides of the Atlantic at the close of the 1950s, a live dance music style that became known as the "big beat," and was later known as "Beat," developed in Britain, taking the process of "indigenization" even further away from original rock 'n' roll. Combining rhythmic elements of rock 'n' roll, the vocal textures of doo-wop, the jazz-derived cadences of skiffle, and the African American traditions of R & B and soul, British Beat not only further indigenized American rock 'n' roll: it paradoxically turned it into a commodity for reexportation to the U.S. market. Developing across several music scenes throughout the country, and with distinct outcomes in each of them, British Beat music was shaped mostly in Birmingham (with such bands as The Spencer Davis Group and The Moody Blues), London (most notably with The Dave Clark Five, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, and The Yardbirds), and, above all, Liverpool. Here, it took on the distinguishing denomination of "Mersey Beat" and showcased some of the most prolific acts of the genre, including Gerry & the Pacemakers, The Searchers, Cilla Black, and, last but not least, The Beatles.

Central to the development of British Beat was a preference for an 8/8 rather than a 12/8 beat, which was a distinct departure from the 12/8 beat syncopation of American rock 'n' roll rhythms that were less familiar to British musicians and audiences. British Beat adopted a "changeless four-four offbeat" drumming style, which "was thoroughly flexible [and] could be used to give a rhythmic propulsion, and therefore a simple dance beat, to anything."ii7 Many of these songs sometimes originated in traditions far removed from rock 'n' roll, as was the case of the Music Hall tradition (the British equivalent of vaudeville). Ironically, the development of this new drumming style took place not in England, but in Hamburg, Germany, where several of the Mersey Beat bands (including The Beatles) played lengthy sessions night after night in the city's red light district during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Comparing the British Beat style to that of Little Richard and Buddy Holly, Dave Laing has noted:

In the Liverpool Beat style, the chord-playing of the rhythm guitar was broken up into a series of separate strokes, often one to the bar, with the regular plodding of the bass guitar and crisp drumming behind it. This gave a very different effect from the monolithic character of rock, in that the beat was given not by the duplication of one instrument in the rhythm section by another, but by an interplay between all three. This flexibility also meant that Beat music could cope with a greater range of time-signatures and song shapes than rock 'n' roll had been able to.ii8

The wider musical range that British Beat was able to incorporate included not only rock 'n' roll, black and white, but also the larger tradition of the blues (and R & B), which had undergone a major revival in Britain since 1957, after the Musicians' Union rescinded its ban against American jazz artists performing in the country. At a time when, in the words of Joe Boyd, "black music of most kinds was a minority taste in white America,"ii9 American bluesmen had come to regard Europe, and Britain, in particular, as a kind of "Promised Land," where they performed before highly appreciative (white) audiences. As such bluesmen as Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Muddy Waters toured extensively in Britain in the late 1950s, a youth following for the blues developed, especially among working class young Brittons who "appropriated [it] as a signifier to define and reflect their sense of otherness"ii10 and created an ardent circle of aficionado practitioners.

The British blues revival climaxed in 1961, with the formation of Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, which was Britain's first amplified R & B band and an incubator of a whole generation of white British bluesmen that included Jack Bruce and Eric Clapton (who went on to form Cream), John Mayall (founder of The Bluesbreakers in 1963), and Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck (who later created, with Clapton, the trinity of Yardbirds' guitarist; Page also formed Led Zeppelin later in the decade). Other major icons of the British blues music included Alvin Lee (founder of Ten Years After in 1966), as well as Keith Richards, Mick Jagger, and Charlie Watts (catalysts of the impending Rolling Stones fame), among others. A significant part in the British blues revival was also played by British music scholar Paul Oliver, whose Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues (1960) remained the definitive book on the subject for several decades.i1

As it happened with rock 'n' roll, British musicians "indigenized" the blues, especially in the fact that in Britain, the division between folk-blues (purportedly the original, authentic form of blues) and R & B (its urban African American pop variation) was never as clear-cut as the purists would have wanted it to be. Ironically, as it also happened in rock 'n' roll, the British adoption of the blues prepared for its popularization in later years among white middle-class Americans. Like its rock 'n' roll counterpart, the blues revival stormed the United States in the early 1960s, not from its birthplace in the American South, but from Britain, where it became a product of transatlantic dialogue.

THE BRITISH INVASION OF AMERICAN MUSIC

British artists had tried to penetrate the American music market, which was by far the largest and most profitable of all commercial sites, since the mid-1950s, when Lonnie Donegan peaked at number eight on the Billboard pop charts with his first U.S. release (which was a skiffle rendering of Lead Belly's "Rock Island Line"). Donegan broke into the U.S. Top Ten once again in 1961. Cliff Richard made headway in 1959, with "Living Doll," which peaked at number 30 for one week, and again in 1963 with "Lucky Lips," which did not make it past the number 62 spot, before
returning to the Billboard Top Forories in 1964 (the magic year for Brit rock), with "It's All in a Game."

Besides Donegan and Richard, few British acts appeared on the U.S. charts before 1964, and most of them were irrelevant to the Beat and rock revolution to come. As Kelly points out in his meticulous chronicle of the British Invasion, "most of the British records [that] hit the U.S. charts [prior to 1964] had been . . . either jazz-oriented, instrumentals, skiffle, or a combination" of styles.\(^{23}\) In other words, such music was almost indistinguishable from the vast musical blandness that dominated the U.S. charts in the late 1950s and early 1960s. English imports were part of many reservoirs (which also included Latin, mild jazz, and instrumentals) to which the American music industry was resorting to get out of the swamps that had followed the demise of early rock 'n' roll.

In the United States, original rock 'n' roll had fallen out of favor toward the end of the 1950s. A number of factors are typically mentioned as concurrent causes of this demise. These factors include Little Richard's retirement from music to become a born-again Christian in 1957; Elvis Presley's enlistment in the U.S. Army in 1958 and his successive relocation to Hollywood for a full decade; Jerry Lee Lewis's blacklist from American radio following the staunch moral backlash of his third marriage to a thirteen-year-old cousin; Buddy Holly's death in a plane crash on February 3, 1959 (a date also remembered as the "day the music died"); the dismissal of Alan Freed (rock 'n' roll's legendary DJ and promoter) from radio and television in 1959, after being indicted for payola payments (a well-established practice in the music industry also known as "pay for play"); and Chuck Berry's imprisonment (just a couple of years later) under the Mann Act, for transporting an underaged girl across state lines for immoral purposes.\(^{23}\)

Music scholars offer diverging interpretations of what followed the eclipsing of rock 'n' roll in the United States in the late 1950s. Those who look more closely at the dynamics of the music market, like rock historians Philip H. Ewans and Reebie Gorelo, argue that, beginning in 1959, popular music in the United States became more bland and formulaic, driven by large doses of "teen" sounds put out by a growing number of independent labels.\(^{24}\) Gorelo points out that rock 'n' roll, a "rather limited science," had, by the end of the 1950s, been absorbed into the "collective unconscious" of singers, songwriters, and producers, who used its fairly elementary formulas to endlessly mass-produce derivative artifacts typically known as "schlock rock."\(^{25}\) This development brought about a "new generation of white, middle-class teen idols"—Fabian, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell, and others—whose musical backgrounds barely scratched the core of rock 'n' roll.\(^{26}\)

A more sophisticated, and ultimately more compelling, interpretation comes from such scholars as Paul Friedlander, Peter Miller, David Hatch, and Stephen Millward, who are interested not so much in what happened on the sales charts, but rather what brewed beneath them.\(^{27}\) These scholars see the period from 1959 to 1963 as transitional, in which a "genuine fusion of black and white music" took place "on a level of intimacy not encountered since the early 1950s or, arguably, the mid-1920s."\(^{27}\) African American artists like Salmon Burke, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and others demonstrated that an R & B artist could still retain a vital relationship with the black audience while surviving in the teenage pop market and in a Las Vegas nightclub context.\(^{28}\) Among white artists, the mainstreaming of the folk revival brought renewed interest in the African American roots of American popular music and in a quest to merge these elements with rock 'n' roll. Bob Dylan, an early rock 'n' roll artist who had embraced the blues through folk music in the late 1950s, did just that in his early 1960s quest for a style that would merge folk-blues with rock 'n' roll.\(^{29}\)

It is in the five-year hiatus between the demise of early rock 'n' roll and The Beatles' historic landing at JFK International Airport on February 7, 1964, that the roots of the new style were laid, as the British Invasion of American music took shape. According to music historian Charlie Gillett, "Britain served the useful function of reestablishing popular music as a medium for personal expression rather than as the raw material for mass-produced entertainment."\(^{30}\) The Beat movement, which had been developing since the turn of the decade in Liverpool, Birmingham, and London (but also as far away as Newcastle, Glasgow, and Dublin), provided those sounds of "self-expression," and, despite some initial hesitation, U.S. audiences embraced them with sudden and unprecedented enthusiasm. The first British Beat song to appear on the Billboard charts was Del Shannon's 1963 cover of an early Beatles number, "From Me to You," which Shannon (an American artist) had heard during the rehearsals for an all-star concert in London in which both he and The Beatles were featured. Shannon's version faithfully replicated The Fab Four's original arrangement and represented an early signal that America's new sounds were being shaped across the Atlantic. That same year, The Beatles, who had already had three successful releases in Britain (in late 1962 and early and mid-1963), made repeated attempts at breaking the U.S. market, all of them aborted.

Only on the strength of their next two singles, "She Loves You," released in the summer of 1963, and "I Want to Hold Your Hand," released in the fall of the same year, was EMI, The Beatles' British label, able to persuade Capitol Records, its U.S. counterpart, to put their commercial muscle behind a major promotion campaign of the band, release their latest two singles in the U.S., and sponsor the band's major television and live appearances. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was released in the United States on January 2, 1964, and, within three weeks, it went to the top of the pop charts, where it remained for seven straight weeks. One week after that first release, Capitol put out "She Loves You," which replaced the previous hit at the top of the charts in late March. "Please Please Me" followed one week later, rapidly climbing to number three. These records championed the driving "beat" rhythm that British rock 'n' roll had "indigenized" from their American sources. Before the year was out, The Beatles had charted thirty-four singles on the Billboard Top 100 pop songs (a historic high), of which had climbed to number one, two to number two, and one to number three, four, and ten, respectively. Nineteen Beatles singles made it to the Top Forties in 1964 alone, including all of the four songs that had been unsuccessfully launched on the U.S. market the previous year. Beatlemania
had swept the United States, and the band had become, in Lennon's infamous words, "more popular than Jesus."

No account of The Beatles' sudden storming of the U.S. pop charts in 1964 is complete without reference to their first U.S. tour in February that year. Extensively discussed in print and film, the February 1964 tour included performances to screaming and sold-out audiences in Washington, D.C., and New York City's Carnegie Hall, as well as three appearances on the most powerful vehicle of youth culture promotion in the United States at that time, the Ed Sullivan Show. The television appearances drew audiences in excess of 70 million viewers each, with the first one on Sunday, February 9, reaching a record crowd of 73 million viewers, about two-fifths of the total U.S. population, and the largest number of viewers ever recorded on American television until that day. Urban legend has it that during The Beatles' first Ed Sullivan appearance, the crime rate in New York City fell to historic lows.

The documentary The Beatles: Their First U.S. Visit, by director Kathy Dougerty, director Susan Frömmke, and the celebrated direct cinema auteur Albert Maysles, brilliantly captures the spirit of that first U.S. tour. A few memorable episodes of the film show the band's quick wit during press conferences and interviews (Q: "What do you think of Beethoven?" RINGO: "Great. Especially his poems"), the crowd's hysteria, and the Beatles' own disbelief at their own success. Other memorable moments of the film reveal an exchange with a journalist that discloses the band's own sense of temporality (Q: "Have you decided when you're going to retire? RINGO: "We're going to keep going as long as we can." Yet, the most revealing moment in the documentary is the visual commentary on Paul McCartney, who is shown while obsessively glued to a transistor radio in the act of witnessing his own stardom on the American airwaves. As McCartney contemplates his notoriety, he appears more as the spectator than the shaper of his own fame. McCartney's amazement lies in what I call the "paradox of recolonization," the conundrum by which an entire generation of young U.K. musicians raised in the penury of postwar Britain and exposed to American rock 'n' roll and blues, mostly through imported records, were able to master their key stylistic elements by absorbing instrumental techniques and playing styles (and accents) that were musically and culturally foreign to them. The "paradox of recolonization" consists of taking those newly learned genres to new stylistic heights and then reexporting them to the United States, thus "recolonizing" this country's own sound.

THE MUSICAL ROOTS OF BRITISH BEAT

Although singles were a determinate factor in the British artists' immediate success during the rock 'n' roll and Beat rock years, albums were the leading element in the lasting fame of these musicians. In this vein, rock albums began to outsell the singles precisely in the wake of the British Invasion; therefore, the early albums of the British Invasion bands tell the full story of their music and reveal the full range of their sound matrix. The Beatles' first, second, fourth, and fifth albums, as well as their fifth EP, "Long Tall Sally," all released between 1962 and 1965, included a large number of cover songs, spanning a wide range of musical influences that turned their sounds into a comprehensive synthesis of American popular music. Although no traditional rock 'n' roll number appears on their first album, Please Please Me, the pioneers of the early rock 'n' roll revolution are well represented in all of The Beatles' subsequent album releases that include covers songs. Chuck Berry ("Roll Over Beethoven," "Rock and Roll Music"), Carl Perkins ("Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby," "Honey Don't," "Match Box"), Little Richard ("Long Tall Sally," "Hey, Hey, Hey, Hey"), and Larry Williams ("Dizzy Miss Lizzy," "Slow Down") all figure prominently among the rock 'n' rollers. In that genre, The Beatles also cover Buddy Holly's "Words of Love" and "Kansas City," a song written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the Jewish Tin Pan Alley songwriting duo responsible for Elvis Presley's defining "Hound Dog" of 1956.

R & B, in its various subforms, is another central node of attention in The Beatles' early albums. The first and second LPs include four "girl group" covers: The Shirelles' "Boys" and "Baby It's You," The Cookies' "Chains," and The Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman." The latter song is the first of three Motown hits covered by The Beatles, who also covered Smokey Robinson's "You Really Got a Hold on Me" and Gordy and Strong's "Money (That's What I Want)," Motown's first-ever single, and a piece recorded by Barrett Strong in 1959. Among the R & B classics, The Beatles covered Phil Medley and Bert Russell's "Twist and Shout" (which had previously been recorded by both The Top Notes and The Isley Brothers) and the lesser-known "Mr. Moonlight" (a song written by Roy Lee Johnson that became popular in Britain in the early 1960s among a restricted elite of R & B cognoscenti). The symbolic value of these song choices for The Beatles can only be guessed, but it speaks about how closely the British rockers were listening to black music and trying to replicate its winning formula. The Beatles' covers also included one Tin Pan Alley standard ("A Taste of Honey"), two soul ballads (Arthur Alexander's "Anna" and Richard Drapkin's "Devil in His Heart"), a Broadway tune ("Till There Was You"), and a C&W number ("Act Naturally"). This variety of covered songs demonstrates how well-versed the Mersey Musicians were in the whole gamut of American popular music and testifies to the range of influences that entered their Beat sounds.

Although the choice of songs for the early Beatles albums was obviously dictated by factors that went beyond the band's individual preferences and were rather determined by production and marketing decisions, these album selections show the extent to which The Beatles were, in fact, "imaginary Americans," as Leslie Fiedler has remarked. In addition to classic rock 'n' roll and rockabilly, which was the central pillar of their sound, the Beatles appropriated R & B and soul music, whose classics outnumber the rock 'n' roll covers in their first two albums. In Motown and R & B, The Beatles found the natural evolution of rockabilly, especially in the way that these styles emphasized group over solo artist, sophisticated arrangements over the more elementary formulas of early rock 'n' roll, and doo-wop-derived vocal harmonies over one-voice performance.
Along the same lines, blues, R & B, and Motown proved to be crucial ingredients for the music of the other British bands that soon ranked high in the U.S. pop charts in 1964, following the success of The Beatles. In February, a London Beat outfit called The Dave Clark Five (and typically known as the vanguard of the "Tottenham sound") shot to number six on the pop charts in the United States with "Glad All Over." This was a driving R & B single written by two of the band members, Dave Clark and Mike Smith, and featuring some of the key ingredients of the "Stax sound"—persistent saxophone line and percussion drumming—molded into a production closely reminiscent of Phil Spector's wall-of-sound early experiments at Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles. And, as The Dave Clark Five stormed the U.S. charts again a few months later with "Can't You See That She's Mine" (which peaked at number four), another London band, The Rolling Stones, named after a Muddy Waters blues classic, appeared for the first time on the Billboard charts that year with "Not Fade Away," which was their third U.K. release. Credited to Buddy Holly and Norman Petty, "Not Fade Away" had first been recorded by Holly's band, The Crickets, in 1957, and was based on the characteristic Bo Diddley beat, a rhythm drawn directly from Western African and Caribbean sounds.53

Two British Invasion bands joined The Beatles at the top of the U.S. charts in 1964. First it was an outfit from Newcastle upon Tyne, named The Animals, who went to number one in September with an electric rendering of a blues traditional, "The House of the Rising Sun," a song that had recently been covered by Bob Dylan in his first 1962 album. The other band was Manfred Mann, a jazz and R & B-influenced London group whose "Do Wah Diddy Diddy" had originally been recorded by the predominantly female black crew The Exciters and was rooted in gospel-reminiscent call-and-response vocals. Mann's version of the song, which spent two weeks at the top of the U.S. singles chart in October, typified the British Bears' adoption of American music. While preserving the call-and-response vocals, Mann simplified the more sophisticated snare drum work of the American original, replacing its heavy syncopation with a double pair of maracas that Mann played himself (a style that Mick Jagger was quick to adopt) and flavored with the distinctive wheeling tone of the Vox Continental organ.

All British Beat bands had a deep commitment with many aspects of African American music. As already mentioned, for The Beatles it was mostly R & B, especially in its Motown variety. For The Stones, The Animals, and Manfred Mann, it was mostly the blues and Memphis R & B, and their early albums bear witness to the Animals drew on both country and city bluesmen, John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed in particular, and R & B (Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, and Joe Tex especially). City blues was the foundation of Manfred Mann's sound (his first album included songs written or previously performed by Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon, and Muddy Waters). The Stones also drew on African American music in early albums that were, in the words of bassist Bill Wyman, "totally obsessed by the blues."54 The Stones' music has various influences stemming from the early master Robert Johnson to the city sounds of Muddy Waters and R & B (Irra Thomas's R & B classic "Time Is on

My Side" became a standard in their repertoire, although "black" rock 'n' roll (Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley) was also an important influence.

**THE BIRTH OF ROCK**

Additional British Invasion bands broke into the U.S. Top Ten in 1964. These groups included The Zombies, a band from St. Albans, a London suburb, whose "She's Not There," penned by one of the band's co-leaders, Rod Argent, offered an unusual combination of cool jazz-tinged atmospheres, strong vocal harmonics, and double-time drum that many described as "ahead of its time."55 Other British groups in the U.S. Top Ten included Gerry & the Pacemakers and Billy Kramer and the Dakotas, two Mersey Beat bands who, like The Beatles, were part of Brian Epstein's stable of artists. The Kinks, a London band that proved highly influential in the British Invasion for their merging of a wide range of influences from music hall to R & B and folk, made their first U.S. chart appearance in the fall, peaking at number seven with "You Really Got Me."

By 1964, twenty-five British Invasion bands had made the Billboard charts, with ninety-three hits, sixty of which ranked in the Top Forties for at least one week. The following year, the number climbed to 108, setting a new record, and it remained significantly high until 1968. Such success showcased, aside from the already established names, new arrivals, which included The Spencer Davis Group, a group from Birmingham that had as its head singer and multi-instrumentalist leader Stevie Winwood, who wrote a long string of R & B-derivative rock classics, including "Gimme Some Lovin. " Other top bands were Them (from Dublin, fronted by Van Morrison), The Yardbirds (a blues-influenced outfit from London that was famous for, among other things, enlisting in close succession such white blues guitar giants as Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, and Jeff Beck), Herman's Hermits, The Troggs, The Hollies, and The Who (whose engrossing appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival of 1967 made them an overnight sensation in the United States).

Beginning in 1968, the thrust of British Beat in the United States began to wane due to a combination of factors, all of which were, in one way or another, connected with a dramatic transformation of the American popular music scene in the wake of the British Invasion. The first of these factors was the development of an American native Beat movement closely replicating the sounds of the British Beat bands, just as the British groups had been hard at work early in the decade imitating American sounds and rhythms. The Monkees, assembled in Los Angeles in 1966 for the launch of a television sitcom centering on four aspiring rock 'n' rollers, became the American response to The Beatles. Likewise, The Turtles, another Los Angeles-based Beat band, and The Beau Brummels, from San Francisco, closely replicated not only the sounds, but also the looks (and at times the British-inflected accents) of their transatlantic counterparts. Another factor for the decline of the British Invasion was the growing attention that African American music, especially Motown, was garnering.
on the U.S. pop charts. From 1965 through 1971, Motown had at least ten Top Ten hits per year. The funk-oriented soul coming out of the southern studios in Memphis and Muscle Shoals also helped refocus attention in the United States on black music, which was now exploited at home in the emerging blue-eyed soul scene focusing on such bands as The Righteous Brothers and The Rascals. This synergy indicated that artists and audiences in the United States were now turning to African American music for new directions.

However, the driving force behind the decline of the British Invasion in the United States after 1968 was, in Elijah Wald’s words, a “major change in orientation [from] rock ‘n’ roll (the earlier, teen-oriented music) to rock (its myriad post-Beatles offshoots).” Beginning at mid-decade (a good break off point might be Dylan’s historic “Like a Rolling Stone” recording and his “electric” appearance at the Newport Folk Festival, which both occurred in the summer of 1965), American rock extended the adoption of the African American musical language to a wide territory of popular music, presaging over the inception of various forms of “lyphenated” rock. These forms included folk-rock, which stressed poetic or socially conscious lyrics (Dylan, Byrds); blues-rock (Steppenwolf, Butterfield Blues Band, and its British originators, which by then had become a staple on the American charts); country-rock (Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Band, Poco); southern-rock (Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd), psychedelic-rock (The Shondelles, Vanilla Fudge, The Doors); West Coast-rock (Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, CSN&Y); funk-rock (Janis Hendrix Experience, Sly & the Family Stone); and jazz/fusion-rock (Blood, Sweat & Tears, Chicago).

Although it would be improper to consider the British Invasion as the sole factor for the emergence of rock, one can argue that it was its enabling factor. Specialists and aficionados might disagree with the finer subgenre distinctions, but the fact remains that the British Invasion was instrumental in the emergence of a rock scene that, in the mid to late 1960s, took American popular music to unprecedented sophistication, leading us back to the crucial question of the “paradox of recolonization.”

**THE PARADOX OF RECOLONIZATION**

In his study of British music, Michael Bryan Kelly has argued that the British Invasion bands’ “penchant for redoing U.S. hit songs of the recent and not so recent past” was a “paradoxical situation.” The paradox, according to Kelly, lies in the fact that even if the British bands became popular in the United States because they presented themselves as an alternative to American rock ‘n’ roll, “nearly all of them reidid old American material.” Although I share Kelly’s idea of the paradox, I rather see it operating in another, much more decisive, direction. The paradox of the British Invasion was, in my view, not in the music that these artists were playing, but rather in the fact that it took these British performers—who were teenagers in the late 1950s and had grown up absorbing and replicating American blues, R & B, and rock ‘n’ roll—to persuade white American record-buying audiences that African American music was, in fact, the language of the postwar generation. It took the recolonization of American music by a swarming British Invasion in the mid-1960s to enable the rise of a fully-fledged rock movement in the United States and persuade Americans at large that the blues and its musical offspring could function as a powerful cultural reservoir capable of granting a whole generation of Americans, in Mark Kemp’s words, a “sound of their own.”

Discussing the birth of southern rock, Kemp articulates this paradox when he writes the following:

It’s ironic that the genesis of southern rock goes back to the British Invasion of the mid-1960s, when acts such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, the Animals, Cream, and Led Zeppelin took southern American musical traditions such as the blues, country, and early rock ‘n’ roll, and transformed them into a new sound. It was an exciting new style of rock ‘n’ roll that reintroduced southern musical traditions to a new generation of Americans, including young southerners, who were hungry for a sound of their own, a sound that was distinct from the music of their parents yet culturally familiar.

It took a sort of cultural triangulation, from Memphis and Chicago to the poverty-ridden urban peripheries of postwar Britain and back to the golden gates of the Billboard charts, to empower mainstream American popular music with the sounds of their African American roots. The British Invasion musicians had adopted American blues (and its offshoots) simply for its musical merit and, unaware of the cultural suspicion that had until that point made it unapproachable to white audiences in the United States (barring the brief season of early rock ‘n’ roll, circa 1955–1959), had, in the process, rendered the racial (and racist) implications of American blues irrelevant. To these British youngsters absorbing records imported from the United States in the mid to late 1950s, American blues did not equal, as singer Cassandra Wilson effectively argued in a recent NPR interview, “low class, low Income, sadness,” but rather, in Keith Richards’s words, the “most important thing America has ever given to the world.” In addition, when British music had a chance to break through the U.S. pop market, it had the paradoxical effect of suddenly neutralizing that cultural uneasiness and pushing it to the side of the equation. “One obvious effect of this European glamour,” Wald emphasizes, “was to separate rock ‘n’ roll from its associations with juvenile delinquency and, more enduringly, with black Americans. Another was to smooth the path to its acceptance as art.”

In the mid-1960s, the British Invasion was instrumental in allowing American rock to blossom into full maturity and aspire to the status of art. It would obviously be naïve to claim that rock put an end to racial separation in American music (let alone segregation in the United States). In spite of its roots in the blues, American rock became a largely white affair with its own racist and often noncommittal undertones; however, beginning in the 1960s and the following decades, the blues gained unconditional acceptance in white America. In the summer of 1967, the Monterey Pop Festival catapulted Otis Redding to instant
stardom amongst a white crowd that completely understood the “musical ley lines being drawn that night between rock and deep soul.” In a similar vein, Monterey prepared Jimi Hendrix to become, within a couple of years, the “highest-paid rock musician in the world.”

Redding and Hendrix were living testaments to the fact that, by the second half of the 1960s, the American popular music scene had become at least a little less focused on the race of musicians and more on the stuff of their music. Although the white artists remained more marketable than the African American ones for many years to come, the British Invasion marked a defining watershed in the development of late-twentieth-century popular music in the United States. Its shifting focus away from early rock ’n’ roll to a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated “Mod” aesthetics, mixing African American styles, defined “rock” as we know it today.

CONCLUSION

The music referred to today as “rock” was born in the transatlantic circulation of African American forms of popular music from the United States to Europe and back again to the United States. This movement, which is referred to in this chapter as the “paradox of recolonization,” involved the adoption in Europe, circa 1955, of American blues and rock ’n’ roll and their “indigenization” through processes of adaptation and transformation, which we now label under the shorthand of the “British Invasion of American popular music.”

NOTES

10. Millard, Beatlemania, 98.
25. Garofalo, Rockin’ Out, 143.
33. It is interesting to note that the Beatles stopped including covers in their albums roughly at the same time they stopped performing live.
REFERENCES


**Chapter 7**


Samples of the Past: Performative Nostalgia, Illicit Sounds, and Cultural Transformation in Latin House Music

Susana Loza

Instead of fretting about the illusory divide between high and low, I prefer to focus on my visceral reaction to a song. Yes, that’s right—my approval is generated by my affective response to music. Does music move me physically and emotionally? Why do certain tracks make me slip into sadness, wax ecstatic, or rise with rage? Does the beat’s sweet pulse inspire me to bridge the Cartesian chasm that treacherously divides mind from body? In short, how does music help me think with my flesh and feel with my mind or not know the difference between these supposedly opposed modes of perception? According to Simon Frith, “music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it: Musical response is . . . a process of musical identification; aesthetic response . . . an ethical agreement.” Moreover, as Frith argues, the “critical issue” in one’s relationship to music is “experience and collusion: The ‘aesthetic’ describes a kind of self-consciousness, coming together of the sensual, the emotional, and the social as performance.”

In addition, music is a way to anchor bodily experience to aesthetic theory—a way to tether the affective tingle to the theoretical thrill. But how does music achieve this reconciliation between objective theory and subjective experience? It does so by concretizing theory, by mapping such concepts as artistic merit and objective value onto the ultimate unstable subjective field: the body. Music is thus an embodied abstraction, a conceptual hybrid that refuses to reproduce the disastrous duality that pits mind against body, objective taste against subjective bias. A conceptual model based on music’s properties encourages us to listen to our bodies, feel theory, think sensuously, and question the hierarchy that says only objective thought is a valid form of analysis. With that in mind (and body), let me spin you a story about a subject torn between the dispassionate confines of good taste, the joy of corporeal betrayal, and the naughty allure of the manufactured mainstream.
MUSICAL INTERLUDE #1: UNMAPPING THE “MACARENA,” OR WELCOME TO TECHNOLANDIA

I do not police the limits of good taste and the boundaries of talented musicianship. I am not here to plumb the rich and interrelated debates about the sonic and sociopolitical ramifications of those all-too-familiar binaries of high art/low art, good taste/bad taste, and subculture/mainstream. Although the aforementioned debates are undeniably significant, I believe it is more crucial to emphasize how these aesthetic dualities are underpinned by oddly analogous desires. In this vein, Frith astutely argues in Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music that listeners “bring similar questions to high and low art, that their pleasures and satisfactions are rooted in similar analytic issues, similar ways of relating what they see or hear to how they think and feel.” In fact, the differences between high and low [only] emerge because these questions are embedded in different historical and material circumstances, and are therefore framed differently, and because the answers are related to different social situations, different patterns of sociability, different social needs.

I shall begin with a shameful if telling admission. The first time I heard the “Macarena” in the summer of 1994, I could not stop myself from swaying self-consciously to its exceedingly tacky, yet terrifyingly catchy, and sequenced baseline. Of course, this lapse into bad taste wasn’t actually my fault. No, you see, I had been helplessly ensnared in a transnational circuit of panethnic Latinidad stretching from Spain to Central America and California. The historical underpinnings of this transnational circuit of culture and commerce can be traced back to the “invention of the Americas, along with the rise of the West and the birth of capitalism as a modern/colonial world system circa 1492.” This means that, “Latino identities are ultimately rooted in histories of conquest, colonization, chattel slavery, labor exploitation, economic and political subordination, and political/cultural struggle.” While this politicogographic explanation of panethnic Latinidad explains how I came to fall under the spell of “Macarena,” it doesn’t excuse me for my unabashed adoration of 2 Unlimited, Culture Beat, Real McCoy, and other Northern European techno-by-the-numbers outfits. Flippant Neo-Marxist excises aside, the story behind how that undeniably cheesy song traveled to meet me in a San Francisco suburb may just be more important than my reluctant reception. Perhaps I should tell you exactly how that infamous dance craze came to blast out of my Father’s boom box.

My grandparents—transnational migrants ever in flux between the San Francisco Bay Area’s Mission District and El Salvador’s Ahuachapán—had just returned from an eight-month sojourn in the aforementioned Central American town near the Guatemalan border. As usual, they had smuggled back plenty of illegal treats, ranging from mangos verdes to noxious-smelling cheeses, “authentic” Indian goods like beach towels, and, of course, the ubiquitous smattering of pirate cassettes featuring continuous mixes of música tropical, silly cumbias, and delicious merengues.

I was surveying this odd conglomeration of commodities when Meme, my abuelo, slipped in the “Macarena” cassette. As he pressed play, he turned to me and said (I swear), “Susanita, te digo que te va a gustar esta canción. ¡Es muy moderno! ¡Es muy moderno! [Susanita, you’re going to love this song. It’s pure techno! Very modern!]” Enter the “Macarena,” with its unbelievable formulaic deployment of synth-pop clichés and programmed handclaps overlaid with the most absurd lyrics. I just condescendingly shook my head—thinking this is not techno. Fatboy Slim, The Chemical Brothers, Orbital, Aphex Twin—British white middle-class social misfits with Roland TR-808 drum machines and archives of arcane samples—now that’s techno. But before I could denounce my well-meaning grandfather, I noticed that not only was I tapping my foot in time, I was also anticipating the call of “Hey, Macarena.”

As Meme improvised an endearing little tecnocumbia dance, I realized that, like so many Latin@s before me and Anglos soon to come, I had caught Macarena fever. Billboard journalist Howell Llewellyn diagnosed this phenomenon in an article entitled “BMG’s ‘Macarena’ Fever Spreads Around the World.” As Llewellyn argues, the “Macarena” had a particularly tumultuous chart history; it saturated Spanish-speaking markets in 1993 and 1994, but its perennial party tune did not penetrate U.S. non-Latin markets until early 1995. Apparently, its meteoric climb up the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart followed the creation of the Macarena dance and the crafting of a semi-English-language version. Of course, it isn’t really surprising that the “Macarena” did not seduce Anglophonic listeners until it was rendered more linguistically intelligible and accompanied by one of those Hot Latin dance crazes. After all, Latinophiles can’t subsist on the 1950s stylings of the chachachá and the mambo forever; they must seek out “new” intercultural sounds that translate the exotic into the familiar.

Whatever the cause of my Macarena fever, I knew that I would be scouring the bargain bins of Berkeley for this utterly predictable synth tune, not just because later listening sessions would conjure up an image of my dancing abuelito, but also because this song made me feel inexplicably happy and resolutely interpertated by some strange transnational strain of Latinidad. This Latinidad is a panethnic identity forged by and through “mass migrations, political exiles, conquest of peoples and territories, and processes of uneven development and unequal exchange that characterize the relations between Anglos and Latino/Americans both within and beyond the territorial boundaries of the United States.” And I thought again, this music isn’t techno, but it was—in Español no less. And I mused: Was this música electrónica a postmodern curse or a modern symptom? Was it a symbol of high-tech pastiche or a market quest for rational beats?
What is postmodernism? Is it a slippery entity that eludes the grasp of the academician by sliding across disciplinary divides, seeping under geographical borders, oozing through time periods? Is postmodernism a parochially limited Western literary phenomenon? Or is it part of a broader aesthetic whose range of stylistic practices includes playful irony, parody, parataxis, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, pastiche, bricolage, and simulation? Does postmodernism signify a permanent rupture with modernism because of these aesthetic permutations? Or is it rather an especially virulent strain of modernism, righteously transgressing once-sacrosanct categories (e.g., authorial agency, textual integrity, and originality) in the name of progressive innovation and creative liberation? What if postmodernism isn’t a new species or a fresh mutation, but rather a sly and sanctimonious hybrid—the “lily white pure blooded offspring of an inbred and dishonest (in the sense of not acknowledging its mixed blood) modernism and poststructuralism”?

Perhaps postmodernism is simply synonymous with poststructuralism, the philosophy that demolishes truth claims, deconstructs hegemonic master narratives (liberal humanism, Marxism, and Freudianism), and dismantles the discourses of modernity into their flawed foundational components (i.e., universal reason, progress, freedom, and liberal humanism). If so, does postmodernism, with its poststructuralist dissections of entrenched binaries, actually “liberate” the bodies burdened with representing the negative half of Western dualities (i.e., women, people of color, queers, and colonized Others)? Is it truly a radical paradigm that harbors the promise of a “postwhite,” “postmale,” “posthumanist,” “post-Puritan world”? Or does postmodernism merely sanctify the epistemological violence done to minoritized subjects by uncritically celebrating their schizophrenic fragmentation and hybridity as clever aesthetic tactics rather than reading them as the painful yet productive survival strategies of Chela Sandoval once dubbed “differential consciousness”? Is postmodernism thus the cultural materialization of the worst relativist impulses in multiculturalism and political correctness? In other words, does it “highlight notions of difference, marginality, and otherness in such a way that it further marginalizes actual people of difference and otherness?”

Is postmodernism guilty of constituting a “world in which things are different. And that is the pleasure of it, but the difference doesn’t matter”? Is it complicit in the commodification of this Otherness? Namely, does postmodernism help capitalism peddle ethnicity as spice, selling it as a “seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture”? Does it help convert gender into a fashion, sexuality into a (life)style choice, then market the difference and pocket the proceeds?

Before summarily dismissing postmodernism as a cynical profiteer, cultural traitor, and capitalist conspirator, it is worth considering whether it could operate as a complex social category, a “dominant yet diverse set of structural and institutional processes wherein sensibilities, styles, and outlooks are understood as reactions and responses to new societal conditions and historical circumstances.” But what if postmodernism is more than a reaction or response to historical flux and economic flexibility? What if it is the sociocultural catalyst of such widespread transformations? Could postmodernism represent “both a symptom and a powerful cultural image of the swing away from the conceptualization of global culture less in terms of homogenizing processes . . . and more in terms of the diversity, variety, and richness of popular and local discourses, codes, and practices [that] resist and play back systemic and order.”

But if postmodernism is both a sociocultural catalyst and symptom of capitalist change, how can its origins be definitively established? Is it a strictly Western phenomenon—an urban malaise that began in the 1970s with the end of modernism and its many progressive myths, as David Harvey maintains in The Condition of Postmodernism: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change? Or should we yoke its birth to post-Fordism, as Fredric Jameson does in Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism? Perhaps postmodernism should be historicized in the plural, a heterogeneous field that emerged from an interrelated, yet disjunctive, set of diachronic processes that unfolded in a multiplicity of times and spaces (i.e., European colonization), as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan argue in Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices.

Postmodernism painfully began when the colonized and the colonizer encountered one another in that moment defined by astounding power differentials, mistaken adoration, treaty-making, theft, translation, transculturation, subjugation, resistance, rape, repulsion, and attraction. Such a version of postmodernism would be grounded in the political economy of European imperialism and how this historical experience cut specific channels in which capital and culture continue to flow. Today, these colonial circuits have been reconstituted as transnational commodity flows, but that does not obscure their imperialist genesis or the ongoing exchange of products and politics. A case in point is the so-called Latin Market, which consists of the Spanish Caribbean, Latin America, Spain, and the Latino/a sectors of the United States. This is a clear example of how the Spaniard’s Conquest created a disjointed empire that has now become a profitable panethnic market bound together by the chains of colonialism, the stigmata of Roman Catholicism, and the mixed linguistic blessing of Spanish.

Now that we have shifted the birth hour of postmodernism from the 1970s to the less exact, nonlinear, multiplied, and emunctured time of colonial contact, perhaps we should also consider displacing the monolithic West as the privileged and unquestioned locale from which postmodern lineage must be unequivocally traced. This rhetorical move would prevent us from "accidentally" and Eurocentrically refying
the hegemonic capitalist center. But can we shift our focus to the real and imagined zones of diaspora, hybridity, and mestizaje without reperipherizing these narratives? In other words, how do we get beyond the tired tactic of flipping over a binary and revalorizing the effaced half? Furthermore, how do we deconstruct unsustainable polarities like West/rest and first world/third world without suppressing the real and stark economic inequalities that persist? Clearly, it is necessary that we mark the differences that power makes, while simultaneously contesting the totalizing narratives that refuse to reconceptualize this transnational social order, in which oppression is much more nuanced and nefarious than could have ever been anticipated. But if oppression’s tentacles reach further and deeper than we ever dared to fear, this strong dispersal of social relations offers us unimagined spaces in which to plot and launch cultural countermoves. As we cunningly twist and turn, we might just hear the whispers of fellow conspirators as they, too, seek clandestine pleasures in the interstitial gaps of power. And when our desires fatefuly collide and commingle, hybrid musical languages may just tumble recklessly from our already impure mouths. If you listen closely, you just might hear Afro-diasporas in dialogue. You might hear merengues harnessed to a house beat, electro-cumbia sprinkled with salsa soul diva vocals, and mariachi melded with hip-hop, samba jungle, ambient Anénd, and, maybe, even some rumba-soaked reggae.

Postmodernism and modernism, as we have seen, are coextensive, symbiotic, and intensely implicated, but each functions to make the Other intelligible. The imposition of modernist desires creates postmodern praxis. Or, in some cases, postmodern methods preclude modernist compulsions. Sometimes, however, to become the modern agent of history, colonial subjects are split apart, only to begin the arduous, yet often enriching, process of recombination. These postmodern identities—compelled, chosen, and overdetermined—cannot be constructed with the cracked tools of ethnically bankrupt aesthetics. In fact, these syncratic subjects sculpt themselves—they chisel identities out of pain, necessity, and yearning; therefore, this is an extremely and politically infused aesthetics—one in which deconstructive designs are always paired with reconstructive aspirations. This is a postmodern aesthetics permeated by the productive dialectical tension between overdetermined destinies and semifermented agencies. This is a method for understanding music and memory as faulty, fractured, and forever innovating. Often feigning a fixed form, music and memory spiral forward and backward, inward and outward, searching for new pasts and imagining old futures.

**MUSICAL INTERLUDE #2:**
**SAMPLING SENTIMENTALISM,
 OR THE ORIGIN THAT NEVER WAS**

In *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place*, George Lipsitz notes how traditional arguments about immigration, assimilation, and acculturation assume that immigrants choose between two equally accessible cultures that are clearly differentiated and distinct from one another. But what if immigrants leave a country that has been shaped by its colonizers and enter one that has been shaped by the colonizer? . . . Which culture do they carry with them? Into which culture do they assimilate?29

To further complicate matters, one may ask, What if one comes from a colonized nation—such as El Salvador—that has not only been scarred by U.S. cultural hegemony, but also marked by a media monolith named Mexico, not to mention implicated within Caribbean circuits of consumption? If so, you might have missspent your preteen years raptly watching heinously dubbed John Wayne Westerns or been suckered into tedious tear-jerking rancheras. Or you could have sacrificed Saludos to random radio programas that mixed languages and genres; one moment you would have been phonetically crooning along with The Beatles, and the next dramatically belting out “Volver, Volver” with Vicente Fernández. This was the El Salvador my thirteen-year-old mother left behind in the 1960s. As she flowed northward, she joined a historical wave of Latinos spurred on by the easing of immigration restrictions in 1965. My Mexican father was also mercilessly dragged into this frantic stream to the North (although I’m sure he would tell me that it was the American Dream that beckoned and he chose to freely follow).

Unlike my mother, my father wasn’t particularly conversant in Central American culturas. This situation was remedied once he landed in San Francisco and became acquainted with a bevy of non-Mexican Latinas. In fact, my musical anecdote involves an evening that he spent entertaining some feisty Salvadorianas. As an awkward silence yawned between him and his guests, he decided to fill the uneasy gap with a recorded collection of rancheras. Unfortunately, right before he could lay down the needle, one of his compadres charmingly denounced the said music as the “Rancheras que daban cólera” or “rancheras that enraged.” Of course, debate and drama ensued. In the end, my father was induced to listen to “La Bala,”30 a delectably danceable cumbia by Los Hermanos Flores. He’s never been the same since his corruption by that Salvadoran megabanda.

Now what exactly do these nostalgia-ridden anecdotes have to do with Latin house music? How do immigrant pasts like these come to be embedded in electronic soundscapes? I would like to suggest that DJs sample classic popular canciones to resurrect the past, with a difference. Many Latin house DJs choose samples precisely because they are soaked in collective history and saturated with individual meanings. When these samples of mambo and merengue ring out, they do not merely, nostalgically, and unproblematically reanimate and reify a simple past. Instead, the spatiotemporalization and resignification of these sonic tidbits in an intricate techno mix is at once profoundly deconstructive (in that it actually takes apart recorded musical composition) and recuperative (because it recontextualizes these elements, creating new meanings for cultural sounds). These electronic musicians cut up the past, repeat it in a loop, and place it in a disjointed and reinvigorated present.
In Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America, Tricia Rose contends that such radical acts of creative resurrection are not just a means for “paying homage,” but they also function as a strategic “invocation of another’s voice to help you say what you want to say.” She suggests that sampling is a “means of archival research, a process of musical and cultural archaeology,” which is an experience that requires listeners to actively decipher the culturally evocative and historically indexed sample. Archivally minded listening means that fans must be willing to painstakingly reconstruct the crumbling ties that bind an imagined political past with the impure sounds of the present. To adapt George Plaskete’s theoretical insights about cover songs to digital sampling, the sample thus invites, if not insists upon, a comparison to the original, a striking of a familiar chord, a rousing residue of musical memory, and an engagement of the listener into a historical duet with lyric and lineage. In this process of remembering, a distant dialogue occurs as a delicate and dichotomous dance between past and present, place and possibility, evolve in the musical experience. Between the sample, its composer, its interpreter(s) and listeners, connecting, disconnecting, reconnecting. Old verses, new voices, new places and possibilities, new ears.

Perhaps, it is time to concretize this musical experience by anchoring it in my own affective politics and listening pleasures.

I might have begun my discussion of Latin house and sampling processes here, in a dance-induced daze at a now-defunct deep house club in San Francisco. I was in the middle of turning to one of my equally sweaty pals to utter some critical crack about the causal relationship between hallucinogens and epically bad dancing when “Volver, Volver” blasted out of the loudspeakers and immediately deafened me in a rush of nostalgia. But it wasn’t the “Volver, Volver” which is to say that it wasn’t the ranchera I sonically butchered on command as a toddler. Neither was it the melodramatic song that reached across a celluloid screen to touch my adolescent Mother’s heart. And, it certainly wasn’t the nationalistic canción that inevitably deposited the faintest trace of tears to my Father’s eyes. No, this was pura techno. It was a manically metronomic beat broken by the ceaseless and chaotic looping of Fernández’s yearning cry to “Volver, Volver” (“To return, to return”). Yet, this Latin house song made that desperately desired homecoming impossible; it only offered up snippets of the past, pieces of narratives, and bits of pain interspersed with joy. Unlike techno tracks cleverly littered with esoteric samples from Sesame Street, Speed Racer, and Star Trek, this song compelled me to think beyond mere sonic categorization and dancing dismissal. It forced me to feel, relive, and reconstruct these seemingly incongruous narratives attached to the same musical product across four decades and three nations. Volver, volver. Repetition with a crucial difference. Memory mediated by music. A sonic return that is contingent, critical, and connective. This sort of sampling doubles as an archaeological excavation that unearths an already hybridized history. By refusing perfect speech and an unmediated return to the pristine past, a sentimental sample forges a provisional and disjunctive link between the dispersed dreams of the past and the far-fetched fantasies of the future. Its refusal of exact speech underlines the fact that sonic communion with the past is always based on the incommensurability of nostalgia and the faultiness of memory.

**Chapter 8**

**BIOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPOSE #1: CLUB SUBCULTURA, SAN PANCHO STYLE**

Latin house music, like most electronic dance music, is often deemed apolitical, hedonistically escapist, and fundamentally uncreative for the following reasons: (1) its lack of lyrics and thus a coherent narrative, (2) its repetitive use of rhythm, and (3) its lack of traditional instrumentation. Let us begin with the last argument; this defensive logic is typically articulated by rock critics and musicians who would rather not school themselves in computer music criticism and electroacoustics. Electronic dance music is thus demonized because, unlike rock music, it cannot be showcased, marketed, and sold as “live” and “authentic” forms by Clear Channel, MTV, and Rolling Stone. Ultimately, it is a specious distinction; however, that allows synth-produced and computer-programmed sounds like techno and house to be labeled as aural noise, while rock—which, I might add, is amped, electrified, cybermixed, studio-boosted, and could not be reproduced without technological intervention—is proudly christened as the raw, real-deal, bona fide music. In the end, these hostile territorial disputes become more about the idiosyncrasies of taste than the actual musico-cultural differences between rock and rave.

But what about the absence of political anthems in electronic dance music? Or its undeniable fondness for repetitive beats? Do these traits reveal house music’s “true” function, which is its hypnotic ability to make us forget the post-Fordist crush of late capitalism? Does an attraction to militantly perfect computer rhythms signal one’s complete interpellation by and for the technocapitalist order? Or, does this digital music act more like an aural opiate, its steady 4/4 pulse soothing the disenchanted youth, seducing them with the promise of a futuristic utopia? In Altered State: The Story of Ectasy Culture and Acid House, Matthew Collin forcefully disputes the notion that electronic dance music, has no politics because it has no manifesto or slogans, it isn’t saying something or actively opposing the social order, misunderstanding its nature. The very lack of dogma is a comment on contemporary society itself… [Electronic dance music] culture offers a forum to which people can bring narratives about class, race, sex, economics, or morality. Again, its definition is subject to individual interpretation: It could be about the simple bits of dancing; it could be about environmental awareness; it could be about race relations and class conflict… It could be about reasserting lost notions of community—all stories that say something about life [today].

Like Collin, the theorists, music critics, and parents who tremble in the shadow of digital dance music too quickly dismiss the importance of the temporary communities created and maintained by its listeners. They hastily erase the club experience, the performativity of dancing, and the music-as-event. I think it’s time to take a trip into Technolanda. ¿Bailamos?
I love to dance. There, I admitted it. Furthermore, I don’t like to dance in heterosexist pairings at mainstream venues or salsa places where my steps are prescribed and hegemonically proscribed. I prefer to dance with friends to house or techno in dingy clubs and sketchy DJ bars. Dancing is not just about senslessly losing oneself in the delicious cascade of computerized rhythms. How can I explain it to you without a dancing demo? For your sake, I’ll have to try.

Imagine that I’m getting my groove on at a Latin house nightclub called Brinca. It’s a mixed crowd. That means a bevy of gay Latino boys, a smattering of Latina lesbians, a dash of transgendered folks, a generous helping of genderqueers, and a fair amount of ambiguous straight people congregate there. I’m bobbing about in the middle of a packed floor. My pace becomes more frenetic as I anticipate the cut of the beat or the loop of a familiar sample. These bodily movements of mine are profoundly interactive, full of jubilant spins and unexpected spills. I dance, manipulating my flesh to match the beats of this unknown, but gorgeous, remix. To dance, I must constantly predict what might sonically flow from the rhythms currently ravishing my ears. Will it be the standard sample of the James Brown snare drum? Maybe the diva’s sexy mantra will resurface beneath the pulsing bassline? It could be a speedy breakdown of those crazy hip-hop beats that have been ominously looming behind the electrode. I’m thinking about all this as I dance. I’m letting the genre give me hints and clues. I’m dancing and detecting, performing and listening, consuming and being consumed.

Dancing is about watching others move and maybe even surreptitiously mocking them for the amusement of your companions. Dancing can also be about copying cool moves and incorporating them into your own repertoire. Dancing is about feeling ecstatically confident about your fluid body one second and then misstepping into awkward apoplexy the next. It’s about viciously dissing the DJ during one track and then declaring your undying love when she plays that underground mix that you haven’t yet managed to track down. In essence, dancing is an event, a performance. It’s about being there with your friends and those strangers who share at least one of your musical passions. It is not necessarily apathetic and narcissistic. These samples of Latin classics that affectively move us—on the dance floor and in our nostalgia-ridden hearts—might possibly move us in other ways. That is, they might just inspire us/them/to find more overtly political connections.

But can this panethnically produced music create an actual political Latinidad, and not one based merely on rampant consumerism a la Sábado Gigante? Or will these Latin house dance anthems merely encourage the listener to purchase a perfect past instead of working toward a better future? Can this commodity serve as a source of memory that can be drawn upon in struggles against xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism? Or is it destined to reproduce these inequalities within its sonic discourse? And what does the sonic conversation between Latino music and African American sounds truly signify? Is it a cynical bid for crossover success? Is it another example of cultural appropriation? Or could it signal cross-cultural cooperation, a mutual willingness to disinter our interconnected histories of dispersal, subjugation, and recovery? In hopes of answering these questions, we must turn our attention to some instances of Afrodisporic music in dialogue.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE #3: DIASPORAS IN DIALOGUE

In her essay “A View from the South: Spanish Caribbean Perspectives on World Beat,” Deborah Pacini Hernández poetically captures the political possibilities of this expanding panethnatic Latin Market when she writes the following:

In this community, one can claim citizenship by listening to and borrowing from others’ music. Clearly, this is an imagined community, as its members do not even [necessarily] speak the same language or share the same geographical space, but it is a symbolically powerful one nevertheless, one [that] will hopefully exert a positive influence upon a region so long fractured by racial and cultural cleavages inherited from its colonial past.49

Although Pacini Hernández is specifically referring to intra-Caribbean exchanges, I would like to extend her analysis to include Latin America and the United States. Such a shift would highlight the increasing flurry of musical traffic and market collaboration across and within the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

This Latin Boom in musical markets is clearly reflected in the decision to create the Latin Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (LARAS), which is a Latina equivalent of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). The president of NARAS, Michael Greene, describes the artistic and cultural constituency of LARAS as the “people in the United States, Mexico, Central America, South America, the island countries, and Spain who are practitioners either creatively or technically in the Latin music community.”46 Such a shift would also allow us to see how distinct strands of the African diaspora further diverged in the Americas and how this drastic dispersal necessarily resulted in the retention, reconstruction, and transformation of diverse cultural elements in the Western world. Today, these transculturated hybrids—sprouting from the erratic mestizaje of native tribal peoples, African slaves, and colonists from various European nations—are colliding once again, and their complex fusion of multiple musical traditions remind us that the colonial past was always already adulterated by heterogeneity and that transculturated hybridity is the inescapable condition of globalisation and transnational capitalism.41 These transculturated hybrids also remind us that culture is not a bounded entity or essence, but rather a radically relational or dialogic process.42

Let us now consider a few examples of sonic syncretisms that demonstrate such complex diasporas in dialogue. El General, an Afro-Panamanian artist, expresses himself by musically melding the Dominicanized idiom of merengue with U.S. AfroAmerican rap delivery in a mildly sexist dirge called “Las Chicas.”48 Meanwhile, CoC Music Factory, a U.S.-based twosome fronted by an African American and a Latino who are internationally known for their catchy dance anthems, were commissioned...
to remix the aforementioned merengue hip-hop hybrid to extend its club shelf life. The result? Deep and funky house, a dance music style that could itself be traced back to yet another Afrodisporic musical invention: disco. That's what I call diasporas in dialogue—singing across oceans and echoing across borders—even if it is in the name of panethnic marketability. But what if we reverse the direction of these flows and select our final example from U.S. shores? Is diaspora differently plotted when the site of syncretism is shifted northward?

In a track called "Tiburón,"85 Proyecto 1, a U.S. Dominican and Nuyorican band, mixes Dominican merengue with Puerto Rican salsa and then, for good measure, throws in a healthy dose of U.S. Afro-American-derived music of disco, electro, and R & B. "Tiburón" begins and ends with a sample of the signature trumpeting horns of Cheryl Lynn's disco classic "Got to Be Real." Throughout the mix, U.S. Afrodisporic roots are further invoked by the skillful layering of beats pilfered from Afrika Bambaataa's seminal electro track "Planet Rock."87 And, of course, who could forget Proyecto 1's saucy bilingualization of the chorus from The Isley Brothers' R & B classic "Shout:" "a little bit louder now / un poquito más duro / little bit softer now / un poquito más suave."88 These undeniable U.S. influences are roughly and gloriously blended with salsa and merengue rhythms that carry with them their own sedimented island variants of the African diaspora.

So how is this megamix to be differentiated from "Las Chicas"? They circulate in the same markets, they deploy similar styles, and they are both indubitably Latin House favorites. And yet, there are crucial differences—differences embodied in nostalgia and desire that are specific to certain locations and historical situations. I cannot speak for the longings of El General or the passions of Proyecto 1, I can only speak as a second-generation middle-class Latina that imagines she has more in common with second-generation U.S. Latinos of her age than a Panamanian rapper. Meaning? This possibly hallucinated relation to Proyecto 1 makes me hear their nostalgia not just for the Afrodiasporas of their Caribbean parents, but also their concentrated yearning for U.S. African-descended music that fills our airwaves, music that urban youth of all colors have been touched by in varying degrees. And, maybe, even misguided suburban kids like myself strave for such oppositional music that could nurture cultural resistance. As an alienated teen in a de facto racially segregated high school, I ached for sounds that could soothe the twin wounds of representational invisibility and internalized self-hatred.

CONCLUSION

In the end, all I know is that disco and R & B flood me with as much (and sometimes more) nostalgia as mambos, cumbias, and rancheras. Yes, the eclectic soundtrack of my life would be mostly strewed with música tropical, mariachi, alternative rock, industrial, hardcore techno, Latin house, ambient, New Wave, gangsta rap, drum and bass, and Brit pop. These seemingly disparate genres viscerally evoke and provisionally connect my past, present, and future. They serve as potent reminders that, music works not as a residual artifact of ethnic identity, but as an important part of the multiraciality of ethnicity. And this function is not limited to ethnicity. It also involves how we experience our class status, our age, our sense of location and place, our daily activities, our rituals, our rites of passage, and so on.86

In other words, music gives us a way to plot the ever-fluctuating coordinates of identity in a transnational age. As a U.S. Latina raised on the postmodern rhythms of diasporas in dialogue, I am a subject that can only be sung, a transculturated hybrid that can only be clasped in musical emotion. "Me eyes?"

NOTES

2. Frith, Performing Rites, 272.
3. Frith, Performing Rites, 19.
4. Frith, Performing Rites, 19.
14. In "Tradduttura, Traditores: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," Norma Alarcón helpfully diagnoses these dangerous tendencies of postmodernism, writing, "Postmodern feminist theories have arisen to supplant gender standpoint epistemology and to diffuse explanatory binaries. However, the critical question arises: Do they free women of color from the `service of violence against themselves,' or do they only rationalize it well?" See Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices, edited by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 130.
15. Chela Sandoval suggests that differential consciousness is the "radical form of cognitive mapping that [Neo-Marxist literary critic Fredric] Jameson seeks. This theory and method understand oppositional forms of consciousness, aesthetics, and politics as organized around the following five points of resistance to U.S. social hierarchy: (1) the equal rights (liberal and/or 'integrationist') mode; (2) the revolutionary ('socialist' and/or 'insurgent') mode; (3) the supremacist (or 'cultural-nationalist') mode; (4) the separatist mode; and (5) the differential (or 'womanist,' 'mestiza,' 'Sister Outsider,' 'third force') U.S. third world feminist...it has generated many names) mode of oppositional consciousness and social movement." (62). See Chela Sandoval, Methodology of the Oppressed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 62.


20. West, "Black Culture and Postmodernism," 89.


22. David Harvey aligns himself with various architects who date the symbolic end of modernism and the concomitant postmodern shift at 3:32 PM on 15 July 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St Louis (a prize-winning version of Le Corbusier's machine for modern living) was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it housed" (40). Such a precise sounding of the deaf knell not only erases the complexity of modernism to one teleological narrative, it also absolutely assures that postmodernism is logically precede modernism. See David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernism: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990).


25. For a fun example of house meets merengue, see Tito Puente Jr. & The Latin Rhythm, "Oye Como Va," Dance Your Ass... Off - A Mover Tu Bum Bum, Polygram, 1995, compact disc.


27. For a delicious and dusty mix of mariachi trumpets and bilingual rap vocals, listen to the eponymous single by Delinquent Habits, "Tres Delinquentes," RCA/BMG, 1996, compact disc.

28. For an audio amalgamation of samba drums and junglistic beats, lend your ears to King Africa, "Salta," DJ Dero Volumen 1, BMG/Oid Mortales, 1995, compact disc.

29. Groove to the Andean pipe-inflected rave beats of Mercosur, "Solo Le Pido a Dios (DJ Dero Carnavalito Mix)," DJ Dero Volumen 1, BMG/Oid Mortales, 1995, compact disc.


34. Rose, Black Noise, 79.


36. Deep house is a subgenre of house music that is revered by its fans for its faithfulness to Chicago house and New York garage. Deep house cools up a tastic sonic stew from disco, gospel, soul, jazz, funk, Latin, and R & B. Like its predecessors, it simmers at 120 to 125 BPM. What distinguishes deep house from its progenitors is its tendency to overuse shrieking divas, ominous organs, and chord progressions to whip up dance floor drama.


42. Rogers, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturalization," 499.


44. El General, "Las Chicas (CoC Pose Mix)," Killer Latin Dance Tracks, Volume 1, BMG/Logic Records, 1996, compact disc.


49. Proyecto 1, "Tíburón (English Version)," Lines 47-52.

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Mercosur. "Solo Le Pido a Dios (DJ Dero's Carnavalito Mix)." *DJ Dero Volumen 1*, BMG/OLD Mortales, 1995, compact disc.


Bhangra-Beat and Hip-Hop: Hyphenated Musical Cultures, Hybridized Music

Melissa Ursula Dawn Goldsmith and Anthony J. Fonseca

Although it has its origin in the music and dance of the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, bhangra-beat music, produced mainly in the last decade in three areas—the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States—is far removed from the folk dance sounds and ritual functions from which it descends. In fact, this hybrid music genre has as much in common with hip-hop and rap as it does with the folk dance and music of Punjabi farmers. For starters, rap, hip-hop, and bhangra-beat share common textual aspects, as well as similarities in their onstage and video performance practices: an obsession with materialism, or an expressed desire or boasting of "bling," in the form of jewelry, wealth, and/or clothing; a defiant stance on cultural identity politics; a tendency to boast of deviant behavior, for example, getting drunk or "krunked" (stoned); a sexualization of lyrics, with a male emphasis on desiring sexy women, and a female emphasis on using sexuality to acquire material goods; and a self-referential call impelling listeners to dance. In addition, these three musical subgenres (rap, hip-hop, and bhangra-beat) embrace remix culture and the commercial appeal of exoticism. At times, all three have also had some connection to rhythm and blues, as well as house (especially in its reggae incarnations) and trance music subgenres.

The similarities of rap and hip-hop music to what we refer to term bhangra-beat (sometimes variously referred to by scholars as "folk hop," "urban desi," and "post-bhangra") attest to the fact that Westernized bhangra hybrids have eschewed the strict rules of the folk ritual and its music. In addition, the rock and pop influence that inspired Westernized Bollywood, as well as very early (1980s) U.K.-produced bhangra music, disappeared from the underground bhangra-beat scene. It comes as no surprise, then, that the evolution of Western music termed bhangra leads to confusion: What was termed bhangra in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and early 1990s in no way resembles what is today termed urban desi, postbhangra, bhangra-beat, or folk hop.
in the same way that rap and hip-hop music in no way resemble classic rock 'n' roll or even most alternative music. And there is further confusion between Bollywood-influenced dance music (like that by A. R. Rahman for Slumdog Millionaire [2008]) and the raw sounding bhangra-beat club music. An early scholar of bhangra-influenced Western music, Gregory Dietrich, defines urban desi and bhangra-beat as basically being the same type of music. More recently, Rupa Huq distinguished between bhangra and what he calls "Asian underground," which roughly equates to the postbhangra or bhangra-beat; Huq differentiates Asian underground as being a "DJ-centered dance music" known for its hybridity, often infused with hip-hop or rap. For the purposes of this chapter, we draw a distinction between not only bhangra and bhangra-beat (or postbhangra), but also between Westernized Bollywood and bhangra-beat, as the Bollywood and disco music aesthetics of the former (which incorporates house and techno sounds, as well as some rock 'n' roll) make it markedly different from the latter, which is informed by hip-hop and rap aesthetics. One could say that bhangra-beat, like rap and hip-hop, dares Caucasian listeners to enter its world, while Bollyhop (for want of a better term) is more assimilative, venturing out into the world of Western beats and rhythms.

Ironically, although a second-generation music, bhangra-beat is more traditional than its predecessor, bhangra. Bhangra-beat artists (musicians and DJs)—here the term refers to the record mixers and producers, not radio announcers—return to their musical and cultural roots, incorporating both the traditional vocals in Punjabi and the traditional drum instrumentation of Punjabi folk music (the dhol). The musical transformation occurs when these DJs remix these traditional vocals and instrumentation over Western dance rhythms, blending in heavy doses of hip-hop and, more often than not, a rap solo. Bhangra-beat incorporates house and techno to a much smaller extent than does urban desi (associated with Bollywood). The result is a hybrid sound that, by 1997, had infected the underground dance club circuit, on occasion branching out into mainstream radio and music videos.

The cross-borrowing between bhangra-beat and rap and/or hip-hop musicians (in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom) has been an interesting phenomenon in respect to music, aesthetics, and culture. Since 2002, marked by the production of Jay-Z and Punjabi MC's megahit "Beware of the Boys" ("Mundian To Bach Ke"), the exotic rhythms of the bhangra-beat sound have become increasingly attractive to rap and hip-hop artists alike. The two musical genres seem well-suited for one another: Exotic rhythms represented in hip-hop, as in bhangra-based music, suggest expansiveness both geographically and musically. Jay-Z, who at times emphasizes the lush in hip-hop culture, occasionally employs a full orchestra. Bhangra instrumentation and aesthetics, or the bhangra "sound," when incorporated in hip-hop music and performance practice, have been produced on both small and expansive levels—from employing just bhangra-influenced rhythms to utilizing a large cast of Punjabi performers to share the stage. Jay-Z, MIA, Timbaland, and Snoop Dogg have all been bitten by the bhangra bug, which has emerged in the club scenes in London, New York, Chicago, Seattle, Toronto, and other urban areas, including Singapore.

THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE RATE

To understand the factors that led to the cultural music exchange between urban black youth (rap/hip-hop) and urban Asian youth (bhangra), one needs a brief history of the global travels of Indian musical aesthetics—and Punjabi music in particular. The musical similarities between bhangra-beat and the music of American and British urban black youth is perhaps due to a similarity of broader cludic and assimilation experiences, all of which set the stage for musical melding. In his benchmark essay "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" Stuart Hall argues that the idea of black experience or black culture is not, as it is often mistaken to be, homogenous. He argues that in actuality, what makes "blackness" viable is its emphasis on the diversity of various black experiences; in fact, Hall uses the term diaspora to describe the black experience. Dietrich describes the same quality in the Indian experience, especially when it comes to musical culture, arguing the following:

Among diaspora communities, music is vital for formulating diasporic cultural identity ... in two ways: First, music unifies diasporic groups, in musical contexts where the homeland is semiotically conjured through musical sound. In its mediated forms, music also provides a means of diasporic communication between separate diaspora communities, so that, for example, Indians in New York are aware of what Indians in London or Trinidad are playing and saying, and vice versa.

In both African American and Indian American cultures, music works as a method of enculturation and unification. This occurs despite the fact that commercial success for such music hinges on what Huq calls its "difference" or exotic appeal. Huq describes difference as a "key competitive advantage" in music, something that Hall refers to as "postmodernism's deep and ambivalent fascination with difference," including cultural difference. As Hall notes, "there's nothing that global postmodernism loves better than a certain kind of difference: a touch of ethnicity, a taste of the exotic." It is also likely that cultural borrowing occurs because, as Ronald L. Jackson posits, blackness appeals to other ethnic communities, often as a commodity. South Asian minority groups in the United Kingdom and United States readily adopt "African American iconography, [which] politicizes, at least temporarily, Indian racial identities by drawing attention to Asian—black connections," resulting in a "countercultural hipness" or an antiauthoritarian stance, perhaps against the previous generation.

Reciprocal borrowing therefore seems inevitable. This is especially true since rap and hip-hop artists and producers have a history of assimilating various musical styles and instrumentation into their songs. This is analogous to rock musicians' borrowing of Indian instrumentation, especially the use of the sitar. From The
that it does more than reflect the social process of an ethnic group (or related ethnic groups) in that music actually provides contexts in which cultural meaning is formulated and negociated. In other words, such theories posit that music is no less than vital for formulating cultural identity.15 Such music empowers youth to stake out a unique cultural space in the host nation, providing a voice for the marginalized community.

By 1995, in England, where Indians are usually subsumed under the label “black,” some bhangra artists began to draw heavily upon black musical idioms and methods.16 This is, of course, accompanied by the search by urban youth for both acceptance and individuality through a reliance on indices of African American culture, not only musical choices, but aspects of image, style, body language, and speech. As Rajan Datar notes in a 1997 Guardian article, it became hipper to be Asian. In metropolitan areas, Asian kids started walking around with extra swagger and pulse.17

Simultaneously, urban Asian youth in the United Kingdom found that their negative experiences were beginning to mirror the discrimination and stigmatizing faced by black urban youth. For example, they had to deal with the alienation inimical to many minority ethnic groups, which typically leads to a need for the aforementioned balancing affirmation of a positive cultural identity, typically one that often reasserts masculinity. As Jackson concludes, the images of maleness in rap identify men as being thuggish, rough, and brash; he categorizes male rappers under the umbrella term contemporary sexual superintendents. In contrast, he notes that women in rap are portrayed as passive sex objects to be appreciated and controlled.18

Likewise, bhangra-beat emphasizes the role of men as musicians, as well as dancers, which is reflected in the aggressive physicality of musical and dance performances. Only recently have more women, for instance, DJ Rekha in New York City, Ms. Scandalous in the United Kingdom, and women involved with university coed dance teams, begun to attract attention.19 In addition, the bhangra-beat scene has always been restricted to minority music (similar to the early U.S. rap scene of the 1980s) due to the fact that the economics of the music industry has worked against its musicians. Between 1985 and 1993, when bhangra artists often outsold mainstream artists, few if any made their way onto the U.K. charts.20

**BEATING THE ODDS, MUSICALLY**

Like urban African American youth ensconced in the U.S. rap and hip-hop culture, urban Punjabi youth found themselves creating what can be termed an intermezzo culture and a positive identity situated within the broader environment of alternative music crucial to communities created by diaspora and colonialism.21 With the 1990s, Westernized Punjabi artists began to move away from rock and pop-based bhangra, returning to the original folk beats. Not only did they incorporate more dhol drum beats and tumbi, they ushered in the rise of several young Punjabi singers. This was in stark contrast to the previous use of white vocalists or Punjabi vocalists singing a
Westernized style. This combination began to give the bhangra (soon to be bhangra-beat) sound a more authentic feel and identity. The Punjabi language lyrics or song texts, sung in a high range, with an energetic tone and added nonsensical, random vocalizations, lent themselves well to remixes—filled with background noises, extended crowd calls, synthesized bombs and sirens, and hip-hop and rap vocalizations. These musical aspects are easily heard in such songs as D J A.R.S.'s (Ajay Paul Singh) "Tabba"22 and Panjabi Hit Squad's (featuring Ms. Scandalous) "Hai Hai,"23 and the influence of rap culture can be heard in the song texts.

In "Tabba," for example, the rap opening begins with text in English. Listeners hear boasts of "taking no breaks" (with some repetition on "breaks"), several shouts of "hey," a call out to "big girls [to] let their boobs hang to the floor," and a call out to "skinny girls [to] shake whatever [they've] got." A.R.S. can then be heard extolling the virtues of volume, prodding listeners to "turn it up," before the male singer starts his Hindi song.24 In "Hai Hai," in lieu of bagging about not taking any breaks, Ms. Scandalous uses a variant euphemism, a more female claim—"Can you handle this?" She characterizes herself as a lady of fashion, describing herself toward the beginning of the song as "dressed in designer" brands that include Versace, Armani, and Gucci. She boasts that, when in her presence, "ladies look so envious." It soon becomes clear that her ideal listener is a man to whom she gives advice so he can approach and captivate women like her. She gives him instructions on how to arouse female curiosity: "whisper in her ear and drive her: softly crazy / Touch her softly, kiss her gently," turning the innuendo up a notch with the addition of the call for men to dance like they are "sexing."25 In addition, most of these bhangra-beat songs have lengthy introductions that impel listeners to dance—a musical aspect found in most hip-hop or rap, as well as in remix culture, and in some other kinds of earlier black popular music intended for dancing (for example, hot jazz or dance hall reggae).

To understand and appreciate how this combination of music and dance occurred organically is to be aware of the influence of bhangra dance on the Punjabi culture and the music itself. Bhangra-beat, Bollyhop, bhangra of the 1980s, and Punjabi folk are all informed by various kinds of musical exchanges. Bob van der Linden, who writes about the intertwining of Sikh political, cultural, and musical histories, observes that, "modern Singh music has been concerned with representations (identity politics) and appropriations, such as western staff notation, the harmonium, recording industry, and so on."26 Traditional or folk bhangra began in the late nineteenth century as a rural Punjabi folk dance, with songs and drum accompaniment that were performed during community festivals and celebrations. Such a festival was integral to the identity of these cultures in Northwest India (and into Pakistan). Since the Punjab region is largely agricultural, the Baisakhi festival focuses on harvest and is most often associated with traditional bhangra music and dance. Because of India's colonization and subdivisions, Punjabis moved about, and they taught their traditional bhangra dance moves and instruments to those who came into contact with them. Maintaining identity was part and parcel of these exchanges, helping to foster a sense of continuity, not only in twentieth-century India, but also in South Asian minority communities that resulted from exoduses to England, Canada, and the United States.27

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, London's Southall Asian community set the scene for the birth of Westernized bhangra music. Van der Linden explains that this traditional music "blended with Western music much to the joy of the youth." He adds that this hybridization angered some elders, especially since Westernization had the potential to undermine Punjabi "masculine" culture, as it could lead to Sikh men and women beginning to dance together in nightclubs. Nonetheless, the hybrid music was important to the "identity politics of so-called black bhangra" (for example, reggae, hip-hop, and Afro-Caribbean music) and took various forms.28 From 2005 onward, the blending of Bollywood music with house music, rap, and hip-hop has led to the further popularization of Westernized Indian film music, Punjabi folk, and bhangra-beat (sometimes all subsumed under the umbrella term urban desi).

**HARVESTING BHANGRA'S DANCE POTENTIAL**

Traditional bhangra dance refers not to just one kind of dance, but several folk and martial arts dances. Today, the numerous bhangra dance competitions held in universities and colleges worldwide include a hybridization of bhangra-beat and Punjabi folk dance moves (traditional bhangra moves). Sometimes no distinction is made between traditional bhangra dance and the hip-hop-influenced moves adapted by young South Asians. In a 2008 Teach-Learn Connection article, Govind Ranggrass, who dances on the Yale University team, describes college bhangra dance competitions and their intense training requirements and stunt show quality and contrasts them with traditional bhangra dance (because the competitions involve both men and women dancing together—a practice that differs from traditional bhangra dance in which men dance separately from women, who also get to dance). He explains that the mainstreaming of bhangra in popular media has caused some debate.29 Ranggrass cites, for example, the use of the dance as an aerobics workout, and he notes that it is being used as a marketing ploy, thus "excitizing the folk dance."30

Ranggrass explains that the slow pace of the traditional bhangra folk dances, meant for village fairs, festivals, and celebrations, has been increased. The competitiveness of the dancers has led to the speeding up of the tempo of the music—and the pace of the dancing. It has also resulted in a marked increase in the number of stunts involved, leading some critics of the competitions to argue that they add a sense of artificiality to the performance. In contrast, Ranggrass describes traditional folk bhangra dance as being less athletically challenging, saying, "The basic step involves raising both arms in the air and alternately lifting the knees, while lightly hopping and bouncing the shoulders. With backs straight and chest proud, dancers swing their arms and clap their hands."31 The dhol, a large barrel drum heard in popular Punjabi music, accompanies the dance. These dance moves resemble, somewhat like pantomime, the specific farming and harvesting movements seen among farmers.
in the Punjab region. Competitions, on the other hand, involve flips, tumbles, and even pyramids.

In short, bhangra-beat dancing takes Punjabi folk moves and adapts them, combining them with hip-hop dance moves and energy. In Bollywood films and music videos (from the 1990s to the present), dancers have further adapted bhangra-beat moves, including in their choreography a combination of traditional dance moves, hip-hop dance, and jazz dance. Of course, other kinds of dance, including classical Indian dance, sometimes make their way into the Bollywood film and video dance routines. What is often featured in the film’s musical segments is the hero, heroine, or both, dancing with a group of people behind them. In bhangra-beat videos, Bollywood influences can be seen: In many cases, singers are backed by a group of dancers in traditional clothing or by chorus dancers doing choreographed hip-hop and/or jazz dance moves together. Male dancers, singers, and musicians usually punctuate or hype their music by shouting “hai” or “hoy.” On the dance floor, the dancers sometimes raise their fists in the air to these shouts.

An example can be seen in the music video for “Jaan Panjabi,” by Punjabi by Nature (PBN), from the 2007 CD Jaan Panjabi: The Album. It features the members of PBN, a musical group that formed in the mid-1990s, and consists of South Asians, white Canadians, and West Indians playing traditional instruments like the dhol and tumbi. The video also features the Jaan Panjabi Bhangra Troupe (dancers). The opening of the video shows a combination of shots that include hip-hop elements, a hip-hop and jazz dance chorus, bhangra dancers in traditional clothing, dhol players, and martial arts dancing, in addition to members of PBN, who also add hip-hop hand movements. The music includes shouts of “hai” near the opening of the video to imply a party atmosphere. The incorporation of rap creates another urban texture (in addition to the hip-hop beat), serving as a contrast to soloist Charanjit Chani, as the chorus dancers incorporate some adapted traditional bhangra dance moves.

According to Jacqueline Warwick’s study of the Toronto bhangra-beat scene, despite their diversity, South Asian immigrants are often perceived as one single cultural group. In these communities, it is therefore likely that a child of Bengali descent may learn to dance to Punjabi music. This observation can be applied far beyond Toronto. Louisiana State University’s Indian Student Association holds an annual celebration on campus that features all kinds of dance, starting from classic Indian dance and ending with Bollywood dance. The staged show attests to the accessibility of classical Indian dance and music, the active preservation of various Indian cultures through dance and music, the acknowledged diversity of the dances and dancers, and the extreme popularity of Bollywood among not only the performers, but also the audience. In the past years, the largest number of dancers—both male and female preteens and teenagers—appear in the Bollywood numbers. Although these numbers often focus on choreographed hip-hop and jazz dances that resemble the chorus in the aforementioned examples, at these university exhibitions, Bollywood musical numbers themselves often mix elements of all these kinds of dances.

A further example can be seen in the music video for “Aashiq” by Miss Pooja (the queen of Indian pop music as of 2010, equivalent to Madonna in the United States) and PBN not only perform the music, but also become involved in the mixture of dances. Miss Pooja flirts with the camera, her eye movements suggesting the choreographed eye movements of classical Indian dance. Furthermore, she pantomimes the flute, a possible allusion to a dance pose of Krishna. Traditional instruments like the dhol and ekara are featured in the video. Likewise, the video features more traditional (folk) bhangra dance; the women are, at times, separate from the men, and the men dance in a circle behind Miss Pooja. The chorus (of hip-hop and/or jazz dancers) is the only conspicuously missing element. Hip-hop dance movements and music elements (in the official video, as well as in the behind-the-scenes shots) are nevertheless omnipresent.

**FLIP IT ON THE “BROWNHAND” SIDE: MUSICAL BORROWING**

The interrelationship between music and dance, in the context of the incorporation of musical elements of rap and/or hip-hop, begs the question of a musical exchange informed by not only cultural and social meaning, but musical aesthetics. Bhangra developed on the heels of Punjabi folk revival in Indian enclaves of British cities during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The music (minus instrumentation) and dance of Westernized bhangra musicians borrow from Punjabi folk elements, sometimes combining them with a Bollywood aesthetic. In time, other kinds of dance music, particularly those associated with assimilated ethnic Western cultures—namely reggae and rhythm and blues—were incorporated. With the assimilation of drum and bass music, hip-hop, and rap, bhangra-beat was created, and the youth who identify most with this music are those termed the desi community. The term desi is a telling one in this context. It technically means “from the country” but has been reinterpreted to equate to “homeboy” or “homegirl.” According to Warwick, this desi community can be considered the product of a “third culture” that these youth have derived from the cultural values and expectations of their South Asian parents, even if they have “little or no firsthand contact with their societies of origin.”

For bhangra-beat artists, the late 1990s seemed to be a breakthrough, taking the music from the underground clubs into the mainstream. Perhaps this is because of the appeal of the bhangra-beat rhythm—the infectious rhythmic element of the songs—which takes a relatively fixed form, making it, like reggae or hip-hop, perfect for dance. The tumbi is played and creates the long-short rhythmic ostinato, and this coincides with the groove of the dhol (roughly equivalent to the bass drum of Western music). Notes on the tumbi and dhol are played as groups of long-short cells that are in duple meter. This rhythm (known as the bhangra-beat), which has sounds close to reggae, is well-suited for hybridization with other genres of Western music, particularly those rooted in African American music culture. While bhangra musicians of the 1980s
stayed true to the traditional rhythm, they replaced the traditional instruments with such Western rock music standards as the electric guitar and bass, the electric keyboard, and the drum kit, in some cases robbing the music of its most danceable qualities.

By the late 1990s, Punjabi folk instruments were reintroduced. Thus, the rhythm and beat of bhangra-beat songs, albeit much more up-tempo than either Punjabi folk music or bhangra music, are, in essence, more true to Punjabi tradition, more concerned with identity politics. Bands like PBN and Punjabi Hit Squad consisted of remix producers who were as well-versed in playing the dhol, tumbi, ektara, chimta, and tabla as they were with mixing technology. Traditional Punjabi folk and original bhangra music (mentioned earlier in this chapter) are dominated by vocals, whereas bhangra-beat is instrument-driven. Traditional Punjabi vocals are either sampled or looped, and vocalists who are experts in the traditional methods of singing are often used as guest musicians; whatever the case, these vocals are placed in the background and deemphasized.

Generally, the vocal style of both Punjabi folk and bhangra-beat is call-and-response. Early bhangra vocalists, however, departed from the conventions of folk-based vocals. In Punjabi folk, according to Warwick, "male singers tend to use a relaxed vocal production, leading to a rich-sounding warm tone." She adds that at the end of musical phrases, the singer often employs ornamentation, but when hybridization results in singing in English, a "male bhangra singer will tend to eschew melismatic ornamentation and adopt a West Indian accent, syllabic text setting, and rapping, throaty timbre, emulating the toasting style associated with reggae music." Warwick contrasts the female singers of bhangra-beat, noting how they depart less from their Punjabi folk equivalents, exhibiting fewer vocal style differences. When they sing in English, they may "emulate an accent and grammatical structures associated with the West Indies, but will not normally use the growing, rasping tones of their male counterparts."41

The mixture of languages is indicative of the third culture status of the demographic for this music. Bhangra-beat vocalists (who sing in their native language, for the most part) are often masters of traditional vocal conventions, and these are incorporated into the final product. Similar to hip-hop, in bhangra-beat, music and dance are more important than their corresponding lyrics or song texts; however, South Asian preferenece of African American culture, particularly music, have less to do with elements of social protest against racial (or ethnic) discrimination than with the appeal of the danceable beats of house and hip-hop. Diethrich explains that, "desi music represents less a protest directed outward and demanding social change (as in rap) than an appeal within the subculture to resist change ... [to] maintain a distinct identity."42 In some versions of the musical history, Bollywood adds its musical influences as well in these urban cultures, resulting in "urban desi."43

For the past decade, remix culture and Punjabi folk have embraced one another, more fully in Canada, but increasingly in the United Kingdom and United States. The practice of creating mixes and remixes of both Punjabi folk and African American music has resulted in widely popular hits. One example is the DJ A.P.S.'s mix of "Tabba," a number-one hit single for two months in 2004 in the United Kingdom. "Tabba" features vocals by Mohammed Siddiq and Ranjit Kaur, well-known Punjabi vocalists who often sing duets. The song owes much to hip-hop: The lengthy introductory opening that establishes the dance beat and distinctive crowd calls of "hey you, turn it up / turn it up," "yeeehaah," "bhaaah," and "yo baby / yo baby," all accented by the rhythmic melody of the ektara, have made the song a mainstay in U.S. commercials looking to appeal to urban youth (in the music video the Toronto-born A.P.S. is always shown wearing a Chicago Bulls Michael Jordan jersey).44

Like other bhangra-beat musicians, A.P.S. grew up in an urban area, a member of the desi community; he has been actively involved in Toronto's remix culture since 1994. In this excellent example of the success of hybridization, A.P.S. layers and combines samples of bhangra-beat, hip-hop, soul, (a hint of James Brown), rap, turntable scratching, and Punjabi folk singing. Siddiq and Kaur do a duet-female Punjabi dialogue, also adding to the song's distinctive sound. As expected with postbhangra music, the instruments and musical samples are prioritized over the vocals, and "Tabba" is purposely filtered to sound as if it is being played from a radio. The music itself is constantly punctuated (and hyped) by the crowd's demands to "turn it up," until the song crescendos into loud, frenzied music and police sirens, breaking up the party.

Jay-Z and Punjabi MC's "Beware of the Boys" is a benchmark text in the Americanization of bhangra-beat. Richard Zimkhwala-Cook notes that the song departs from previous instances of rap's "sampling" phrases and/or ostinatos from Bollywood music, which usually resulted in songs where the Indian composer was left anonymous. The Jay-Z/Punjabi MC version is a true collaboration (initiated by Jay-Z after hearing a popular version of the song in a Swiss nightclub) in that the rap/hip-hop and bhangra musical elements get equal time. From the point of view of the bhangra-beat DJ, the song was a breakthrough in commercial marketing because it sold 100,000 singles in two days and became MTV's "Dance Hit of the Year," "despite the fact that it only appeared on Punjabi MC's label (rather than on Jay-Z's)." Informed by a prominent drum and dhol sound, and vocals by Bollywood singer Labh Janjua, "Beware of the Boys" emphasizes bhangra musical elements over rap elements.45 In essence, it marks American hip-hop's use of commodified Indian musical forms, capitalizing on "earlier aesthetic negotiations of black and Indian identities that became popular in Great Britain."46

The song begins with the typical self-referential call of rap music, wherein Jay-Z identifies the major players in the song: He refers to "The Roc, Calib, Ramel, Tarrrel, The Neptunes, as all being 'in the house.'" He then announces, "Yes, live from the United States / Brooklyn, New York, it's ya boy." These lines, rapped in couples, are equally interspersed and alternated with Punjabi lyrics, also in couples, for the first section of the song. Generally speaking, the song text is concerned with the male tendency to objectify, sexualize, and seduce, hence women are warned to beware of the boys who want to "put the snake" on them.46 The bhangra-beat is punctuated with vocalizations, in this case gasps, which seem suggestive of sexual intercourse.
The word bounce, another staple of dance-oriented rap and hip-hop, is repeated throughout. In this context, the word bounce is not only sexually euphemistic, it also refers to the movement that often accompanies such songs, in essence, a call to move the body and dance (and it has been used by bands like The Outkast to imply a chemically induced “high”). Moreover, “Beware of the Boys,” like “Tabba” and many other rap and hip-hop songs, is metatextual: It acknowledges that women may be dancing to it—they can bounce (shake it). This preoccupation with sex and the female dancer serves as a contrast to the men’s old-school-style break dancing, as well as popping and locking, as seen in the official video. References to the word snake allude not only to male genitalia, but also to the various dance movements: the natural hip-swaying movement of sexy women (as noted in the song text) and the worm-like convulsions of male break dancing, the imitation of peristaltic motion. The rapped lyrics of the song also express the rapper’s preoccupation with wealth for the sake of showmanship (to get the women’s attention), referring to himself as the “black Brad Pitt.”

The video, featuring characters named Angry Singh, Blonde Travolta, and Preetee Kaur (the last being the female object of desire), makes it clear that any individual worth commanding attention has lots of “bling.” As characters nonchalantly flip through wads of cash and wear expensive clothes. After the entrance of the accompanying Hindi song in the refrain of “don’t stop,” Jay-Z employs a softer style of rapping that comes closer to resembling singing. These vocalizations result in a breathy sound that also evokes a sexier and more lyrical mood than in the first part of the song. Compared to “Tabba” or “Hai Hai,” “Beware of the Boys” employs more sensuality through sound, although its beat is not clearly dance-driven. The video owes more to Bollywood imagery, with its featured character drama, than either “Tabba” or “Hai Hai,” and perhaps plays to the American audience’s taste for narrative and Hollywood-style drama, featuring urban characters.

CONCLUSION

As a hybrid music genre in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, with similarities to rap and hip-hop, bhangra-beat is far removed from both traditional bhangra and its context and 1980s Westernized bhangra, although it incorporates elements of both. Musical borrowing from African American subgenres has enabled this departure to evolve further; however, this music makes hybridization an affirmation of identity through its gestures. These juxtaposed gestures may be sorted out in discernible layers, even in remix culture, as in, for example, an examination of instrumentation alone—the use of Indian instruments, the featuring of a Punjabi vocalist (and/or a rapper), and the use of ragas (and/or the turntable).

Likewise, videos reveal discernible layers in respect to dance, costume, and focus on diverse groups (according to race, culture, or gender, to identify just a few). These groups are also identifiable in such oppositional terms as aggressive versus lyrical, urban versus country, or popular versus traditional/classical. This study reveals that two major threads connecting bhangra-beat to traditional Bhangra nevertheless remain intact: their creation as third culture phenomena, as well as their utilization of exchange (or sharing in terms of cultural appropriation rather than simultaneous reification of three musical genres). In bhangra-beat, as well as in hip-hop, rap, or remix cultures that borrow bhangra-beat elements, the music and dance represent the exchanges that take place, as well as specific Punjabi and African American cultural elements that remain intact.

NOTES

1. Postbhangra is a rather troubling term in that it fails to describe the difference between bhangra music and its descendant; it merely relates the two chronologically. Bhangra-beat is our preferred term because it succinctly describes, rather accurately, the qualitative difference between the two styles of music: Bhangra-beat is danceable and energetic, relying heavily on the bass (or Punjabi equivalent) and drum (dhol and/or dholki) elements of the song.

2. Diethrich equates urban desi and bhangra-beat. We argue that the Bollywood influence in the former makes it different from the latter. Urban desi incorporates more house and techno musically and, in video, differs in that it hybridizes bhangra-beat dancing with Hindi and/or Bollywood dance. Diethrich is one of the few published scholars of bhangra music who incorporates a brief discussion of the music itself (its rhythm, beat, and time signature) in his commentary. See Gregory Diethrich, “Desi Music Vibes: The Performance of Indian Youth Culture in Chicago,” Asian Music 31, no. 1 (2000), 43.


8. Huq, Beyond Subculture, 64.


11. See Richard Zunckhawala-Cook, “Bollywood Gets Funky: American Hip-Hop, Basement Bhangra, and the Racial Politics of Music,” in *Global Bollywood: Trespass of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Susagna Gupal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 310; See also Huq, *Beyond Subculture*, 69–70, 84. Although he never comes to a definitive conclusion, Huq examines the possibility that the adoption of a hip or cool style of music, dress, and gesture is a youthful reaction to authority figures.


15. Herman Gray argues that music allows black culture to create “complex counter-representations,” since “popular dance, performance, gesture, and pose remain among the most dynamic and expressive cultural forms through which black youth express and authorize their own subjectivity” (154). In a similar vein, Hall refers to black culture finding its “deep form, the deep structure of their cultural life in music” (29). See Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 149, 154; Dietrich, “Deal Music Vibes,” 35–38; Hall, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?”, 29.


19. See “Q & A with DJ Rekha,” *Global Rhythms* 17, nos. 1–2 (2008): 60. In this interview, DJ Rekha talks about her first CD release, after 10 years on the underground club scene. Rekha Mallotra, a London-born musician and producer, has been credited with pioneering bhangra music in the United States. Her first CD, *DJ Rekha Presents Basement Bhangra*, was released in October 2007. Ms. Scandalous is a Southall-born Asian bhangra and rap artist who was discovered by Panjabi Hit Squad. She debuted on their CD *The Streets* (2002) and has released her own CD, *Ladies First* (2005). She is often granted the title of the first Asian female rapper. See also Rangrass, “Bhangra Boom,” 68–69. Rangrass discusses bhangra dance team aesthetics, including gender roles.

20. Datar cites a producer who goes by the moniker Shabs (Outcaste Records), who states, “We started creating music in a society that doesn’t really revere our culture and now we want acceptance on our own terms.” Shabs argues for bhangra artists taking a page from African American artists, specifically those associated with Motown: “Motown is the great example. . . They made records [that] talk about black people’s problems. Marvin Gaye’s ‘What’s Going On’ or whatever, but with lyrics that white people could dig and get into. We’ve got to do the same; reach out to the girl in Salisbury, the guy in Norfolk, but on our terms.” Datar also cites Tijender Singh, leader of the band Cornershop, who argues that South Asians in the United Kingdom and African Americans share a cultural aesthetic. Of music, Singh explains that, “Punjabi folk music has a lot in common with hip-hop, the way it came about being very raw, minimal, and reflecting someone’s way of life.” See Datar, “Don’t Tell Kula Shaker,” T-14.


24. DJ A.P.S., “Tabba.”


26. Van der Linden stresses that “reformist Sikhs appropriated western (orientalist and moral) ideas about music, instruments (like the harmonium), and print culture in view of their own cultural tradition” (3). He traces the interwining history of music and Sikh political and cultural history. According to van der Linden, the Singh Sabha of the early twentieth century were “heavily influenced by print culture and defined modern Sikhism in response to a fast-changing colonial culture and other self-assertive Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities in an emerging public sphere” (2). As much as he focuses on their striving for identity, van der Linden also explains how the Punjabi Sikhs quickly adapted and accepted Western notions (recall they are highly influenced by print culture) and some Western musical practices (for example, their being introduced, by the English, to western wind instruments and performing brass bands). See Bob van der Linden, “Sikh Music and Empire: The Moral Representation of Self in Music,” *Sikh Formations*, 4, no. 1 (2008): 2–6, 9–12.

27. Van der Linden cites Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (New Delhi, India: Permanent Black, 2007), page numbers not provided, as well as Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*.

African American artists, specifically those associated with Motown: “Motown is the great example. . . They made records [that] talk about black people’s problems. Marvin Gaye’s ‘What’s Going On’ or whatever, but with lyrics that white people could dig and get into. We’ve got to do the same; reach out to the girl in Salisbury, the guy in Norfolk, but on our terms.” Datar also cites Tijender Singh, leader of the band Cornershop, who argues that South Asians in the United Kingdom and African Americans share a cultural aesthetic. Of music, Singh explains that, “Punjabi folk music has a lot in common with hip-hop, the way it came about being very raw, minimal, and reflecting someone’s way of life.” See Datar, “Don’t Tell Kula Shaker,” T-14.
Chapter 9

42. Diehrich remarks that bhangra-beat is more than merely party music since "it very consciously asserts an internal, separate, and vital Indian identity through the combination of popular Indian music and black 'underground' house music and hip-hop—in short, it is more about pride than protest" (43). He further explains that South Asians are attracted to blackness because of their shared history of oppression, as well as their being stereotyped as passive and thus uncivil. See Diehrich, "Desi Music Vibes," 42-44.
43. Urban desi is slightly less indebted to hip-hop; in fact, it incorporates more Hollywood-influenced rhythms (by way of Bollywood) than does bhangra-beat, which is more raw. Urban desi incorporates more house and techno musically, and, in video, differs in that it hybridizes bhangra-beat dancing with Hindi and/or Bollywood dance. See Diehrich, "Desi Music Vibes," 43.
44. DJ A.P.S., "Tabba.
46. Zunbkawala-Cook chronicles, in detail, the financial issues behind the Americanization of bhangra-beat in an article that (overall) examines the commercial forces behind what he calls the "market merger" of African-American and Indian [musical] sensibilities" (139). Although he does not go into detail in discussing the musical elements of the song, he thoroughly describes the roles played by both the bhangra and rap/hip-hop elements, although he underrepresents Jay Z's role as a vocalist. See Zunbkawala-Cook, "Bollywood Gets Funky," 319-21.

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