

Race and Popular Music ANTHRO 106 2017

Is there "Black music"?

Is there "white music"?

- The history of African American cultures provides the most astonishing and empowering account of resistance, and of a resistance which from its earliest days has consisted of strategies for forming and sustaining a culture against the dominant, using materials at hand (Potter 1995)
- Race no longer exists as a scientifically defensible concept and the word has been abandoned by biologists, anthropologists and sociologists. However, the perception of race socially, spiritually and intellectually, as well as the ramifications of racism, are still felt by many peoples.
- Racism is a historical and political issue that is "deep and ubiquitous in the cultural and psychological fabric of the nation [America]"
- The structure of the education system, the constitution, science, as well as the law, conspire to keep the "whites" dominant (perpetuate status quo)
- Black culture is a specific self-identification not defined by a racial biology, or a mystically shared essence called blackness.
- Black culture consists of the repetition and revision of shared themes, it is a "discursive formation"
- The Blues was called "race music" (the title kept the music isolated from the mainstream). It remained the unofficial designation for working class African-American musics until 1949
- The first compromise for rock and roll was to call it 'rock and roll' instead of rhythm and blues, to camouflage the music's black roots (Biskind in Dorston 1990)
- "African American styles are constantly being re appropriated to cater to white mainstream audiences" Kolubinski
- The effect of a hegemonic culture is ultimately the ensemble of material and cultural practices that reinforce the belief systems embraced by the power elite, as to so firmly entrench it that it is seen as the all-encompassing truth, instead of merely one version of the truth.
- Cultural hegemony is a belief system that is largely an unrecognized, covert form of power. By absorbing and co-opting competing ideas, it ingratiate the powerless, suggesting that their beliefs will be realized. Yet despite its concessions, responses, porous, cooptive, dialectical and dynamic properties, there are always groups on the margins who recognize it as such, so there is always some repression of dissent among marginalized classes and races.
- From Duke Ellington's and Count Basie's swing to the black pioneers of ragtime, blues and jazz, the record businesses owned by white men stifled their deserved financial success while whites made more money from manufactured Tin Pan Alley tunes. Even by the late 1930s, artists like Bessie Smith, Robert Johnson, Big Joe Turner, John Lee Hooker and Tampa Red were unknown to everyone who did not have access to the handful of "race" record stores in segregated neighborhoods, and the few radio stations that played any sort of "race" music.
- The reluctance of radio to play rhythm and blues, and the failure of major labels to sign black musicians is rooted not only in the industry's conservative treatment of new music, but also its cultural hegemony. Much of the words in rhythm and blues, in the tradition of the blues, expressed black peoples' discontent with economic injustices. Perhaps white industry leaders saw that there is often a sense of righteous anger that would serve as a powerful unifying force for oppressed minorities if it were to be disseminated throughout the airwaves of America
- Racism is implicit within the music industry.

- Until 1956, hit songs that were written by African -American musicians were only made bestsellers when performed by white artists, because black performance style was considered crude and offensive.
- Rock's "primitive" roots in African -American music.
- Romantic tendencies towards glorification of the "primitive", like Rousseau's Noble Savage.
- "When white America turned to black rhythm and blues for its popular music, it embraced 'animalism and vulgarity' as virtues. It did so willfully and selectively."
- White teens' love for African -American music was unfortunately not a sign of social integration
- White audiences consumed African-American music and there was no concern with social realities.
- In the fifties, major label corporations knew that white culture would reign supreme, because teenland codified heroes who more closely resembled them, or what they wanted to be, as the only fitting rock & rollers. For the baby-boomers, rock and roll would eventually become, by 1965, "white music made by white people with the occasional black old-timer thrown in" (George, 93). Steeped in R & B roots, white musicians like Buddy Holly, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, the Kinks, the Who and Led Zeppelin became the true celebrities of rock & roll.
- In the Sixties, R&B became "soul," "a word which would in its day rival 'rock & roll' for social currency and commercial exploitation" (George, 93). A couple independent labels would make a significant jump in popularizing black music. Stax in Memphis took the independent approach of aiming at R&B fans more than the pop market, putting out records with "some of the most unencumbered soul-shouting ever recorded,". Motown in Detroit was however, " totally committed to reaching white audiences" (George, 86).
- Rock and roll sent deep and profound quakes through American racism. The social upheaval began with challenges to racial prejudice but it did not end there. Bob Dylan, through the message of his music, pierced the conscience of a generation during the most controversial war in American history.
- White Blues artists in the late Sixties: Eric Clapton and Johnny Winter.
- By the 1970s a few black musicians were fueled by frustration at racism and chose to take the unsophisticated path. They let their hair grow into "afros" to accentuate their pride in their blackness, and revealed a political thrust within their communities in the struggle for integration. As a younger, more radical generation became involved in black pride and black power, the sentiment was hinted that mainstream white culture was not worth integrating into. White culture included rock & roll, which was stolen from them in the first place.
- Disco created music for a new mainstream black radio. Black stations across the country turned into disco radio with black artists playing "beige music". Downplaying their blackness in order to compete for the advertising dollars, they dropped the word black, and when even beige wasn't good enough, the stations used "urban contemporary." Funk bands were not marketed and allowed to succeed because they were too black. The phrase echoed with the sound of self-hate." Too black". A retreat from the beauty of blackness. "Too black". (George, 160).
- Michael Jackson used cosmetic surgery to turn himself into a commercial, anglicized product for mass consumption. Despite his cosmetic surgery and tiresome claims to "universality," "Off the Wall sold 9 million copies. As MTV's visual format grew popular as fast as nose jobs, more entertainers followed suit, with Lionel Richie acting whiter than everTo these people, beige wasn't even white enough
- But then there was rap. When the Sugar Hill Gang came from a black owned New Jersey label with "Rapper's Delight," industry pros, including blacks, ignored it. "It just goes to show you that by 1980, being black didn't necessarily mean you know a damn thing about what was happening in black neighborhoods" (George, 169).
- The white Beastie Boys popularized rap in a mainstream breakthrough. The Beastie Boys grew up in black culture in New York, have a black manager, and started on an indie label. Beastie

MCA said "Rock & roll was started by Chuck Berry, but it's Elvis who is called the King. So it's not so surprising that it took the Beastie Boys to popularize rap. That's typical of America" (George, 194).

Pop Music history

- Ike and Tina Turner "Proud Mary"
- James Brown "Say it loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)"
- Bob Dylan "Blowin in the Wind"
- Cream "Crossroads"
- Funkadelic "Cosmic Slop"

BLACK ROCK

- AFROPUNK: The Movie
- Electric Purgatory: the fate of the black rocker
- Prince
- Lenny Kravitz
- Tom Morello
- Jimi Hendrix
- Bo Diddley
- X-Ray Spex "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!"
- Bad Brains " Rise"

White hip hop

- Hall & Oates "I Can't Go For That"
- Blondie "Rapture"
- Iggy Azalea "Fancy"
- Vanilla Ice "Ice Ice Baby"
- Macklemore

Songs that explore race

- 2Pac/Makaveli "White Man's World"
- Eminem "White America"
- Mos Def "Rock n Roll"
- Joyner Lucas "I'm Not Racist"
- Jay Z "The Story of O.J."
- Childish Gambino "This is America"
- Weird Al "White and Nerdy"

Blue Eyed Soul

- Sam Smith & Adele have very powerful, politically-driven marketing machines pumping millions of dollars into their careers, while black artists like Jazmine Sullivan don't nearly get the support they deserve.
- White artists aren't making better soul music; they're just marketed better. Statistically speaking, the white marketplace is much larger than any other market.
- Magazine articles: Forbes "Hip-Hop Is Run by a White, Blonde, Australian Woman." (2014); GQ "Sam Smith: The New Face of Soul" (2015)

- The notion of “blue eyed” soul was created to even the playing field between black and white singers. That’s what White America does when black people are better at something; they try to create their own version of it so that it appeals to a larger white audience.
- Blue Eyed Soul is a manipulative marketing tactic that labels began using to position soulful white singers as rare, or exceptional.
- To some people, talent is talent. To others, this is the early onset of White Corporate America finding a clever way to exploit black culture for its own profits.
- “We’re done watching and waiting while this invention called whiteness uses and abuses us, burying black people out of sight and out of mind while extracting our culture, our dollars, our entertainment like oil, black gold.” (Jesse Williams)
- Wild Cherry “Play that funky music”
- Righteous Brothers “Loving Feelin”

Bounce Music

- Big Freedia “Explode”
- Sissy Nobby “Josephine beat”
- Drake “Nice”
- Beyonce “Formation”
- Sissy Bounce, queer artists, Grassroots expressive culture
- New Orleans, 1990’s, Hurricane Katrina
- Southern hip hop
- sexual empowerment, “liberating self-expression”
- Roland 808 drum machine; DJ Cameron Paul’s 1987 “Brown Beat” and the Showboys’ “Drag Rap (Trigger Man)”; Electro
- Call and response; Chant, repetition, local place names, audience participation
- Mardi Gras Indians
- Twerking
- <http://apraamcos.co.nz/news/2015/september/what-the-genre-bounce/>

Cultural appropriation

"You're in videos with black men, and you're bringing out black women on your stages, but you don't want to know how black women feel about something that's so important? Come on, you can't want the good without the bad. If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, dance with us, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us. You shouldn't not want to know that".

Grapevine- “Cultural Appropriation- Bruno mars” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9NTvCyprsA>