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Message from the Editor

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As always, I would like to sincerely thank all members of our peer-review board for their hard work and excellent suggestions for improving each article.

All issues may contain articles and announcements in the following categories:

- **articles with a special focus on local music traditions (any region in the world)**;
- **research articles** – generally, all music-related topics are being considered;
- **opinion articles** that are part of, or provide the basis for, discussions on important music topics;
- **composer portraits** that may or may not include an interview;
- **short responses** to articles published in previous issues;
- **bibliographies** on any music-related topic, which may or may not be annotated);
- **reviews** of books, printed music, CDs, and software; and
- **reports** on recent symposia, conferences, and music events.

I would like to call for submissions that fit any of these categories. Submissions by students are, as always, very welcome. All submissions are expected via e-mail with attachments in Word format or in Rich Text Format. For detailed submission guidelines visit http://www.scmb.us.

Research Articles

Contemporary Political Rap: An Analysis of the Genre through Lyrical Content

by Brayden Gibson
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Introduction

It is 2016, and currently African-Americans across the country are fighting for various rights of inclusion, most recently being the "Black Lives Matter" movement, a movement dedicated to becoming "unapologetically black" and reaffirming their black heritage. It started after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed, based on what many believe to be racial profiling by his assailant. This sparked immediate outrage by the black community, who viewed this as another example of systematic racial oppression. The Black Lives Matter movement describes itself on its website (https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/) as such: "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression." This movement can be viewed as a third wave of civil rights, the first being the 1960s with segregation, the second as the 1980s-2000s as poverty, and now, 2016, as a fight for accountability for black murder.

One of the most incredible aspects of the movement is its social media presence. Millions of people across the world have all began posting "#BlackLivesMatter" on various social media outlets. In this lies one of the biggest differences between this third wave of civil rights liberation and its previous iterations, the idea of social inclusion and accountability. People all across the nation are participating in social commentary, from those struggling in poverty to congressmen at our nation's capital. Anyone with an internet connection can chime in on both sides of the argument. In the previous civil rights movements, it was a strictly black fight. It was about segregation or about poverty in the ghettos, but today Black Lives Matter has evolved into a multi-platform political sphere. They hold opinions on issues from black identity to transgender inclusion. It is no longer just an African-American movement, but an American movement for accountability on acts of racial injustice.

I recently was scrolling down my social media feed when I discovered a video that I believe encompasses all 3 civil rights movements. The video is chaotic, it begins with yelling and chanting as two sides, protesters and police officers, are advancing towards each other. In an act of communal protest, all at once the protestors began to chant Kendrick Lamar's song "Alright" (2015). This song gives them energy and states to the police "we will not back down". As the lyrics "we gon be alright" are being chanted, an overwhelming sense of the African American political struggle was emitted. Like the song says, Blacks will be "alright". They have fought racial injustice before, and will do it again. It is a song uniting those who believe in the strength of the black community and its ability to survive under increased racial prejudice.

Every wave of the civil rights movement had its songs as a rallying cry for support. In the age of segregation, the artist Sam Cooke released a song called "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964), which like "Alright" states "'It's been a long time coming, but I know a change gonna come". It reminds those fighting that we have been fighting for decades, and it may be hard, but we will be okay. In the second wave, songs got more aggressive with the influx of "gangster rap", songs that led this era include N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police" (1988), a song that rallies blacks against police brutality. This is the exact issue that black lives matter currently fights for. The three waves of civil rights all included songs that defined their motions and ideals, and currently the genre that defines black social movements is Political Rap music.

This article aims to create a guide through contemporary political rap by examining the song "Institutionalized" (2015) by Kendrick Lamar and its lyrical content. The song analysis is a spine that allows us to branch off from it and examine several important aspects of contemporary political rap. This will focus predominantly on song structure as well as meaning, because I believe it to be important to analyze a song's lyrical content in order to accurately examine its political gravity and structure. This song covers several aspects of African-American culture, which will be further explored. This article is categorically structured, but uses song analysis to create a consistent union. Previous research of this genre focused on the past, the early 2000s and 1990s. This article looks to the present with an analysis of a song released in 2015 and lyrical allusions to songs released in the last five years. This research is not just an analysis of the genre as a whole, but an analysis of the genre in the present.

What it political Rap?

In order for us to examine a song we believe to have political rap stylings, we must first have a definition. Robert Walker, as quoted in the book *Pulse of the People* (Bonnette 2015, 25), describes political rap as having "three main criteria to identify message songs: (1) songs with implicit or explicit ethnic symbolism; (2) references to 'social class problems'; and (3) references 'to groups other than ethnic or social class'". While I believe Walker is correct in his analysis of political rap, I believe it to be too specific. Often times in music, political themes are told through subtext or often in modern times through music videos. Applying too strict a criteria can alienate several aspects of our analysis. In today's musical sphere, political rap is popular among much of the population. As this style of rap increased in popularity, so did its stereotypical statements. Take this line from Drake's song "I'm goin' in" (2009):

Out of this world though
I'm so sci-fi
And I don't sit still I keep it moving like a drive-by
I just tell the truth and so I'm cool in every hood spot
Twenty one years and I ain't never met a good cop

Would this song be considered political? While it does contain a political reference, the rest of the song does not imply any stance on a political issue. In my definition, this song is political, although very little, it still does perpetuate some meaning in a person's mind, it still pushes the stance of police brutality. Therefore, I would define political rap as any song with lyrics referencing a social or political issue, no matter how small it may be. My definition aims to include as much music as possible, because the effect of political rap on its audience is not a single effort by a minority of artists, but by a culture of music.

How is political rap structured today?

One of the most politically fueled albums of 2015 was *To Pimp a Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar. It covers topics that many rappers have taken on before: the idea of losing your home town idealism when you become famous. Lamar also covers harsh topics such as current black identity in conflict with American patriotism. In an effort to answer the question of contemporary rap structure, I will analyze the song "Institutionalized" as well as explain how the song is structured to show its political attitudes. We can see it in the first stanza:

What money got to do with it
When I don't know the full definition of a rap image?
I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it
Institutionalized, I keep runnin' back for a visit
Hol' up, get it back
I said I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it
Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?

In this first stanza, Lamar begins to question his current mental state and question his actions. He explains that after becoming famous, he will never be able to go back to the life he once lived. Kendrick grew up in Compton around the rise of Tupac, and because of his youth spent in this area, he feels "trapped inside the ghetto". Kendrick's soul is trapped between two worlds, the first being his home town and his past memories, and the second being the present, his life of luxury and fame. Lamar aims to go back, but it will never feel the same as it did when he lived there in the first place.

Hip Hop is often regarded as a community, with several scholars describing it as a "process of self-representation heralds authenticity as a way to foster self-esteem and to validate cultural affiliations" (Gilliam 2010, 222). Fostering self-esteem is what I believe to be one of the most prevalent aspects of early political hip hop. In a study of late 1980s and early 1990s rap, Catherine Beighey and N. Prabha Unnithan (2006) discovered that 45% of studied lyrics included a theme of black cultural identity. This ideal of black family values through political music is often viewed as a defensive mechanism against previous and modern transgressions. Several decades of increased prejudice has led African-Americans to still fight for cultural identity. From great civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have Dream" speech to the previously mentioned Black Lives Matter Movement, the same fight is till happening, the fight for African-American Identity. Take this famous excerpt from MLK's I Have a Dream speech:

> I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (King 1963, 5.)

Let's compare this quote to current black lives matter values:

> We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others. (https://blacklivesmatter.uucdc.org/mission-and-principles/)

Both civil rights groups use the same overall value that they dream of overall racial equality and cultural identity for African-Americans.

Michel Franti, quoted in *Brothers Gonna Work It Out* by Charise Cheney (2005, 66), stated that "with the forced exile, incarceration, and execution of black leaders, rappers have become the spokesmen for the black community." This explains the findings of Beighey and Unnithan (2006, 138) that 45% of rap music involves references to the black community. Cheney explains that after the Civil Rights Movement, an intergenerational gap was formed, the previous "civil rights" generation accepted how they were treated in American culture, while the younger generation – who did not know the fights that the elders struggled with in civil rights – thought they had a way to go. This led popular civil rights leaders, besides those who were killed or are no longer prevalent to become ignored by the popular youth of the community. These once spokesmen of the black community no longer spoke for the youth. While this started in response to the post-civil rights movement era, songs still remain with this theme of black community.

Let us consider this line from Wu-Tang Clan's song "I can't go to sleep" (2000):

> Don't kill your brother, learn to love each other
> Don't get mad, cause it ain't that bad

In this song, Wu-Tang Clan takes the side of the previous civil rights generation by telling Black youth to not allow themselves to fall into stereotypes. Wu-Tang explains that by killing "your brothers" due to gang violence, African-American youth are only perpetuating the stereotype of black ruthlessness. They also try to explain perspective into the lives of the youth, explaining that their situation could have been worse, and in previous generations it was worse. This section of the song also includes a second meaning, an idea of black communal values: Wu-Tang tries to fight for gang violence to end in order to enact a black community. This is another representation of the generational gap between civil rights fighters and the present. Gang life has destroyed the previously created black community. What African-American youth see as the product of police brutality and institutional racism, the civil rights era defines as a destruction of merit due to gang warfare. This intergenerational gap left both sides seeking different moral leaders, with the Civil Rights generation seeking their leaders from the past, while the youth began looking to the present. With music being a defining cultural aspect of African-Americans, many black youth began to idolize this influx of political rappers who seemed to understand the contemporary outlook on life. These rappers began pushing their morality and political attitudes toward the youth.

Lamar's structure and many contemporary rappers repeat themselves, often times coming off as a "stream-of-consciousness"-way-of-writing. We

see that this thought – "I'm trapped inside the ghetto, and I ain't proud to admit it" – plagues Lamar's mind. This repetition among modern rappers can be seen as emphasis in order to get their main point across, Lamar's being that he feels callings to his home, but is unable to fulfill them. This same theme reoccurs in the next stanza:

If I was the president
I'd pay my mama's rent
Free my homies and them
Bulletproof my Chevy doors
Lay in the White House and get high, Lord
Who ever thought?
Master, take the chains off me!

This stanza refers to Lamar's increased mental turmoil; if he obtained one of the most powerful positions in the world, he would still "bulletproof [his] Chevy doors". Even with all the power and fame Lamar could ask for, he still does trivial things. He is trapped inside this mindset and cannot escape its grasps. The final line is seen as a plea to the gods, calling for these chains to be removed, for him to escape this life of sin and "ghetto" mindset. It can also be seen as an allusion to early slave culture, explaining Lamar's struggles with his current black identity.

This theme of cultural identity directly relates to a problem previously mentioned among the Black Lives Matter movement. The idea of loss of cultural identity is a topic spoken about by many Black political artists. Does it lie with the slaves and early black prejudice, or does it lie later during civil rights, or does it even lie in Africa? This cultural identity confusion is a hot topic among many popular rappers, who – when trying to have a proud African-American identity – begin to not feel American at all.

This idea of Black identity vs. American culture is not a new one. Due to decades of persecution by America, from slavery and Jim Crow Laws, blacks were left with what W. E. B. Du Bois defined as a "dual consciousness". Shayla C. Nunnally (2012, 195) explains this by saying that blacks "knew their status as Americans was fragilely defined by their dual status as Negroes". This left many Blacks defining themselves as Black first and American second, because of continual persecution due to the color of their skin. Like previously stated, this created a tight-knit social and political community. This community was distrustful of government because of its previous racist interactions with it. This created an idea of institutionalized racism, explained by the Kerner Commission as:

"Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, and one white – separate and unequal."
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerner_Commission)

Institutional racism can be defined in two regards, the first being that racism is so ingrained in the government that it would cease to function without it. This can be proven by years of continual persecution of various races from the American government. Government is often seen as a body that cares for the people. In this definition, the people are cared for on a racial basis, leaving the minorities struggling for representation. The second definition explains it as racism between institutions, rather than racism between people. I believe the first definition to be inclusive, while the second aims to create a black and white argument, while racism is more personal and less structured. Institutionalized racism is something Lamar speaks about in the next stanza, to him and many African-Americans it is much more than a systematic oppression; it is a more personal racism. The following stanza could be seen as a first-hand account of this:

Life can be like a box of chocolate
Quid pro quo, somethin' for somethin', that's the obvious
Oh shit, flow's so sick, don't you swallow it
Bitin' my style, you're salmonella poison positive
I can just alleviate the rap industry politics
Milk the game up, never lactose intolerant
The last remainder of real shit, you know the obvious
Me, scholarship? No, streets put me through colleges
Be all you can be, true, but the problem is
Dream only a dream if work don't follow it
Remind me of the homies that used to know me, now follow this

In this section, Lamar explains that in order for something to happen, i.e. fame, something must be given up. He holds large amounts of respects for his life in Compton, which did more things for him than modern schooling ever did. He explains that in or-

der to escape this lifestyle, dreams cannot stop at being dreams, and one must work to escape. This is an interesting juxtaposition to his previous statements. Lamar is in a struggle between longings for his home, while knowing that in order to live this life he must give it up. He also uses a popular styling of puns in this section. While still explaining his true meanings for writing this song, i.e. his struggle, he still manages to fit in many rap tropes. Modern rap is not entirely political anymore; going back to Drake's "I'm goin' in", it includes political themes, but is not entirely political. In Beighey's study that showed us that a large amount of rap included themes of community, it also explains that a large amount of rap includes aspects of boasting and masculinity. An interesting trait of modern rap and political rap is that, although it consists of political themes, it still contains this checklist of rap tropes. In a song about living in Compton, Lamar still manages to elaborate on the "sickness of his flow". In this line we can also see the previously mentioned puns; this style of puns and references in rap often define the musical skill of the rapper. The more ridiculous they can connect these lines together, the more technically impressive.

Lamar remains true to the theme of early rap. Like N.W.A, a popular gangsta rap group of the early era whose lyrics spoke of police violence and racial injustice, Lamar continues to bring often unseen problems to the limelight. His connection to his roots, growing up poor in Compton, is not something that is talked about in contemporary rap. K. Powel, quoted in "Rap and Race: It's Got a Nice Beat, but What about the Message?" by Rachel E. Sullivan (2003, 608), explains that "critics from within the hip hop community have argued that many contemporary artists have abandoned antiracism messages and focused on money and sexual exploits". As rap's popularity increased, the old and often jarring aspects were weeded out for the "wider and whiter" audience. For example, in the previously mentioned song "I'm goin' in" by Drake:

out of this world though
I'm so sci-fi
And I don't sit still I keep it moving like a drive-by
I just tell the truth and so I'm cool in every hood spot
Twenty one years and I ain't never met a good cop

Drake uses meaningless lines such as "I'm so sci-fi" and "keep it moving like a drive-by" to establish a persona of wealth and power. This stray from political depth to more meaningless content has worked for rap's popularity. Billboard's top 100 albums of 1998 included 13 rap albums, and just three years later, in 2001, the same chart included 21 rap albums. This increased popularity was due to an influx of the "wider and whiter" audience. As rap strayed from political content, which often blamed white racial infrastructure for their problems, a whiter audience emerged.

During this starting era of politically infused rap, artists were often criticized by the media for "inciting violence". As Sullivan (2003, 608) explains, these discussions "appealed to Whites' fears of Black youth". This led whites to actively ignore rap until it dropped its seemingly uncomfortable content. Aspects of early rap's political structure still remain intact in contemporary rap, such as Drake's line "Twenty one years and I ain't never met a good cop", but rather than encourage activism for police violence, Drake establishes an "ethnic persona". This is a problem in many modern-day rap songs, in which rappers appeal to white audiences by establishing an ethnic persona that furthers black stereotypes. This persona creates a juxtaposition between modern rappers who speak of problems in the black community, such as Lamar. For Drake, these lines of police brutality are seen as popular and "cool", while to Lamar they are a harsh reality. Audiences often do not enjoy songs of harsh truths, an example of which can recently be seen at the 2016 Grammy Awards, with Kendrick Lamar sparking controversy by performing his politically fueled song "The Blacker the Berry" (2015). Kendrick filled the stage with cells, each one occupied by a black "prisoner". This image of "mass black incarceration" left many Grammy watchers uncomfortable at the truths Lamar aimed to show. Popular music is not entirely devoid of political content, because Lamar did win three Grammy Awards that same year. In order for audiences to accept and buy albums, many artists must create an "ethnic persona", therefore perpetuating stereotypes of violence and sexual deviancy.

Kendrick in the next section reaffirms his previous point:

I'll tell you my hypothesis, I'm probably just way too loyal
K Dizzle will do it for you, my niggas think I'm a god
Truthfully all of 'em spoiled, usually you're never charged
But somethin' came over you once I took you to the fuckin' BET Awards
You lookin' at artists' like the harvests
So many Rollies around you and you want all of them
Somebody told me you thinkin' 'bout snatchin' jewelry
I should've listened when my grandmama said to me

Throughout this stanza, Kendrick talks about him physically, seeing the economic gap between Compton and rap's rich and famous. He explains that by taking his "homie" to the BET Awards, it awoke something in him. This person was immediately encapsulated by the rich and famous that filled the seats of the awards and aims to join their ranks and reach this level of fame. Rather than being like Lamar and working hard to escape this lifestyle, the person falls back into their own tricks and thins about "snatchin' jewelry". Much of the rest of the song focuses on reaffirming Lamar's point, but a line in the final verse allows an interesting discussion:

I guess my grandmama was warnin' a boy
She said...

Kendrick throughout the song continues to reference his friends, those who still live in the Compton lifestyle and are stuck in black stereotypes. In this section, as well as the previous ones, Kendrick is playing the part of his own friend, a person obsessed with fame, but unable to escape his own ways to get it. In the final line of the verse, "I guess my grandmamma was warnin' a boy", Lamar becomes his self again. This switch of characters allows us to see the full gravity of Lamar's situation, with this mental struggle almost becoming an affliction for him. As we saw at the beginning of the song, Lamar is feeling this tug back home as well, but he personifies it in order to explain it more clearly. This style of multiple characters is a facet among much of popular rap today, with many artists creating several personas of themselves. Nicki Minaj, for example, had several personas that each represented various aspects of her personality, from her more feminine side to her more aggressive and angry one. This personification gives artists more ways to tell stories, as well as give several sides to an argument.

Conclusion

Modern political rap is often not political in nature, but full of small pockets of political attitudes. These lines are often repeated throughout many artists' libraries and are used to create a "cool ethnic persona". This is used to appeal to white audiences, who were not susceptible to early political rap. These songs were often full of antiracist sentiments that made certain audiences uncomfortable. As seen in "I'm goin' in" by Drake, these modern political attitudes are nothing more than a political hive mind that aims to sell records. Although these are in non-political songs, they still have political merit. If these songs fill the media atmosphere, they can slowly affect listening audiences.

By using "Institutionalized" as a reference for modern contemporary rap, we learn that in rap, largely politically fueled, the same political tones are still held. In Beighey and Unnithan's study we see that early political rap consisted of black community themes; in this song we see the same themes present, but rather than a positive analysis of said themes, Lamar leads us to question our previously held political attitudes.

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"It's Your Thing": Soul Music's Pivotal Role in Modern Afrocentric Music

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Introduction

Soul music, as a fusion of gospel, rhythm & blues, and jazz combines many African-American music genres into one. Soul music is the origin of most late-20th century music, such as hip hop, and subgenres, such as neo-soul. Soul music has been on the forefront of the African-American sound for years, acting as the voice of the Civil Right movement, and has transpired in popular music today. It is constantly being sampled and borrowed from, and many are unaware of the origin popular music is centered around. This essay will pay homage to soul music and what it has pioneered in the latter half of the 20th century. I will take major genres from the 20th century and show the connection soul music has with the success of other genres. I will illustrate the pattern that reveals the influence of soul music on genres in the 20th century to present day, and recognize that it is the invocation of modern sound.

1. "It's Your Thing": A Definitive Sound and A Brief Introduction to The History of Soul

> It's your thing, do what you want to do
> I can't tell you who to sock it to
> (The Isley Brothers, "It's Your Thing", 1969.)

I listen to the words of one of my favorite Isley Brothers' tracks. Ronald Isley, the voice of the iconic soul band belts the lyrics, and I cannot help but feel a connection. In true millennial fashion, I am playing this off a Spotify playlist I curated in dedication to a band and others with the same soulful rhythm. The next song played is Ice Cube's "It Was a Good Day" (1993) from the album *The Predator*, and the first thing I notice is the background base: it sounds a lot like "Footsteps in the Dark" (1977, from the album *Go for Your Guns*), another famous track by the Isley Brothers. These tracks have a 15-year gap between them, and it currently being 2016 means the original track by the Isley Brothers is about 39 years old, yet this soulful rhythm has a rather timeless effect. I change it again to "Them Changes" by Thundercat on the 2015 album *The Beyond / Where the Giants Roam*, and there it is again. To me, the Isley Brothers' sound represents a time in black popular culture that embodies the true African-American spirit. Songs like "Shout" (1959), "Testify" (1964), and "Fight the Power" (1975) narrated a crucial time in 20th-century African-American life. With the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in full effect, Soul music was the narrator that documented the outcry for justice in the 1960s. Today, soul is the parent genre for R&B, hip-hop, and neo-soul.

As a fusion of gospel, rhythm & blues, and jazz, soul music combines many acclaimed African-American style characteristics in one genre. As many groups at this time, the Isley Brothers actually began as a gospel group, but as soul music began to gain traction, they crossed over. Soul music embodies cultural and social changes in African-American life in the 1960s. Specifically, in the book *African*

American Music: An Introduction, Portia Maultsby states "the lyrics of soul retained the traditional topics of romance and social relationships," which is what tied it to rhythm & blues, but "expanded topical coverage to include social and political commentary inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements" (Maultsby 2015, 277). Soul music had a broader topic selection than most music genres in the 1960s. For instance, a song like "Footsteps in the Dark" (1977) by the Isley Brothers definitely portrays more rhythm & blues elements as a love song, but "Fight the Power" (1975) and "Freedom" (1970) had a timely message that aided two of the most significant movements of the 20th century. The sound and message of soul generated a definitive sound that led it to champion R&B as a genre in the second half of the 1960s and its rise to success in the 1970s. It cultivated a new cultural epidemic that rose in black communities all over the United States and "in many ways soul was a representative of the growing unity of purpose among black Americans that surged in the post-WWII era" (Vincent 2013, 141).

Soul music cultivated more than just sound; it became a way of life for many African-Americans, as it represented a new cultural aesthetic. It became a part of the vernacular with the emergence of the "soul brother" / "soul sister" and other terms used outside of music, it was seen in fashion, food, and community – it was an accurate depiction of African-American life and spirit. Soul created a consensus of most music in the second half of the 20th century and on to current popular music through sampling and subgenres that emerged after most considered it gone.

2. "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved": Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements' Contribution to Soul

Both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements played an undeniable role in the emergence of soul music. While the Civil Rights movement fought for "equal rights for African-Americans", the Black Power Movement "emphasized Black unity, Black pride and self-determination" (Maultsby 2015, 277). Together, these two movements played a huge role in redefining the African-American aesthetic, and soul music contributed many great voices as the two movements gained traction. Artists such as Ray Charles, James Brown, and Sam Cooke "share common musical roots in Black gospel music, which inspired their transformation of rhythm and blues into the sound of soul" (Maultsby 2015, 279). Soul music led people into action and brought international awareness to both causes. Soul reflected the changes within the black community as well as highlighted the strife and political struggles of black Americans; it proved to be a useful tool in aiding the message that brought African-Americans together and cultivated a new identity for blacks.

I have the pleasure of knowing many great African-Americans who have lived through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. My grandmother, Betty Hicks, was just graduating from A. J. Moore High School in Waco, Texas. After graduating, she moved to Houston and worked at a record store. She told me: "The music I remember was Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, Nina Simone, Diana Ross and The Supremes, and Otis Redding." The music for many African-Americans was a call to produce the change that needed to be seen. For my grandmother, it was no different. "While I was in school in Houston, I would go to a Woolworth drugstore downtown with a few of my friends and we would sit around the counters and they would not serve us, and we would just sit there every day." It was a subtle way of showing resistance and unity amongst the black community. "I do remember, it was a little scary for the younger generation," she remarked. But it was the courage the music instilled that kept them constantly going back to the same Woolworth drugstore day after day. These outbursts of courage presented by my grandmother and other blacks at this time proved there was a surge of spirit and passion the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements created, and soul music was a part of that.

I also asked my grandmother about the most memorable events that happened during this time, and she said the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and President Kennedy were instilled in her mind. "It was a sad time, but people of different backgrounds and walks of life came together to support the black community. It makes me think of

when Jesus died for us on the cross. He did it so we could live forever, and they died for us to have our freedom." The interview I conducted with my grandmother allowed me to see through the eyes of someone who was involved and affected by the political and social changes within the black community at this time. There were times when she feared for her safety and the safety of others, but she knew, like many African-Americans and others willing to fight for their rights that something had to be done. My grandmother shared with me the artists she was listening to and how their message correlates with how she was willing to take action. She specifically noted Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, and Nina Simone, who were all activist and who had songs that helped shape the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and got everyday people to go out and be inspired by the change they sung of.

2.1. "Say It Loud": A Brief Account of the Godfather of Soul

James Brown was one of the most pivotal artists in soul music, earning him the title "Godfather of Soul." His music portrays what it meant to be black during the 1960s and before. Like many African-Americans, Brown grew up in a very adverse environment. James Joseph Brown Jr. was born on May 3, 1933, in Barnwell, South Carolina. With no relationship with his mother, and his father not able to support a young Brown, he was sent to Augusta, Georgia, where he lived in with aunt. Brown's aunt's "two-story dwelling was a working brothel", so Brown learned to fend for himself early on, being constantly surrounded by strangers. In his teens, Brown was constantly in run-ins with the law, earning him a sentence in the state penitentiary. Life was very tense for James Brown in his early years, but once he found gospel singing, it became "'one of the things that helped [him] to survive" (James Brown, quoted in Schwartz 2016).

An artist like James Brown marked the emergence of soul music. He combined the gospel style with the secular sound of rhythm & blues. Brown was at the forefront of R&B music, but the message of strife, love, and black pride gave it its soulful theme. Much of Brown's music directly correlates with the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.

Uh! With your bad self!
Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!"
(James Brown, "Say It Loud", 1968.)

The release of "Say It Loud" (1968), an acclaimed hit by Brown, said to the world as well as to the African-American community to be proud of what and who they are. The song is a chant, much like the spirituals that slaves used to sing out in fields, it has a message of strength and resilience that the African-American community needed at this time of political shifts. Soul music helped redefine what it meant to be black in America, and James Brown gave them something to sing about, something to be proud of and something to hold onto. Brown sings:

Everybody over there
(Get on up)
Everybody right there
(Get into it)
Everybody over here
(Get involved)"
(James Brown, "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved", 1971.)

Brown's "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved" (1971) was a seven-minute call to action to the black community of the time. This was meant to get them involved and ready for the revolution that was coming. The Black Power and the Civil Rights Movements were strongly affected by songs like this. It gave them awareness and attention, not just from the black community, but international recognition. Brown lyrics were instrumental in creating traction and giving people a reason to stand up and be brave the next day.

Wait, wait, wait, wait
You better become a
Part of the call
You gotta have patience
Or you won't be called
You gotta have patience or
You don't have the call"
(James Brown, "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved", 1971.)

Brown sings about "the call" – a call to act and get involved. He also says to be patient. Change was certainly coming, and if African-Americans

stayed strong, persevered, and got up, got into, and got involved, tomorrow would be a better day. James Brown's music and sound created change during a time when change was an adverse subject in the black community. He helped curate this new black identity or soul aesthetic in African-American life. His voice became a contribution to the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements, but most importantly, his voice became the voice for everyday black people living and acting in the change that surrounded them.

2.2. "Mississippi Goddamn": The Message of Nina Simone

Nina Simone played an influential role in creating traction for the Civil Rights Movement with songs like "Mississippi Goddamn" (1964), which directly references the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and the deaths of the four young girls (Kernodle 2016). Simone was a serious Civil Rights activist, supporting leaders such as Malcom X. In the 2015 documentary *What Happened, Miss Simone?* it was mentioned that Simone actually lived right across the street from Malcom X, which propelled her involvement in the Civil Rights movement. Simone was not always tied to the Civil Rights movement, but once she made her involvement know by releasing music such as "Four Women" (1966), "Strange Fruit" (1965), and "Mississippi Goddamn" (1964), she began to receive less commercial attention. Her shows were not broadcasted the same way they had been prior to her revealing her involvement, and it was something that almost tainted her career in entertainment. But Simone and artists like her knew the power they held and knew the impact their voices could make on the Civil Rights Movement. She chose not to focus on her commercial success and instead focused on the message and the story her songs told.

The album *Miss Simone: The Hits* contains a remastered live recording of the song, at the beginning of which Simone states: "four little girls were killed in Alabama, and at that time we got the inspiration to do this song, but Dr. King's murder has left me so numb, I don't know where I'm at, really."

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
(Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam", 1964.)

Nina Simone depicts the frustration she had with the three states that heavily enforced Jim Crow laws and where events like the church bombing happened often. In this live recording of the song, Simone states she "hopes that we will have songs that go down in history for these wonderful brave people who are no longer with us." Simone shares this soulful message to inform her audience that her songs are not merely for entertainment, they contain a serious message, that was created to inspire change so that the fatal event that took place in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church do not repeat themselves. Artists like Simone instill a historical presence in the music they put out by always reminding us of what was, how to prevent it, and what can be.

Simone goes on saying "the king is dead. The king of love is dead." My interpretation of this is that she is referring to the very recent (in terms of this recording) assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. who advocated for a peaceful way to end segregation and the violence that plagued minorities during the 1960s. It goes without saying that Simone's goal has been reached. Audiences today can still reflect on the message much of her music has created.

Lord, have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
(Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam," 1964.)

Like many soul songs, Simone tells her audience to remain strong and courageous, for they will reap the benefits of their rights "in due time". She will remain upset with Alabama, loose her rest with Tennessee and make sure everyone knows Mississippi Goddman, even if her career is threatened. Simone was an activist, and she supported the message with strong feelings and actions. She said explicitly what many at this time would not dare say, and she used her voice as a means to spread the soulful word that ignited change.

2.3. "A Change is Gonna Come": A Look at Sam Cooke's Influential Ode to Change

When talking to my grandmother about the music she remembered most from the time of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964) by Sam Cooke came to her mind almost instantly.

I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I've been running ev'r since
It's been a long time, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will.
(Sam Cooke, "A Change Is Gonna Come," 1964.)

Cooke, who was born January 22, 1935, in Clarksdale, Mississippi, instantly recalls the Mississippi river and uses it as a metaphor stating "just like the river I've been running ev'r since". This could be interpreted as running from the adverse encounter many African-Americans were faced with from young ages and running to something better. He knows a change is gonna come, an opportunity such as the Civil Rights or Black Power Movements will allow blacks to triumph and prosper in the identity they created for themselves.

I go to the movie and I go downtown
Somebody keep tellin' me don't hang around
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will
(Sam Cooke, "A Change Is Gonna Come," 1964).

The verse specifically made me recall what my grandmother said about a time when she went to a movie theater that was strictly for blacks, and there was another that was for whites, even adding the one time she went to integrated movie theater, but the blacks sat on one side and the whites on the other. African-Americans were constantly being told where they could and could not be, even in time of integration; a social and cultural partition still made the environment incredibly unwelcoming. Even at the Woolworth drugstore at which my grandmother conducted sit-ins, someone would tell them "don't hang around".

In addition, the lyrics black entertainers use historically contain double-entendres within their music that would portray their white counterparts; however, during the Civil Rights and Black Power era they vanished. The cloak black entertainers would use in the face of white spectators was gone. Cooke and many others marked that change. These lyrics have no double-meaning and allowed African-Americans to take physical action when it came to their freedoms. Cooke also worked as an activist during the Civil Rights era and was "an admirer of Martin Luther King Jr" (Maultsby 2015, 280). And with songs like "Change is Gonna Come", "Cooke demonstrated his racial pride by challenging Jim Crow laws and de facto segregation, the latter outside of and within the complex of components – record labels, recording studios, publishing companies, etc. – that comprise the music industry" (Maultsby 2015, 280).

Another wonderful thing about this track is that "A Change is Gonna Come" is at the end of every verse. It reflects the persistence and patience African-Americans and activists had to have in order to succeed. After constantly running like the river, change was a new tomorrow, and it was something that had to be dealt with strategically and with great perseverance.

2.4. "Move On Up": Curtis Mayfield's Inspiring Message Songs

Hush now child, and don't you cry
Your folks might understand you, by and by
Move on up, toward your destination
You may find from time to time
Complication.
(Curtis Mayfield, "Move On Up," 1970.)

"Move on Up" (1971) is without a doubt one of my favorite Curtis Mayfield songs. Moving "toward your destination" is fitting for any adverse situation. It is a timeless ode to the possibility that probably gave a lot of African-Americans the strength to keep moving on up. Mayfield was "raised by his mother in Chicago [and] worked odd jobs to help support his struggling family", making him a credible source when displaying the struggles blacks faced in the early half of the 20th century.

So hush now child, and don't you cry
Your folks might understand you, by and by
Move on up, and keep on wishing
Remember your dream is your only scheme
So keep on pushing
(Curtis Mayfield, "Move On Up," 1970).

"Your folks might understand you" shows the connection black "folks" had with one another. They understood what they were going through, and that others might not have viewed their struggles the same way. Mayfield's message of hope had "fused biblical messages of hope and transcendence with gospel-influenced vocals and rhythm and blues nuances and instrumentation" (Kernodle 2016). He used the gospel elements prevalent in black churches to further instill a message of perseverance. The church, being the center of many black communities, was seen as refuge during times of adversity. Even during slavery, the church was where slaves would congregate and define their own identity separate from the one that was assigned to them. Mayfield's gospel elements remind blacks of the spirituals and odes sung in church, which center around having hope and faith in order to "keep on pushing" for a better tomorrow.

Take nothing less – than the second best
Do not obey – you must keep your say.
(Curtis Mayfield, "Move On Up," 1970)

Mayfield reinforces the idea of persistence with "take nothing less – than the second best" stating that African-Americans should no longer have to settle for the situation they were in. They should no longer have to settle for their freedoms as individuals. "Do not obey – you must keep your say" could be read as keeping the resistance against those who try to tell you otherwise and keeping true to what you believe in and what you want to see.

You can past the test
Just move on up, to a greater day
With just a little faith
If you put your mind to it you can surely do it.
(Mayfield, "Move On Up," 1970)

"You can past the test", the test of strength, courage and devotion to the black identity African-Americans wanted others to recognize, and "with just a little faith" and putting their "mind[s] to it" they "can surely do it." Mayfield's "Move on up", like many soul songs, wanted African-Americans to take action and stay strong in hopes of creating a better future.

2.5 The Soul Connection

Soul music had a direct influence on how citizens during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements responded and acted in the change that was surrounding their lives. It helped unify and encourage people to stand together and defend the rights of African-Americans, while playing on the gospel and R&B elements heavily associated within black music. Soul music displayed a message that signified a pivotal change in African-American culture in the 20th century. It ignited the spirit and helped cultivate a new African-American identity. It created a cultural movement that believed in change for the better and social justice amongst its inhabitants; its message bread positivity and though it would directly hint at the adverse situations seen in black life, it would offer a silver inning that those like Curtis Mayfield said "move on up", and The Isley Brothers told to "shout". The soul artists helped narrate a story in African-American life; they reported the daily struggles, they helped create the conversation and aided those activists using a universal platform to engage an audience who may not have heard the black community's outcries.

3. Mama's Gun: The Next Generation of Soul and the Truth About Neo-Soul

Neo-soul is "a marketing term used to promote soul music created by the second generation of soul singers" (Maultsby 2015, 291). The emergence of neo-soul is rather interesting. It is meant to be a subgenre of soul; however, its definition only relies on what neo-soul is in terms of consumerism and those interested in this music genre. It says nothing about how it differs from traditional soul or rhythm & blues music, just that it represents a new wave of soul artists who are regarded as the "torchbearers, carrying on a legacy of soul music" (ibid.). Neo-soul artists represent a new generation of the same traditional soul music seen in the 1960s. They depict the current and past struggles of the black community and sing in the spirit of a better tomorrow.

In the article "'There's Nothing Really New under the Sun': The Fallacy of the Neo-Soul Genre," Phillip Lamarr Cunningham (2010) asserts that neo-soul is just an extension of soul and R&B mu-

sic, rather than a subgenre. Cunningham uses artists such as D'Angelo, Erykah Badu, and Maxwell to emphasize these artists do not ascribe to neo-soul or use it to define them in anyway. Most of the artist dubbed neo-soul tend to stray from the commercialism of the music industry and choose to solely identify with issues that pertain to them. For instance, Erykah Badu (born Erica Wright) actually changed the last few letters of her first name to Kah, which means "self". Neo-soul artists like Badu choose to focus on the self-awareness in their music and in the image they portray versus what others will call and label them. Artists such as Badu "liberate themselves from genre labels, assert their individual subjectivities, and complicate what it means to be black and to make black music" (David 2007, 699). As a genre, neo-soul will reflect the work of artists who do not live in the confined borders of a genre, which is precisely why the definition of neo-soul is more for commercial purposes.

Though neo-soul artists stray away from using the term, there are some discrepancies with this subgenre and the traditional soulful sound that arose in the 1960s. Artists such as Erykah Badu and D'Angelo identify as soul artists; however, there is a certain fluidity in their sound. Badu has a very soulful voice, using the same vocal strategies of Aretha Franklin and Roberta Flack. She even instills a message of black power. The fallacy of neo-soul is that artists don't identify with the genre, but it adds afrofuturistic elements that go beyond current issues, but rather foresees how they play out in time, "neo-soul certainly communicates with this sort of post-black / post-soul impulse" (ibid., 700). The message, as relevant as it is today, has a futuristic context, which "posits a reconciliation between an imagined disembodied, identity-free future and the embodied identity-specific past and present" (ibid., 697). Neo-soul goes beyond the everyday struggles of African-Americans and into the outcome or even solution. Badu and artists that have been put under the same label represent a new wave of sound, maybe not neo-soul, but they do embody the second generation of soul music.

In addition, like soul music, neo-soul views the African-American culture with very high regard. Though it may reflect adverse situations in the black community, there are messages of courage and strength that are projected out in song. This can especially be seen with artist such as Badu, Lauryn Hill and Jill Scott. These artists take their personal experiences of growing up within the black community to guide those African-Americans who could be going through a similar circumstance.

3.1. Mama's Gun: The Eryah Effect

Mama's Gun (2000), Badu's second studio album released on the iconic soul label Motown, is the flagship of this chapter, because it represents what most would think of as definitively neo-soul. Badu acknowledges timeless struggles within the black community that have even aided me in my growth and recognizing my identity as an African-American. I chose a few tracks from this album that represent the themes seen in neo-soul music, and what makes the second-generation soul artists such as Badu the "torchbearers" that they are.

3.2. "All you must hold onto is you"

Bag lady you gone hurt your back
Dragging all them bags like that
I guess nobody ever told you
All you must hold onto, is you, is you, is you.
(Badu, "Bag Lady", 2000.)

Recovery is an important theme in the song "Bag Lady" (2000). The idea is that someone who is holding onto something negative, like a past struggle, is being inhibited to move forward, not necessarily physically. This song relates to emotional baggage someone has in their life, and Badu makes the solution very easy, "pack light" and "Bet ya love could make it better". Here the solution neo-soul artists provide is prevalent, Badu instills "all you must hold onto is you", and a little self-love can make up for all the negative baggage we choose to hold onto, which in fact is weighing us down and getting in the way of the things we most desire. Whether it be love, success, or a more positive outlook, Badu says "let it go".

3.3. "Don't you want be strong with me"

"Green Eyes" (2000) is a track I find very interesting. It represents a cycle or a metamorphose into

something greater. Badu leads us on nothing short of a journey of self-exploration in this track. The song illustrates almost the steps of getting out of a failed relationship: denial, anger, and the realization that the relationship wasn't something that was for her. The song begins with Badu singing "my eyes are green cause I eat a lot of vegetables, it don't have nothin' to do with your new friend" to deny some sense of jealousy and denial. The song begins with a fuzzy sound, like that of a dated record player. She repeats the lyrics a few more times, and the rhythm of the songs changes; it begins to sounds clearer, marking a new stage in this process. As the song progresses, the tempo gets faster.

"I'm Insecure / But I can't Help it" marks the next stage in the song. The melody slows down, as Badu sings this course, then begins to get faster. As the song continues, there are stronger percussive sounds like drums and a stronger base. Badu recognizes the feeling of insecurity she had when seeing someone she had a relationship with in a new relationship.

Feelin' insecure
Love has got me sore
I don't want no more ooh
(Erykah Badu, "Green Eyes", 2000.)

The insecurity with getting over a relationship is something very many people can relate to, and as these feelings become more brutally honest and the indecisiveness progresses, a piano riff repeatedly breaks the verses, marking the end of the thought. The riff begins when Badu sings:

Just make love to me
Just one more time
And then you'll see
I can't believe I made a desperate plea
What's with me?
Me me yeah.
(Erykah Badu, "Green Eyes", 2000.)

The realization marks the end of the cycle. Badu sings her realizations:

Don't you want be strong with me
You told me we had a family
Want to run 'cause I weigh ya down
But times get tough and there you go
Out the door you want to run again
Open my heart will you come back again?
Want to run 'cause you say that you are afraid
You're afraid oh
Never knew what a friendship was
Never knew how to breathe love
You can't be what I need you to
And I don't know why I fuck with you
I know our love will never be the same
But I can't stand these growin' pains"
(Erykah Badu, "Green Eyes", 2000.)

The end of the song shows Badu understanding that the relationship was not for her and questioned why she even bothered with the partner to begin with. She embodied the several different stages of getting past a failed relationship and exhibited the emotional hindrances this type of trauma can commonly cause. This ten-minute ode to rehabilitation portrays a struggle, not just found in the black community, but a universal truth that people of all 'walks of life' can identify with. This track contains a soulful theme, even if Badu was still bruised with the realization of the end of a relationship, she still presented a situation that was slowly evolving into a positive outlook. This track is definitively a second-generation soul song because that positive outlook was her own self-awareness. She evaluated and reevaluated what was going on and how "love" made her feel and kept displaying the battle she had with herself and the emotions that were clouding her judgement.

3.4. The Message Remains the Same

With artists not relying on the label of being a neo-soul artist, neo-soul is a genre for the sake of having a soul subgenre. Its main purpose is to essentially have a place to put current soul artist and a marketing strategy that says artist like Badu are different from artists like Nina Simone. The message remains the same with neo-soul, it just represents a more modern approach to the music that led the Civil Rights movement. However, artists like Badu do heavily address the many issues that have transcended across generations and guides the black community using afrofuturistic elements to a solution.

In response to Cunningham's assertion of neo-soul, it is valid to say there is "nothing new under the sun." Neo-soul artists contain the same

characteristics of past soul singers as well as the same message that inspired political, social and personal change with the only difference being that their message has been adapted to a modern audience. Neo-soul artists keep the elements of traditional soul alive under a different alias. Badu, Hill, and Maxwell have all helped keeping soul music current, making these second-generation soul artists the successors of soul music and contributing to its influence on the modern sound.

4. Touch the Sky: Soul in Hip Hop as an Invocation to Modern Sound

4.1. What's The Word: The Soul Message In Hip Hop

Both hip hop and soul music have a message of "cultural crises, alienation, political expressions, and social visions conveyed in black popular music in particular and black popular culture in general" (Rabaka 2013, 203). Hip Hop takes an in-depth approach to the same messages provided in soul music by constantly providing an image to adversities commonly displayed in black communities.

A common occurrence with hip hop music is that it samples existing music, specifically traditional soul music, or pieces of it, into the modern power house that is rap music. Sampling is taking "an excerpt of one sound recording and reus[ing] it as an element in the creation of a new recording" ("Sampling" 2016). An artist that has done this particularly is Kanye West. For years, Kanye West has sampled the music that has empowered a movement, even using gospel and rhythm and blues elements to create the messages he sends in his music. An example is the song "Touch The Sky" (2005) from West's second studio album; it specifically samples Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Up". West raps:

> I gotta testify
> Come up in the spot lookin' extra fly
> Fore the day I die, I'mma touch the sky
> (Kanye West, "Touch The Sky", 2005).

It is very interesting the way West chooses his samples. The meaning of the song is commonly emphasized by the sample. In "Touch the Sky", West addresses the struggles he had trying to become a household name in hip hop. He rapped about overcoming an adverse situation and not settling for anything less than "the second best", as Mayfield put it in the original rendition of the song. At the end of the song, West chants: "Sky high, I'm, I'm sky high! / Yeah, feels good to be home, baby!" to signal that he reached his goals and almost creates a call to action in the same way Mayfield's original hit did.

Even when West does not use direct soul samples in his music, there are elements that stylistically line up with soul. The song "Jesus Walks" (2004), featured on the album *The College Dropout*, samples from The ARC Choir's "Walk With Me" (1997). West embodies the fight that he has to stay strong in his Christian faith, as well as discussing major universal political and social issues, opening the song with:

> Yo, we at war
> We at war with terrorism, racism,
> but most of all we at war with ourselves
> (Kanye West, "Jesus Walks", 2004).

This track represents universal adversities that go beyond race, ethnicity, gender, and religion, even though it does have a strong relationship with Christianity. Historically, the church has always been the center of African-American life, acting as a shelter or familiar environment, in which beliefs and ideas can be expressed. West uses The ARC Choir's song to emphasize how the church is a safe haven. In the midst of all the adversities, the choir still chants the phrase "Jesus walks" in the background, as West continues to rap about violence, deviances, and major political and social taboos. This choice of sample emphasizes West's outcry for God in his life and the strength to keep himself on a straight and narrow path. When West raps "(Jesus Walks) / God show me the way because the Devil's tryin' to break me down / (Jesus Walks with me)", it could be heard a plea to God.

> And I don't think there is nothing I can do
> now to right my wrongs
> I want to talk to God, but I'm afraid
> because we ain't spoke in so long, so long
> (Kanye West, "Jesus Walks", 2004).

West even goes as far as to address how he's hesitant at reviving his faith, saying "we ain't spoke in so long". West's reservations about taking a step in faith displays the water and oil effect secular culture can have on religious values. After stating this, West raps:

So here go my single dog radio needs this
They said you can rap about anything except for Jesus
That means guns, sex, lies, video tape
But if I talk about God my record won't get played
Huh?
(Kanye West, "Jesus Walks", 2004).

West overtly says radio will not support a religious song like the one he is currently rapping. West's approach to dealing with this situation is much like the delivery of soul music's messages. They were not covered in duality, they meant what they said, and said it forcefully to inspire change. Ultimately, what West is trying to do here is changing the cultural, political, and social views on religion or what it means to be spiritual in a violent and secular culture, while even reflecting on himself and what he needs to do to be better in his relationship with God. The self-awareness seen on this track also mirrors the theme of self presented in the neo-soul genre.

With neo-soul being the revival of traditional soul music in a more futuristic and modern context, West has also sampled neo-soul music. The track "All Falls Down" (2004) from *The College Dropout* features a sample from Lauryn Hill's "The Mystery of Iniquity" (2002), sung by Syleena Johnson. Though Hill's version only contains acoustics, West included the acoustic elements and added a beat. In the song "The Mystery of Iniquity", Lauryn Hill is rapping about unjust situations predominantly involving African Americans. What West samples is the hook of the song:

Oh when it all, it all falls down
I'm telling you oh, it all falls down
Oh when it all, it all falls down
I'm telling you oh, it all falls down.
(Kanye West, "All Falls Down", 2004)

In this song, West primarily addresses negative stigmas associated with the black community, while also discussing the self-consciousness with how black people present themselves to the rest of society. West raps:

Now, tell me that ain't insecure
The concept of school seems so secure
Sophomore three years aint picked a career
She like fuck it, I'll just stay down here and do hair
Cause that's enough money to buy her a few pairs of new Airs
Cause her baby daddy don't really care
She's so precious with the peer pressure
Couldn't afford a car so she named her daughter Alexus.
(Kanye West, "All Falls Down", 2004)

West is describing the insecurities seen in women. This does not necessarily just embody one person specifically; what West is trying to do here is creating this personality many African-Americans can relate to personally, whether they've felt these insecurities themselves or it reminds them of someone they know. West presents a strong correlation with how insecurities can take a toll on the individual's financial situation and how money does not change, that the person is still whatever they are trying to hide under the façade they created. West takes a dig at the value of materialistic possessions when rapping:

The prettiest people do the ugliest things
For the road to riches and diamond rings
We shine because they hate us, floss cause they degrade us
We trying to buy back our 40 acres
And for that paper, look how low we a'stoop
Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coop / coupe.
(Kanye West, "All Falls Down", 2004)

West blames the power of cooperation with this black community against the world theme he heavily portrays in this song. West is playing on neo-soul sensibilities on this track by addressing a current issue in African-American life and also discussing how he plays into these stigmas as well when he raps "I got a problem with spending before I get it / We all self-conscious I'm just the first to admit it".

West takes a neo-soul approach in the sampling of this track. The use of Hill's "The Mystery of Iniquity" emphasized the social message he was putting out. West wants everyone, specifically the black community, to understand that it is okay to feel insecure in a world that can disregard black lives. The message itself has a very neo-soul theme; once again, West looks at how he has also contrib-

uted to the negative financial stigmas associated with black Americans. He recognizes his own insecurities to encourage others to take action and look at their own.

West is a hip hop artist who constantly conveys his message through the samples he chooses. West goes beyond what just sounds good to what will emphasize the word he wants people to know. He has used both traditional soul and new generation soul music to create these messages, while also using the messages these songs have put out to emphasize his message. Artists like West help influence and keep traditional soul music and elements of rhythm & blues and gospel current and popular.

5. Soul as an Invocation to Modern Sound

Though soul music has changed over time, elements of it are still very prevalent in popular genres such as hip hop and subgenres like neo-soul. Socially and politically, soul was the root of stating the goals and messages of the black community in music. As time progressed, soul music's message inspired other music genres to convey the same message and call to action it once did. Neo-soul and hip hop artist alike have become responsible for keeping the soul message alive as long as social and political events have an effect on black communities. These two genres have aided African-Americans by providing a narration of the trials and tribulations of black life and an understanding of the black identity. Neo-soul specifically aided the "self" theme in music, which gave it a strong presence amongst African-Americans, while hip hop unapologetically battles the social and political adversities of African-Americans. These two genres have kept the message of soul, marking it as an invocation to modern African-American sound.

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Trolling, Satire, and Internet Culture in the Music of Odd Future

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Introduction

Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All (OFWGKTA) was a Los Angeles rap collective founded in late 2006 by Tyler, the Creator (Tyler Okonma), with original members Left Brain (Vyron Turner), Hodgy Beats (Gerard Long), Matt Martians (Matthew Martin), Jasper Dolphin (Davon Wilson), and Casey Veggies (Casey Jones). The gamut of Odd Future's artistry spans from misogynistic delirium to raw and expressive genius, depending on who you are talking to. At their peak from 2010 to 2012, Odd Future's popularity exploded among young listeners, prompting parents and critics alike to condemn the group for its often violent and misogynistic themes. This ruffling of feathers only further fomented the nihilistic and rebellious nature of the group – leading to even more offensive and abrasive releases until their falling out in late 2015. Understanding Odd Future relies primarily on two central topics: the satirical nature of their music and the ever-so-typical misinterpretation of their lyrics as autobiography. Keeping these two subjects in mind, this paper will attempt to address both the merits and shortcomings of the arguments surrounding these topics, as well as the implications this music has on, or rather from, millennial youth. Although Odd Future's member base has grown and shrunk periodically over the years, this paper will address the music produced by the group as a whole – as well as references to solo work performed by the members themselves.

1. The Internet Generation

> "Trolling – (verb) to post inflammatory or inappropriate messages or comments on the internet, especially a message board, for the purpose of upsetting other users or provoking a response." (Trolling 2016.)

1.1. Connections with the Youth

Born in 1991, founder Tyler, the Creator entered adolescence at the same time the internet did. As part of the Myspace generation, Tyler and his peers were undoubtedly influenced by internet culture and its love for obscenities, "trolling", cats, and antisocial behavior. This can be seen in the group's habitual use of satire, where violently offensive lyrics and imagery are conveyed with facetious indifference. The group's mantra of "Kill People, Burn Shit, Fuck School" demonstrates this whole-hearted embracement of offensive and over-the-top content, which can be found all over internet chat forums and comments sections. This in part explains why Odd Future's fan base is composed almost entirely of other like-minded internet-hardy youth, while older audiences see the group as the shallow and vacuous embodiment of what's wrong with contemporary hip hop. They cannot seem to tolerate what the younger audiences can, because they simply are not used to offensive subject matter being presented in such a casual and flippant way. But this denunciation of the Odd Future collective is exactly the response the group wants. Much like in internet trolling, there exists an "in-group" and an "out-group" within Odd Future's music. The in-group is familiar with Odd Future's work and knows not to take it seriously. The out-group misinterprets the sarcasm and attempts to denounce the music, fans, and members. The out-group will desperately try to debate the music's content with members of the in-group, who they believe condone such activities. But this appropriation of fans' perceived values is entirely false. And in this way the out-group is fighting a shadow, which only adds to the entertainment of the in-group. This in-group / out-group dynamic reinforces Odd Future's connection with their fans and allows listeners to be "a part of the crew" in a sense. With millennials spending more and more time online, it is understandable why they have become desensitized to the ubiquitous trolling present on the internet (World Stats 2015). It is easier to dismiss wildly offensive subject matters as trolling than it is to engage the troll in debate. When internet-weathered youth are presented with something they find offensive, many will just dismiss it as distasteful trolling – instead of taking it to heart and attempting to combat it.

1.2. Avid Use of Internet Marketing

An integral part of Odd Future's rapid rise to stardom was their avid use of internet marketing and releases. Mixtapes and albums were released with free downloads, allowing them to spread across social media much faster than a paid counterpart. Seeing as how social media is predominantly used by young peoples, it makes sense that their primary tactic for exposure was this very medium. This explosion in popularity demonstrated how an otherwise unknown and unsigned group of artists could use the Internet to market and distribute their work for little to no cost, eventually leading to the formation of their own label, Odd Future Records, in 2011. With the birth of file-sharing software like LimeWire, Napster, and bit-torrent in the early 2000s, the group's members undoubtedly experienced the free (and legally questionable) downloading of music, literature, games, etc. throughout their youth. Millennials have grown up on an internet, from which most music can be downloaded for free, and according to a 2011 study "70 percent of all 18- to 29-year-olds have pirated music, TV shows, or movies", compared to just "36 percent among people aged 30 and above." (Copy Culture 2016). With this in mind, it just would not make sense to sell albums and mixtapes, knowing fans will most likely just download them from a peer-to-peer file-sharing site for free. This free and open access to information is a consistent hallmark of internet culture, so it is understandable why the group would embrace the tradition. With most of their income coming from merchandise sales, Odd Future allowed their music to spread like wild-fire among young listeners. It is important to address the fact that Odd Future does sell their music; however, the main idea here is that while fans can choose to buy albums, they have always been publically available for free on the Odd Future site.

1.3. Cats, Trolling, and the Embracement of the Obscene

Other elements of internet culture can be seen throughout Odd Future's work, chiefly the group's "Tron Cat" logo, which can be seen covering a lot of the merchandise offered on the crew's website. Tyler even talks about being bullied in the song "Oldie" (2012): "Cuz you was into Jazz, kitty cats, and Steven Spielberg" (Kgositsile, et a., 2012). Odd Future was raised on the internet, a place where offensive and facetious trolling is embraced wholeheartedly – even celebrated in some cases. Does this say something about internet culture's effect on young kids and teens? Or is it simply a reflection of the taboo human-nature we all share, yet so readily and comfortably hide online under a guise of anonymity? Odd Future would rather exhume these taboos and put them on display – for better or for worse. Or perhaps Odd Future is simply playing the role of a social troll. They mock social values simply for the sake of entertainment and see the backlash from critics and parents as some kind of affirmation of a job well done. In this way, Odd Future straddles the line between thoughtful social-provocateurs and senseless teen rabble-rousers, a line for which even the members themselves cannot clearly see.

2. Over Their Heads with Tongue-In-Cheek

Odd Future is arguably one of the most misunderstood members of the satirical rap genre, where facetious lyrics and black stereotypes are hyperbolized to the point of exhaustion. The satirical nature of Odd Future's music is not always clear, especially to unfamiliar listeners. However, this label of satirical rap is not all-encompassing – rather, it is an element of their music that they employ to garner shock from inexperienced listeners, while also appealing to punk-centric youth who understand the joke.

2.1. Satire's Place in Hip hop

This motif of satirically over-the-top content is best exemplified in songs like "Swag Me Out" (2010), in which a droning "WOOOAAAH WOOOAAAH" can be heard in the background throughout the song, with an over-played hook chanting "Swag me out, bitch!" between every verse. The hook continues on its own for the last 2 minutes of the 7-minute track, before the members themselves begin begging for it to stop saying things like "What the fuck? Turn this shit off!", "Why is it still going?", "Oh my God … it keeps going on forever", and "If you don't turn this off Ima kill myself". Another song whose abrasive beats and shallow lyrics border

on unintelligible yelling is "We Got Bitches" (2012), sporting a hilarious hook chanting "We got bitches, we got bitches, we got bitches / We got diamonds, we got diamonds, we got diamonds / We got cars, we got cars, we got cars / We got Jacuzzis, and your bitch be on my dick" (Okonma, et al., 2012) between short and disorganized verses, where practically every sentence has at least one swear word or obscenity. This shallow content coupled with the ill-produced and abrasive sound of the track is clearly mocking other contemporary hip hop artists, whose music is plagued with simple hooks and verses, with unbridled materialism encompassing practically every facet of their music. These songs typically made little impact outside of Odd Future's fan-base and likely were not intended to make a lasting impact on hip hop or American culture; their value stems purely from their laughably over-the-top nature. On other occasions, Odd Future's critiques of contemporary hip hop come in more direct forms. For example, on Tyler's solo track "Bastard" (2009) he says "I created OF cuz I feel we're more talented than 40-year old rappers talkin 'bout Gucci / When they have kids they haven't seen in years / Impressin' their peers" (Tyler 2009). Tyler is tired of listening to the same themes of materialism from the same "40-year old rappers". He created Odd Future so the younger generation would have a voice in contemporary hip hop's sea of unoriginality. The members of Odd Future are tired of artists employing the same themes of gangsta-ism and materialism in their music to make money. Tricia Rose explains:

> *This consolidation and "dumbing down" of hip hop's imagery and storytelling took hold rather quickly in the middle to late 1990s and reached a peak in the early 2000s. The hyper-gangsta-ization of the music and imagery directly parallels hip hop's sales ascendance into the mainstream record and radio industry.* (Rose 2008, p. 3.)

This brand of hip hop reached its peak around the same time Odd Future emerged. Attempting to break the mold, the members of Odd Future are far from gangsters. Most were raised in Californian suburbs, attending high school and making good grades. Earl Sweatshirt (Thebe Kgositsile) has a line in his solo-track "Chum" (2013), explaining how he was "Too black for the white kids and too white for the blacks / Went from honor roll to crackin' locks up off them bicycle racks" (Earl Sweatshirt 2013). Earl is saying he was smart enough to make the honor roll, but abandoned his schooling to join Odd Future. Furthermore, Tyler doesn't smoke weed; a staple of practically every other contemporary rap artist. The members repeatedly defy hip hop norms, favoring their own individualism over all else. To them, the genre has become stale and is in need of some much-needed innovation.

2.2. Storytelling vs Authenticity

Commonly the groups' dark tales of murder and rape are misunderstood as autobiography, rather than fictional storytelling, resulting in their songs being interpreted more as criminal-propaganda than expressive artistry. Tricia Rose attempts to explain this phenomenon, citing hip hop's recurring motif of "realness", where rappers boast about how they "keep it real" or "stay true", while other rappers are "fakes" and "phonies":

> *This assumption – that rappers are creating rhymed autobiographies – is the result of both rappers' own investment in perpetuating the idea that everything they say is true to their life experience (given that the genre has grown out of the African-American tradition of boasting in the first person) and the genre's investment in the pretense of no pretense. That is, the genre's promoters capitalize on the illusion that the artists are not performing but "keeping it real" – telling the truth, wearing outfits on stage that they'd wear in the street (no costumes), remaining exactly as they'd be if they were not famous, except richer.* (Rose 2008, p. 38)

This "keepin' it real" ethos of rap undoubtedly adds confusion to the uninformed listener's interpretation. If a rapper can stand on stage and preach about how authentic and "real" they are, how can they be upset when their fictional narratives are interpreted as autobiography? Depending on what artist one asks, one will get a different definition of what it means to "keep it real". Some argue that the truest form of realness comes from preserving one's own individualism – staying true to oneself. In this light Odd Future's "realness" can be maintained even

though what they say they do on stage is completely fictional. They express themselves in a raw and unfiltered way, depending on what interests them at the time. In an interview with *Spin* magazine, Tyler said:

> *Truthfully, I'm just having fun. I'm young, and when you're young you just find things that interest you. Like skateboarding, I like that shit. I read books on serial killers and rape and shit so my mind is just filled with that at the moment. I'm not a fucking serial killer. I just rap about that shit, because it interests me at the moment. I'm just having fun ...”* (Quoted in Escobedo 2011.)

Odd Future refuses to conform to social standards and values, especially if it means censoring their artistic expression. In McLeod's 1999 paper on authenticity in rap, Method Man is cited echoing similar sentiments: “Basically, I make music that represents me. Who I am. I'm not gonna calculate my music to entertain the masses. I gotta keep it real for me.” (quoted in McLeod 1999, 140.) In this way, their authenticity is maintained, even though what they say they do, and what they actually do, are completely inconsistent. For all intents and purposes, Odd Future doesn't seem to care whether one sees their lyrical content as autobiography or storytelling, as long as their artistic expression is left unbridled.

2.3. Defying Hip Hop Clichés

Hyper-masculinity and egoism are two ubiquitous themes found throughout hip hop. Rappers often preach about how cool they are and how they can get any woman they want. This tradition of self-boasting comes from the early days of freestyle battling, where rappers would verbally battle one another attempting to degrade their opponent's “street-cred”. While many of Odd Future's songs conform to this pattern, a recurring theme of self-deprecation is present throughout their music. For example, Tyler often talks about his suicidal tendencies – peeling back his stage-persona to reveal his more vulnerable side. Many members grew up without a father, and this fact is reiterated often in their music. It is possible to see these admissions of raw humanity as the demonstration of the duality of artists' stage-personas and their actual self. Some tracks are performed by their rap-persona, others by themselves, and some as a mixture of the two. Music is a form of expression, so these artists employ hip hop to vent their deeper personal shortcomings, regrets, insecurities, and frustrations. Earl's track “Stapleton” (2010) is full of offensive obscenities regarding rape, murder, and drug use – yet he still manages to reveal his more vulnerable side with the line “Product of popped rubbers and pops that did not love us / So when I leave home, keep my heart on the top cupboard” (Earl Sweatshirt 2010). Another cliché that Odd Future attempts to defy is the general label of hip hop as “black music”. Many hip hop artists would be ashamed to admit that they hold a large fan-base of whites, yet Odd Future rejects this label. When asked how he felt about Odd Future having a large majority of young white fans, Tyler responded:

> *...why does it matter? I mean I joke about it. I have a Formspring and people ask me, like, ‘How do you feel that most of your fans are teenage white kids?’ Those are the people I hang out with is teenage white kids, what are you fucking talking about? People who bring up shit like that, I don't know why the color of their fucking skin or their fucking background has to do with the music they can relate to or listen to. What does the color of my skin have to do with the fucking notes I'm playing?* (Quoted in Escobedo 2011.)

In this way, Odd Future's intention is not to appeal to only one demographic; rather, they want to appeal to the generation they are a part of – regardless of socioeconomic background or skin color.

2.4. Fascination of the Abomination

When listening to Odd Future's music, it is integral to remember the age of the artists at the time. With most members below the age of 21, one would expect to find immaturity, anti-establishment sentiments, offensive language, drug use, and over-sexualization of women in their music. If one opened the mind of any teenage boy, one would expect to find these things; so why are critics so surprised to find it when listening to Odd Future? And why are fans so eager to listen in the first place? In Zach Baron's article “On Odd Future, Rape and Murder, And Why We Sometimes Like the Things That Repel Us”, he attempts to explain:

> *…with art like this you never identify with the victim, the proverbial "you"; you identify with the person speaking, and that person is a bad motherfucker, and thus so is the listener. Through this type of identification, art allows us to explore the weird frisson between reality and fantasy, the gulf between who we are and who we'd like to be.* (Baron 2010.)

But is this explanation really adequate? How can listening to a song about murder, rape, and drug-use be an enriching experience? Baron continues:

> *…There's something else at work here. Odd Future and the acts from which they've descended make us confront a kind of disgust that is mercifully absent from our everyday lives. The discomfort and foreignness of the elaborately awful scenarios that Odd Future concoct is part of the point: it takes us out of our comfort zones, makes us feel weird and awful […] And more to the point, it reads as novelty, to the ear and to the critical mind – at last, something new, something that is not an indie-rocker strumming an electric guitar or an unimaginative rapper talking about a Maybach he doesn't actually own. It's not so much how it's different – although that does matter, too – but that it's different. We sort the ethics out, after the fact.* (Baron 2010.)

In this light, we can see Odd Future's work as an exposé of what the human mind is capable of. It serves as a peculiar and enticing glimpse into the abyss of the socially taboo. This "fascination of the abomination" is an undeniable pattern of human nature. It is why we slow down to sneak a peek when driving past a car accident. Or why people watch shows or read books about the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. It is why some people get obsessed with the lives of serial killers. As humans, we love to explore the dark catacombs of society's collective psyche. Overturn what is socially acceptable to see what is hidden beneath – even when we do not condone the things we find. Odd Future, whether knowingly or not, exploited this element of human nature. These dark topics of rape, murder, homophobia, drug addiction, violence, and suicide are presented in such a laughably facetious manner that it dissociates the listener from the action, allowing the audience member, for better or worse, to enjoy (or at least ponder) these satirical narratives, even when the narratives are obscenely violent.

Conclusion

Odd Future represents an emerging generation of hip hop artists who have been handed a genre dirtied with corporate money, materialism, and overplayed racial stereotypes. Artistry has given way to marketability, and in the process the artistic diversity of the music has suffered. To bring this to light, Odd Future employs satire in their music; mocking contemporary hip hop artists for their unimaginative lyrics, dry and predictable production, and general unoriginality. These satirical tracks have been repeatedly misunderstood by critics as "more of the same", resulting in the widespread dismissal of Odd Future as a whole. This dismissal of Odd Future's satirical works unfortunately includes their more sincere and innovative tracks, which are often overshadowed by the violence and abrasiveness of their more controversial tracks. This misinterpretation warrants another look from critics and hip hop fans alike. Since most members of Odd Future grew up in the internet age, one can easily draw parallels between internet culture and the music of Odd Future. The ever-present "troll" can be used to explain the group's commonly facetious and inflammatory themes of rape, kidnapping, murder, and drug use. It is also possible to deduce that Odd Future intended for their music to exhume socially-taboo subjects in the hopes of stirring the morbid curiosity of listeners. It is also critically important to consider the age of the members when this music was produced. With most under the age of 21, it is understandable why their music is chalked full of violence, sex, and drugs. Odd Future intended to stay true to themselves, making music the way they want, regardless of its reception. They wanted to break the mold of contemporary hip hop and reintroduce lyricism and individuality to a genre starved of creativity. In an excerpt from the collective's unifying work "Oldie", Tyler uses a double-entendre to comment on how their music has been misunderstood by critics only looking at the black-and-white interpretation of the lyrics, but also on how the group has been criticized for their largely white fan-base:

> This is for the nigga in the suburbs,
> And the white kids with nigga friends who say the n-word,
> And the ones that got called weird, fag, bitch, nerd
> Cause you was into jazz, kitty cats, and Steven Spielberg.

They say we ain't actin' right.
Always try to turn our fuckin' color into black and white.
But they'll never change 'em, never understand 'em,
Radical's my anthem – turn my fucking amps up!
So instead of critiquing and bitchin', bein' mad as fuck,
Just admit, not only are we talented we're rad as fuck, bitches
(Kgositsile, et al., 2012.)

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Book Review

Understanding Video Game Music

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Summers, Tim. *Understanding Video Game Music*. Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1107116870. $100. http://www.cambridge.org/us/

Understanding Video Game Music is the first ludomusicology monograph from Cambridge University Press. Author Tim Summers, a regular contributor to the field, takes a more practical approach to the subject than that of other recent monographs, such as William Cheng's ethical and socio-political view in *Sound Play* (2014). Summers avoids the technical and historical study already completed by Karen Collins in *Game Sound* (2008), as well as the more common composer's perspective taken in Chance Thomas' *Composing Music for Games* (2016), Michael Sweet's *Writing Interactive Music for Video Games* (2014), Tom Hoover's *Keeping* Score (2010) and Winifred Phillip's *A Composer's Guide to Game Music* (2009). Rather, Summers opts for a more complete, musicological study akin to Kristine Jørgensen's *A Comprehensive Study of Sound in Computer Games* (2009) – a study that heavily influences the subject of this review. Summers also acknowledges the influence of film music scholar Royal S. Brown with the addition of the appendix, "How to Hear A Video Game". The aim of *Understanding Video Game Music*, according to Summers, "is to empower the study of video game music through providing tools, techniques and concepts for understanding music in games" (p. 5). Overall, Summers achieves this aim with aid on every page for novice ludomusicologists, helping the book's status as an excellent text for a class on the subject. The first half provides a framework for studies in theoretical ludomusicology and employs the methods to several case studies in the second half. Throughout, Summers emphasizes the importance of *play* and the accompanying aspect of *immersion*, cementing the interplay between games and music.

The first section of the book explores categories of video game music, research issues, primary and satellite resources, and possible methods of analysis with examples from recent studies in the field. In chapter one, Summers begins by defining and categorizing various sources of musics in video games, separating them into two headings: *extraludic* (such as console start-up jingles and producer cues) and *gameplay*. With this ever-evolving medium, Summers helps to recognize the larger research issues, such as aging and changing technology, *porting* (or adapting) games to new technology, and often-unreliable satellite sources – Summers' term for tertiary resources not within the game (such as interviews, official soundtracks and arrangements). After presenting the terminology and possible issues with research, Summers defines various play styles and methods of video game music analysis in chapter two and provides several research possibilities with exemplars (pp. 39-43) – the outline in this part of the chapter is an excellent bibliography for each field in ludomusicology.

The second half of *Understanding Video Game Music* applies methodologies from the first half to a handful of games and their soundtracks, while outlining more theoretical concepts. Chapter three presents *texturing*, the first of these concepts borrowing heavily from Genette. Texturing is the term Summers chooses for music immersion in video games, adding "even where graphics and gameplay are technologically limited, music can use general musical signs and / or references to other media and cultural touchstones that are already well-established to enhance the game experience" (p. 60). Summers takes up virtual worlds in chapter four and delves into the philosophy of *reality*. Games project their reality and their world and rules to the player: "[t]he game medium consists of dis-

tinct separate components (visual, sonic, haptic) which conspire together in the player's reception of them to conjure the virtual realities" (p. 86). Chapter five focuses on how music communicates in games. This can range from the simple task of a *stinger* (providing a notification) to the more complex cluing of the player to an objective. Filmic qualities of video game music is the subject of chapter six, with Summers paying particular attention to *Advent Rising* and *Final Fantasy VII*. Games are, and have been, reliant on their 'older media-cousin' for musical direction, striving to be more cinematic as technology improves. In chapter seven, Summers carefully analyzes several studies of musical play in video games. *Music games* "offer players a plethora of different relationships with music, most of which involve empowering and encouraging gamers to produce musically successful outcomes" (p. 187). They "are lessons in reading music – players are shown ways of interpreting, performing and listening to music" (p. 188). Summers further philosophizes on the concepts of play between both music and games in the concluding chapter of *Understanding Video Game Music.*

This publication constructs a healthy relationship between new ludomusicology scholars and the existing bibliography on ludomusicology. Heavy consideration is given to other concepts such as play, reality, and communication to reinforce musicological findings. However, Summers provides only limited coverage of the Japanese culture that persists in games of the past and present. While this neglects a vital body of scholarship, Summers stays in a cultural comfort zone, allowing the author a better understanding of the material. This publication clearly targets musicologists, though non-musicians can enjoy it due to its limited use of notated examples, analyses, and musicological jargon. Borrowing old terms and coining new ones, *Understanding Video Game Music* nurtures a pedagogical approach without explicitly being a textbook.

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