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The Correlation Between Music Genre and the Audience's Racial Ethnicity

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*The Correlation Between Music Genre and the
Audience's Racial Ethnicity*

by Sarah Pesin

45 Cobane Terrace
West Orange, NJ 07052
SP18800N@Pace.edu

Graduation: May 20, 2009
Communication Studies Major
Advisor: Emilie D. Zaslow
Communication Studies Department

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Précis

Racial segregation is nothing new; it has been a part of the United States' history and unfortunately still continues today. Even in racially diverse areas like New York City, the racial divide is more than apparent in the music industry. Fans and audiences of a certain genre will almost always be of the same racial background as one another and the musician performing. This paper summarizes the issue and explores three different hypotheses by relating them to three different music genres: rock 'n' roll, rap/hip-hop, and British Pop/American Independent. Music is one of the most popular forms of communication, but with regards to integration between races and genres, it is unable to successfully bridge those lines of communication.

I presented three hypotheses for why music continues to be one of the most segregated forms of communication, and they are: medium and message, consumerism, and location of genre development, all of which, combined help explain the racial divide within each genre. Each were applied to each genre as a means of proving that they had stability within the communication studies field. In order to attempt to prove my hypotheses, I consulted pre-existing research online, in databases, and scholarly books. This secondary research proved to be resourceful for rock 'n' roll and hip-hop, but for British pop and American independent music, a more primary research approach was necessary. This included attending concerts of the respective genres, as well as conducting interviews with several different people who work in the music industry. They included Jack Rabid, creator and owner of an independent magazine that covers unknown British and American acts called *The Big Takeover*. Also interviewed was his assistant, Ancelmo Huggins, who is Black and Hispanic. Finally, I interviewed Kandia

Crazy Horse, editor of *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock N Roll* and possibly one of the only African Native American's in the independent music scene. Their insight into the British Pop and American Independent music scene was crucial in supporting the hypotheses I set forth. With regards to rock 'n' roll, David P. Szatmary's *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll* was a great source of information regarding rock 'n' roll's beginnings as a Black genre, and its ultimate appropriation by whites. As for hip-hop, both scholarly work in databases and books were my main source for compiling information on this somewhat integrated genre. Most helpful was Bakari Kitwana's book, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* and Noah Mark's article "Birds of a Feather Sing Together." With the help of multiple other articles and books, I was able to put forth and apply my three hypotheses to three very different musical genres.

With the help of both my primary and secondary research, and the genres I explored, I was able to reach certain conclusions with regards to my hypotheses. Each hypothesis was applied to all three genres, and while they produced different results, they each supported my assumptions in different ways. The only genre that did not reflect my hypotheses exactly was hip-hop, which, in doing so, allowed me to surmise that my theories were still correct. This is because hip-hop was, in some ways, the control group, in that it was contradictory of my theories, allowing me to apply them in a completely different manner. Ultimately, while hip-hop is the only genre to have a seemingly integrated audience, the reasons for this, are the same for why the other two genres do not, because the medium and message, consumerism, and location of genre development all effect the audience's development, whether positively or negatively. This research,

conducted over the course of a year has helped explain the segregation within the music industry. Unfortunately, there was little information with regards to lesser-known genres, like British pop and American indie, and they are probably the most segregated of the three genres. A further look is necessary to truly understand what has caused this segregation, as it is rampant within the music industry. I believe that primary research is a must and the only true way to solve this problem is to see where it stems from. Studying a large sample of concert attendees over a long period of time, conducting interviews with fans, musicians, and industry insiders will help develop a more conclusive theory for what causes the correlation between music genres and the audience's racial ethnicity.

Introduction to Genres and Racial Divide

While the baby boomer generation of hippies may have experienced an idealistic view of the world that, as the Beatles' said, "all you need is love" and that with peace and love, freedom would be the outcome, it is anything but the case today. Occasionally there are sprinklings of different races at concerts, but unfortunately they are an exception to the rule, even in exceedingly diverse areas like New York City. As record stores and concert venues worldwide demonstrate, there is a diverse range of music genres and music fans alike. What is interesting about this is that each genre has its differences through both sound and audience composition. But why are audiences so racially segregated?

Of the many possible genres to explore, rock 'n' roll, rap/hip-hop, and British pop/American indie best highlight a lack of diversity within the music industry. These three genres help to explore where the racial divide in the music industry comes from. All three genres were chosen for specific reasons: rock 'n' roll because it began as a Black genre and then was usurped by whites, hip-hop because its fan base is the most integrated, and British pop/American indie because they are less mainstream, yet still racially segregated. Music should bring people together, not separate them. We have come a long way from segregation but this issue just highlights how far we still have to come.

The reasoning for why one genre may appeal to a person of one race but not another is important to explore, because although our country believes in and practices integration, the same cannot be said for the music industry as almost always, the majority

of the audience will be the same race as one another and as the musician who is performing.

Rock 'n' Roll

The history of rock 'n' roll is an extensive one. It took many different talented artists to explore multiple genres of music to arrive at what we know of today as rock 'n' roll. Its origins are from the blues, which were “an indigenous creation of black slaves who adapted their African musical heritage to the American environment” (Szatmary 2). Because it originated within the African American slave community, its original trailblazers and listeners were also from the Black community. That being said, whites, especially of the adult generation, feared rock 'n' roll in all of its different forms because it started out as a slave, and thus Black, tradition.

Although the blues originated in the rural south where the slave population was greatest, it was “during and after World War I, [when] many Southern African Americans brought the blues to Northern cities” (Szatmary 3). As the people and music moved north, the sound of the blues began to change into what is known as rhythm and blues, or R&B. As time went on, the genre changed again and by the mid-sixties, “Chuck Berry and Little Richard had bridged the short gap between rhythm and blues and what became known as rock-and-roll” (Szatmary 19). As the music was changing, so too was the United States, as the civil rights movement was underway and altering Black acceptance throughout the nation.

While rock ‘n’ roll originated as a Black art form that stemmed from the blues and R&B, it eventually expanded to a genre that enjoyed a multicultural fan base. As David Szatmary noted on the expansion of rock ‘n’ roll:

At first, only African Americans bought R&B discs... [then] during the early 1950s, more and more white teenagers began to become aware of R&B and started to purchase the music... [and] eventually, white teens in all parts of the country turned to rhythm and blues (16).

As the youths of the early 1950s were accepting of the Black art form, the same can not be said for the adult generation of the time – who had grown up in an entirely different era where racial integration was unacceptable, especially in a social setting.

As a way to squash the backlash and obtain control of the growing youth market obsessed with rock ‘n’ roll, “established crooners, disc jockeys, and recording company executives... torpedoed the new music by offering toned down, white copies of black originals” (Szatmary 2). This ultimately resulted in record companies and the white musicians covering Black music to become the face of rock ‘n’ roll. As these white musicians enjoyed money and fame, the Black originators were left poor and broken as the “African-American artists received little fame or money for their pioneering efforts” (Szatmary 26). Eventually, rock ‘n’ roll became a staple in the music industry as more and more white teenagers became avid listeners and unfortunately, the Black aspect of rock ‘n’ roll was phased out by the white carbon copies, especially once Elvis Presley came into the limelight.

Medium and Message

With each different genre of music that ultimately formed rock ‘n’ roll, the culture and audience adapted with the new message being presented. In its original form, rock ‘n’ roll started from a basic version of the blues. While the blues may have been born in

Africa, it was because of the slaves in the South that it became widely popular in the United States. Because it originated in the slave community, the blues became associated with African Americans, as they were essentially the ones producing and listening to this genre. As Henrik Bødker states, “music in general (and perhaps blues in particular) is thought to be an emotional form of expression, deeply linked to feelings of communion and/or community.” The blues’ message was originally made for other slaves as they could understand and appreciate where the singer was coming from. The meanings of the blues “developed as a language of communication and cultural affirmation among ourselves and specifically for ourselves, but simultaneously embodied an “outward” message of resistance, opposition and negation” (Bødker). That is, understandably, why the blues are an inherently Black art form: because any other race would be unable to understand the messages being portrayed through the music.

It is not to say that whites, amongst other races, are not fans of the blues. But with this fandom does not come understanding. Moreover, whites may actually romanticize the pain and guttural emotion expressed in blues music:

Blues culture’s commercialization and accompanying loss of social context, the white imagination ignores or romanticizes the poverty, violence and endurance that bred and fed the blues. From this perspective, the “cross-over” from local, specific communities to the (white) mainstream is interpreted wholly in terms of loss and damage. While denying and/or romanticizing the original context, many blues lovers simultaneously adhere to a liberal notion or ideal of color-blindness. (Bødker)

Anyone who was not Black and listened to the blues, especially prior to the civil rights movement, may have been fans but they did not appreciate where these artists were coming from. Because they did not live the same lifestyle as the artist, they heard the blues as music and not as a message, like fellow Blacks did. Essentially, this is why fans

of the blues were predominately Black, because those who actually understood and made it could only come from an African American background.

As African Americans migrated north, the sound, mood, and audience of the blues began to change. The transformation of the music came about

by combining the sounds of the country and city into a nitty-gritty, low-down, jumpy sound, Muddy Waters reflected the optimism of postwar African Americans, who had escaped from the seemingly inescapable Southern cotton fields. The urban music contrasted sharply with the more sullen country blues, born in slavery (Szatmary 7).

With this optimism came a great change in the sound, feel, and message of the blues.

Because the message became more lighthearted, people of all different races were now able to listen to and enjoy the blues that were being made in the north. With the change in the music and message came a change in the blues' core audience. Gradually, as the blues became rhythm and blues, the fan base became more integrated and this continued all the way up until the genre became rock 'n' roll, which is when white artists started to emerge.

Unfortunately, it was at this moment of integration that the true message of the blues' began to get lost. "The lyrics of rhythm and blues, particularly as a commodified product, could simply not directly address the issues concerning the majority of blacks" (Neal 28). Whether rhythm and blues was being created by Blacks or whites, it was at this stage where the new genre began to appeal more to whites than to Blacks.

Ultimately, it was this shift in the message that allowed the newly developed art form of rock 'n' roll to be consumed by whites, both professionally and musically.

Seeing that rock 'n' roll had an emerging white teen audience, record producers were quick to find the originators' white counterparts to sell and market. As Danny

Kessler of the independent Okeh Records found, “if the black record began to happen, the chances were that a white artist would cover – and the big stations would play the white records....There was a color line, and it wasn’t easy to cross” (qtd. in Szatmary 26).

These cover artists are the reason rock ‘n’ roll eventually became a predominantly white genre of music, as whites were producing it, marketing it, and listening to it. This is what gave way to Elvis Presley’s sensational rise to stardom in both the Black and white teen markets. Sam Phillips, the owner of Sun Record Company – the place that recorded Elvis and other rockabilly artists – once said that “if I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars” (qtd. in Szatmary 33). With Elvis, he was able to find exactly that, which is why Elvis became a national success rather quickly. While the message that was being promoted by Elvis and other white rock ‘n’ roll stars was inherently the same as that of the Black artists, the white artists were a product that was easier to sell than the Black trailblazers who started the genre.

Consumerism

Rock ‘n’ roll’s lineage begins with the blues, and because the blues were made by African American slaves for one another it became known for its Black ancestry. Because slaves and even recently free Blacks had little to no buying power, the blues were not marketed towards them nor affluent whites because the recording industry did not see the blues as a profitable genre. It was not until the blues’ message changed and became more optimistic that whites started to take note of the genre that was now becoming Rhythm & Blues. Once R&B made the final crossover and become rock ‘n’ roll, the music industry and record executives decided to market the genre as they saw money being made and

not by themselves. This is how and when rock 'n' roll became a white dominated market, because the only way to sell rock 'n' roll was to make its creators white.

Before the white cover artists ever came to popularity, rhythm and blues and eventually rock 'n' roll had to become a commodity worth selling. Just like hip-hop, the culture of Blacks surrounding this new genre became exploited, otherwise known as "blaxploitation". Through

corporate America's uncompromising exploitation and revisioning of the meanings and icons of blackness introduced both cartoonish and surreal constructions of blackness to a mass buying public. Steven Haymes writes that these processes transform black culture "into signifiers, absent of historical references to black life and absent of signification other than making luxury consumer goods pleasurable to middle-class whites. This stripping of history and signification from black culture has reduced it to a simulacrum (Neal 96).

Once anything and everything that can be associated with Blackness is stripped away from the art form, it is then ready to be sold commercially, especially to whites with buying power. This can still be seen today, a good

thirty-odd years after the death of Jimi Hendrix, perhaps the greatest ever guitar revolutionary this planet will see, the notion of a "black" guitar hero is still inconceivable to many – or at least to record executives and other power players in the rock biz. This despite the mainstream success of Lenny Kravitz (Crazy Horse XV).

And even with Black rock heavyweights such as Lenny Kravitz and Ben Harper, their core audience is made up of whites.

The cheapest and quickest approach of selling Black music to whites was to create white cover artists who out-rightly stole not only the music but the money made from it as well. While white youths may have been comfortable listening to Black rock 'n' roll musicians, the same can not be said for their parents, as "the integration of white and black youths elicited a racist response from many white adults" (Szatmary 22). While

segregation was starting to decrease socially, the same can not be said of the music industry. Black artists were creating music that was taken and re-recorded by white musicians which then was promoted and sold to the masses. As Bo Diddley, a popular Black musician who never achieved Elvis-like popularity said, “they wouldn’t buy me, but they would buy a white copy of me” (qtd. in Szatmary 26). While rock ‘n’ roll may have had a Black feel to it, that was all that was left of what once was an exclusively Black genre.

As Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Records, correctly mused above, a white man with the Negro sound and feel would promote the rock ‘n’ roll industry into a billion dollar corporation, and that white man was to be Elvis Presley. While Elvis was not the only white musician to have perfected the Black sound, he was and still is today the most well known artist with regards to rock ‘n’ roll. Although Elvis had a great fondness for the Black pioneers of rock ‘n’ roll, it was because of his success that the core audience of rock ‘n’ roll altered from Black to white. While parents and “the national press disparaged Presley’s success, criticizing him for his sexual innuendo,” it was still more acceptable for white teens to adore Elvis as opposed to his Black counterparts, thus his overwhelming success (Szatmary 48). Because the record labels saw Presley’s appeal to the youth market, both Blacks and whites, they made him into a product. Although there were other Black artists out there, many of whom Elvis admired and also covered their music, they were not marketed, especially to the white audience. As Steve Allen, the host of *The Steve Allen* show remarked, “it was television that made Elvis’s success possible...What his millions of young fans responded to was obviously not his voice but Elvis himself. His face, his body, his hair, his gyrations, his cute, country-boy persona”

(qtd. in Szatmary 47). Because Elvis appealed to the greater and more affluent white community, he was marketed as a product that the record industry was able to sell because of the color of his skin and not his music nor its message.

Location of Genre Development

Where a genre develops is exceedingly important with regards to its audience's racial ethnicity. With regards to rock 'n' roll, its location of development is not entirely definable as it went through multiple genres and locations to become what it is today. Its audience altered accordingly as the music progressed through several different stages because the genres transformed as the musicians changed locations.

The blues, originating in the South of the United States, took on a core audience of African American slaves. This occurred because slaves' main interactions were with one another and as they were the ones creating the blues, it makes sense that they were also the ones listening to the art form. The blues spread throughout the South as Blacks spread the message to one another as they knew that other Blacks would be able to understand and appreciate the message of the blues, and they were also the only other people with whom they interacted with.

Eventually, recently freed slaves made the migration to the Northern states to avoid the racial discrimination that was rampant in the South during and after World War I. While their lives in the North were not significantly better, they were still free and able to express themselves and obtain work. This is when the music of the blues began to change to a more optimistic, fun genre known as rhythm and blues. The hopefulness found in the newly formed rhythm and blues could only have occurred when the artists severed ties with the South and changed their location. Thus, not only did the location

change but so too did the genre and its core audience. Its optimism and new location allowed for whites in the area to start appreciating the new genre. Whites had never been exposed to the blues because it was not in their area, thus they did not seek it out as the people they knew and interacted with were not creators nor fans of the genre. Also, the record industry was still young when the blues and R&B became successful, so the music faced difficulties with both technology and distribution, which hindered the spread of these genres amongst fans of all races. Once the newly revamped genre formed in the North, inhabitants of the region, both Black and white, started to become fans of the new genre. If the blues musicians had not moved North, whites would never have become listeners to its sister genre of rhythm and blues that developed in Northern cities. Its location of development is what allowed the blues to branch off into rhythm and blues, and its audience to expand to races of all kinds.

Once rhythm and blues started to take off and expand to a larger market, record executives saw the potential to exploit these Black artists and create a genre with the help of white cover artists. This is when and where rock 'n' roll was created. Its conception, although birthed from the blues and R&B, is essentially one that was created in a factory, or in this case, a recording industry. Rock 'n' roll's location of genre development is not even a location but an idea concocted in order to make a lot of money with a genre that showed promise. By controlling where the genre started, the music industry was able to control who the newly developed genre was marketed to. Record executives cut out the middlemen, in this case the Black originators of the blues and R&B, which altered the course that rock 'n' roll would have taken if left in the hands of the Black musicians. If left to run its natural path, without the music industry and white cover artists getting in its

way, rock 'n' roll could have been the hip-hop of its day. As blues progressed into rhythm and blues, it was apparent, with the help of the civil rights movement, that the racial divide was beginning to deteriorate and fans of both races were beginning to integrate. Rock 'n' roll had promise to become a genre that broke down racial barriers, much like hip-hop did for today, but the music industry and white cover artists (specifically Elvis Presley) intervened and altered the course of music history. This involvement is what led to rock 'n' roll's unauthentic location of music development which ultimately gave way for it to be controlled by marketing instead of born to a certain area and community.

Rap/Hip-Hop

As one of the newest genres of music, it is commendable that in such a short period of time it has ballooned to be the giant that it is today. Emerging from New York City in the "mid-1970s... it has grown from a New York phenomenon to a mainstay of popular music in the United States and around the world" (Sullivan 605). Originating in urban communities, hip-hop's primary artists and listeners were those who inhabited low income, inner-city areas, specifically Blacks and Hispanics. While they are still the majority of hip-hop's fan base, hip-hop has expanded to include both artists and fans of numerous racial backgrounds. "More recently white kids, a large segment of hip-hop's listening audience, are jumping into the fray. Nevertheless, rap music indisputably remains dominated by Black youth" (Kitwana 200). It was "the 1980s [that] saw the popularity of rap music expand dramatically. Artists... gained popularity not only with urban African Americans and Latinos but also with White adolescents outside the inner

city” (Sullivan 606). In its short history it has created multi-platinum artists and expanded from just a music genre to a full blown empire and way of life. Although it has been around for less than forty years, hip-hop’s quick rise to success has had an impact on the music industry and the world that is nothing short of incredible.

Growing up in one of the first generations that has seen hip-hop as a part of mainstream music as well as American culture, it is impossible to ignore its popularity. As hip-hop came to age as my generation was coming to age as well, my peers and I have always recognized its importance and immediacy. What is even more important to note is the difference between my generation and the one prior to it. The difference between this generation and our parents’ is absolutely astronomical. As we are the “millennium generation (those born between 1985 and 2004)... [we] are the first Americans to live [our] entire lives free of de facto segregation” (Kitwana xii). Whereas the generations prior, the baby boomers and generation X, were living in a country filled with racism and segregation, we have come “of age with a fair degree of awareness of African American culture. At the same time, public acceptance of old stereotypical assumptions [has been] diminishing” because of the popularity of hip-hop (Kitwana 38). This cultural acceptance allowed hip-hop to expand from small Black urban areas all the way to mainstream, white Middle America communities.

Medium and Message

What originally drew African Americans to hip-hop was that it served as an outlet for young people to express themselves and they were able to relate to the messages being rapped about. “Hip-hop emerged as a culture organic to African-American youth in urban spaces [which] reflects the...social isolation afforded black youth” (Neal 136).

Originally, these messages were politically charged and often dealt with the alienation that African American youths felt growing up in poor, urban communities. It was “during the 1980s [when] genres of rap became more noticeable and many rappers turned to more overtly political themes. They addressed gang violence, police brutality, and other politically charged issues, such as poverty and racism” (Sullivan 606). Eventually, it was these strong political statements and feelings of alienation that spread to young whites who were dealing with the same issues. “For many white kids who got into hip-hop during this period, being down with hip-hop was as much a political statement as it was an alternative musical choice” (Kitwana 27). But what is interesting to note is that originally a lot of rap “addressed the effects of White racism in the United States” (Sullivan 606). While this should have segregated the races, it is essentially what brought them together because it “provided a space where American youth, Black and white included, [could] explore these new ideas together, even if old racial politics are always lurking in the shadows” (Kitwana xvi). Because hip-hop presented such a strong message, it attracted all races that were able to relate to it and one another, regardless of race.

Hip-hop was music with a message which is why it was able to attract listeners of all racial backgrounds. The significance of an understanding community relaying profound messages is not something to ignore, hence hip-hop’s expanding popularity. While this is what originally drew a diverse racial fan-base, the same can not be said for today, because the “more overtly political rap lost popularity in the mid-1990s” (Sullivan 607). Today’s mainstream hip-hop is “packaged and sold as hip-hop, but it is a distortion of hip-hop culture” (Kitwana 47). While it may have lost its political charge and message,

hip-hop is still exceedingly popular amongst people of all races, whereas other genres of music are not. What originally attracted whites to hip-hop was its political voice, but it is now just the opposite. While the politics and “rap’s critical voice has faded into the background,” hip-hop’s white fan base did not (Sullivan 607). Therefore, it is important to explore how it maintained its popularity even though it lost its central message.

Consumerism

As hip-hop originated in poor, urban communities, it is understandable that those who originally made and listened to it were without the substantial buying power enjoyed by middle-class white America. Consumerism and marketing, a staple of American culture, especially in the most recent generations, is one of the reasons for hip-hop’s mainstream success. “Corporate culture has become a tool for marketing everything, even Blackness, via pop culture” (Kitwana 78-79). Affluent whites and young people are easier to manipulate and sell things to because they have the spending power, which is why hip-hop was marketed towards whites. Bakari Kitwana expressed it perfectly when he wrote, “as much as white kids chose hip-hop, hip-hop chose white America” (44). Hip-hop has been one of the most successful genres with regards to a diverse fan base because “hip-hop, as part of the American entertainment industry, is now for sale to all buyers” (Kitwana xiii). Anselmo Huggins, who is both Hispanic and Black and is the assistant to one of the few remaining indie publications in the US, *The Big Takeover*, feels that “since hip-hop went mainstream and was now seen as acceptable, the masses could flock to it like sheep. Not since Nirvana can I remember a rock band taking over the country the way hip-hop has.”

There is, rather ironically, an infatuation with Blackness. Although there were decades of slavery, racism, and unequal rights, “white American fascination with black popular culture throughout the twentieth century is in part predicated in the notion that blacks were in fact the natural conduits for a more sensual, sexual, and orgasmic living experiences” (Neal 43). Even the name rock ‘n’ roll is an African American euphemism for sex. As hip-hop is an art form that was founded and expanded with the help of unity, marketers used this as selling tool because, “inclusiveness was high on the agenda of those who saw the potential for hip-hop as a business. In their desire for growth, most consciously sought mass appeal” (Kitwana, 45). This is apparent with “how advertisers, magazines, MTV, fashion companies, beer and soft drink manufacturers, and multimedia conglomerates like Time-Warner have embraced hip hop as a way to reach not just black young people but all young people” (George ix). Rachel Alpert, the head of +1 PR and Management, who graduated from Fordham University with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and a minor in African American studies, comments on the power of marketing: “I think it is really hard,” she says, “to get people of different races to listen to people making music outside of their race.” She continues to note:

That is what is interesting, people of all races love “Black” music. All I can say is, it is all about marketing. Like you said, Black culture is marketed as cool because white people saw that they could exploit poor Black people to make money for themselves.

While Blackness and hip-hop is marketed towards whites, it would not sell if whites did not have an infatuation with Blacks and their culture. This fascination with Blackness is deeply rooted in American history because of what we associate with being white and being Black. Although throughout history Blacks have been oppressed, they still enjoyed freedoms whites did not, whether through sexuality or even clothing. Whereas Blacks are

ironically associated with freedom, whites, because their skin is “both a colour and, at once, not a colour and the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen: the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, [are associated with] non-existence and death” (Dyer 45). Whites long to be more like Blacks, because they associate Blackness with leisure, being more natural and sensual, so a way whites can achieve a form of Blackness is through music and because those selling hip-hop saw a market with whites, they successfully targeted them to sell their products, and their latest product is hip-hop.

The White Influence on Hip-Hop

Hip-hop, unlike every other genre, has a segregated pecking order. What originated with Black youths in urban communities is now being marketed to and by middle class whites. While “on the creative side there are a handful of highly successful Blacks at the top of the midlevel of the chain... they aren’t the ones pulling all the strings” (Kitwana 46). Without a doubt, hip-hop is “firmly in the hands of white American men, mostly baby boomers” (Kitwana 46), and while Blacks may control the creative aspect of hip-hop, they most definitely have little or no influence on the business end. There are of course, a few exceptions to the rule like hip-hop moguls Sean Combs, Russel Simmons, and Jay Z but they are a rarity, and even in some cases may not be as powerful as they seem. Jay Z, while the owner of the record label Def Jam Recordings, is still a subsidiary label, owned entirely by the true major label, Universal Music Group. Although white’s being in power may be incredibly paradoxical, it helps explain the popularity of hip-hop music. While hip-hop is inherently a Black art form, it is being controlled and marketed by whites to whites, which essentially reduces the Black aspect of hip-hop in the corporate world. There is no doubt that the “white dominance of the

hip-hop industry” has aided in its success amongst whites (Kitwana 47). Because “so many whites [are] working in the hip-hop industry, naturally the final product would appeal to other white kids” (Kitwana 47). Really, “the white influence is so great in the hip-hop industry that it would be unnatural and odd, almost freakish, if the final product didn’t appeal to white youth” (Kitwana 47). White influence over hip-hop is absolutely paramount, and while it may take away the Black aspect of hip-hop, it is what makes it successful within the white community. Through this process, hip-hop was marketable to all Americans because they were able to “dilute what was considered... far too Black and far too influential” (Kitwana 87). This hierarchy that exists within hip-hop may seem absurd as those in power are not Black, but it is what helped hip-hop spread to the masses.

Location of Genre Development

A large aspect of a genre’s racial audience has to do with the locale from which it originated. Where the genre develops gives it a local fan base and a community that supports it. Those who were originally making and listening to hip-hop came from poor urban areas of New York City and were of Black or Hispanic backgrounds. Because they were there from the beginning, they have a special connection to the music that new fans will never understand. As Noah Mark argues, “musical preferences spread through social network ties... People develop musical tastes similar to those of the people with whom they interact. People are exposed to and learn about various types of music through their network ties” (454). Because Blacks and Hispanics were the originators of hip-hop, they spread the notion of hip-hop to their social network ties, which happened to be people of the same race, which ultimately created a solely Black and Hispanic fan base when hip-

hop started. This is what Noah Mark calls “the principle of homophily, [which] is that people who are similar in sociodemographic characteristics are more likely to interact with each other than are people who are dissimilar” (454). Music genres normally form in certain, distinct areas (grunge in Seattle, punk in New York, and so on) so they maintain their original niche audience from where they were created. “From the moment a musical form is created, it occupies a niche” (Mark 459), therefore, when hip-hop was created in New York, immediately its niche was created too. While hip-hop has been one of the few genres to successfully expand its audience’s racial background, it is still predominately listened to by Blacks and Hispanics. As of 2004, 84% of African Americans listen to hip-hop (Roberts 198). This most likely has to do with where the genre originated. Noah Mark, in his article called “Birds of a Feather Sing Together” explores two hypotheses that result in the homogeneous fan base of music. First is his “niche hypothesis [which is] a person’s probability of liking a type of music is negatively related to the person’s social distance from the niche center of that type of music” (460). Second is his:

familiarity hypothesis [which is that] people located outside the niche of a type of music and who are not fans of that type of music are less likely to be familiar with that type of music than are nonfans located inside the niche (462).

Combining these two hypotheses explains why one race is usually associated with one type of music. Where a music genre was created ostracizes people who are unfamiliar with that type of music, thus causing them to not get involved and listen because the original fans are most likely all close in race and class, which hinders someone from a different race to explore other musical genres. Where hip-hop started determined its audience’s racial make up, and because they became devoted to hip-hop, they had no time to explore other genres; thus, the racial distinction is apparent from the beginning.

Once the racial distinction of a genre is intact, it is increasingly hard to expand to other races as they were not part of the genre's original niche audience.

Will Whites Usurp Hip-Hop?

Just like hip-hop, rock music originally was created and listened to by Blacks, but with the help of Elvis Presley's mainstream success of covering Black artists, the genre essentially became known as a white art form. There is a fear that this will ultimately happen with hip-hop, especially since there are so many whites already in control. This fear is not unwarranted as it was the "Beastie Boys, a white punk band turned rap group, that was the first hip-hop group to have an album go platinum (*Licensed to Ill*) in 1988" (Kitwana 82). Then, of course, there is Eminem, one of the most successful rappers of all time, who is, coincidentally, white. Kitwana notes that "the success of a white boy in a Black-dominated medium in a predominately white society, more than anything else, is a crash course in America's racial politics" (140). But while this fear is justified, Kitwana states that:

no matter how mainstream hip-hop gets, it will never duplicate rock and roll's metamorphosis – becoming more strongly associated with white Americans than Blacks. In fact it would take an army of Eminems to divorce the image of hip-hop from young Black men, who after thirty years still dominate the art form (2).

Without question, there is a grave difference between the America of Elvis's time and the America of Eminem's time. There is no doubt that if rock was still predominately a Black art form today, and Elvis started making rock music, rock would not come to be associated with him because our society is a completely different than the one in which he was popular in. Elvis was incredibly talented and deserved his success, and the same goes for Eminem. Eminem, like "hip-hop, prides itself on its multicultural appeal. When it comes to hip-hop, skill comes first" which is why Eminem and the Beastie Boys were

able to achieve great success within the hip-hop industry (Kitwana 153). While hip-hop might be owned and controlled by whites, its success depends exclusively on Black artists becoming popular with Black youths, which then means that they will eventually become popular amongst white youths. Hip-hop would not exist without the Black aspect of it, and that will never change, no matter how many white rappers emerge. Which, to some extent means that hip-hop is a genre that will always be considered a Black genre.

British Pop and American Indie

While hip-hop and rock 'n' roll are genres known world wide for their popularity and huge acts, British pop, otherwise know as Brit Pop, is a genre truly left to the most dedicated fans. As it originated in England, only the bands that were huge in Britain had any chance of breaking America, and even so, that was not an easy accomplishment. The same can still be said for today: British bands making pop and indie-rock music have an incredibly hard time being successful, both in the United Kingdom and the United States. That being said, there is still a huge fan base for the genre in England and a budding scene here in the United States, specifically in New York and California.

The reason why Brit pop is not exceeding popular in the US has to do with the fact that the radio airwaves are already exceedingly jam-packed with American artists who are known to sell, thus leaving the door closed for experimentation with foreign musicians. Also, Brit pop and independent (or indie) music is hard to define. With "pop" being the abbreviation for popular, which in some cases is ironic with regards to how unpopular some of the bands that make up this genre are, comes a heavy connotation. Pop music is known for its fluff and mediocre talent, as the artists usually climbing the

pop charts are bubblegum, unoriginal, and fabricated by the music industry. While that may be the case here in the United States with pop artists such as Britney Spears, Jessica Simpson, and Pink scaling the Billboard top forty and being some of the most successful artists of the 2000s, it is not the same for the pop acts in the United Kingdom. The pop acts in the UK are not acts; they are in fact proper musicians and bands that worked hard to become popular artists and their music often has a message unlike those of the pop acts here in the United States.

Possibly an even harder genre to define is American Independent music, or just indie for short. Although it would be easy to classify indie music as any band or artist not signed to one of the four major record labels in the United States, which are Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, EMI, and Warner Music Group, that would then exclude many independent labels. This is because the boundaries between major and independent labels have been obscenely blurred, as there are now major labels that own independent labels, as sub-labels under different names. “The majors have bought many indies and the big four still use more than fifty names of labels they have taken over” (Cumberland). So, between the four majors, they own a great number of independents, including some of the most successful independent labels in the United States. While majors may own these independents, the artists on these labels are anything but major recording stars, so it is important to include and consider these artists and labels as independents. Independent labels, whether actually independently funded or not, have small allocations which leaves more room for experimentation and freedom for their artists because their successes or failures do not come at an exorbitant price.

Even though both British pop and American independent music are incredibly hard genres to pinpoint, they both are moderately successful both here and in the United Kingdom. The music they produce is strikingly similar and is in some cases the same genre, just in different locations.

Medium and Message

Despite the fact that Brit pop and American Indie may not have the biggest market share in the music industry, they do have a committed fan base, albeit a small one. For generations, Brit pop has been consumed by fans both in the UK and stateside, and undoubtedly the genre was started by the fab four, better known as The Beatles. While they technically may not be considered Brit pop by definition, the artists who did in fact start Brit pop, like Blur, Oasis, Suede, and Pulp would not have formed if it were not for the Beatles. Even today, The Beatles are the most successful crossover Brit pop artists, and it is because of them that Brit pop even had a chance in the United States. While the Beatles made history with nearly everything they did, British promoter Arthur Howes contended, “the biggest thing the Beatles did was to open the American market to all British artists” (qtd. in Szatmary 115). Brit pop has come a long way since the Beatles introduced it in the 1960s and it has taken a long journey through the decades to come, nearly full circle, into the genre that it is known as today. Brit pop’s success in the beginning had all to do with the fact that “by the late 1950s and early 1960s, many English baby boomers had become teenagers, who were ready for rock-and-roll” (Szatmary 105). Unlike their conservative parents before them, the teenage baby boomers were looking for a genre of music to define their generation, and that genre just happened to be Brit pop led by the Beatles, followed by many other British artists. As the success

and power of the Beatles was felt in the UK, it was also mirrored in the US. Since the United Kingdom is a predominately white nation, it is understandable that both the artists making Brit pop and the fans enjoying it are of a white background. Working class and unemployed whites in the UK were able to relate to The Beatles because they too had a working class background. Their messages, although seemingly twee, spoke to the white baby boomers fears and insecurities, which created a culture of die hard Beatles and Brit pop fans internationally.

As the decades passed, and the teenage baby boomers became prominent working class adults and the Beatles split up, the music in both America and England began to change. Although British and American pop music may have fallen into the shadows during the 70s and 80s, to give way to punk and glam-rock, the genres were never fully forgotten, and in the 1990s a revived version of British pop and American indie emerged, although this time they began from the ashes of different genres of music, like mod and new rave. These new genres began because

British youths in the 1980s and 1990s confronted even harsher conditions than their American counterparts. But unlike American youths, who crafted a desperate music of disillusionment, British teens followed their Mod and New Romantic forebears, who took to the dance floor to escape their problems. Enjoying few prospects, they chose to blissfully crowd the dance floor with drug-induced smiles on their faces (Szatmary 314).

Adolescents in both the UK and US “experienced grim economic realities” which gave way for the reintroduction of Brit pop and American indie (Szatmary 314). These bands were working class members of society, just like their followers which broke the barriers between artist and fan, allowing listeners to escape their grim realities through listening to blissful pop music, in harrowing times. While Black youths of the Beatles era and today’s Brit pop and American indie may be facing the same tribulations as their white

counterparts, they are virtually absent from both music scenes and found solace in other music genres. Kandia Crazy Horse, editor of *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock 'n' Roll* and possibly the only African Native American to attend concerts of both genres in New York confided to me that although racial inequality

may not seem like such a big deal to the iShuffle generation, but back [in the 1950s and 60s] racial hatred was far more upfront and lines were firmly drawn as to what cultural pastimes went with which race. That hasn't truly gone away – not least in the fact that Black young folks are still questioned if they want to rock out – yet then people of my parents' generation were being literally killed in the pursuit of freedom and for challenging long-held societal values.

This of course pertains to not only Brit pop and American indie but nearly all musical genres, because generations of Blacks, both adults and youths have been discriminated against when they tried to integrate, and this continual prejudice, while maybe not as severe today, does still exist. Kandia continued to say that

the sad fact is, a lot of post-Boomer white folks, hip or not, don't know many Blacks (nor other "Others") nor socialize with them often – even at gigs. I should know! I have spent two decades in what is supposed to be America's most cosmopolitan city and I STILL get asked what I am doing there at gigs across a range of genres and am often the only Negro at the venue.

The message of post baby boom affluence and today's escapism that the Brit pop and American indie bands create, clearly applies to Kandia and it seemingly should apply to numerous other racial backgrounds. But Kandia is in the minority of "others" attending predominately white British and American artists concerts, which very well may be because the cultural prejudice is too hard for many young people to shake, on both sides of the racial divide: Blacks with rap and R&B, and whites with rock and indie rock. So while Brit pop and American indie may compose messages that are applicable to people of all races, the prejudice that has been ingrained for centuries that birds of a feather should flock together may be too hard to overcome.

Consumerism

Individuals of all different races approach listening to music in a diverse manner. Black and whites specifically, prove, through the decades, that whites feel they have the right to explore different genres, which has been highlighted through the fact that whites have usurped several Black genres. This comes from a long-standing tradition of what is acceptable behavior of each race, which can aptly be applied to why Blacks do not consume white music such as British pop and American indie. There is no denying the double standard that pertains to the aspiration's of Blacks and whites to swap races. It is acceptable for whites to

desire 'to be black' – vividly expressed in white people's relationship to black music and dance – may well inform the fashion for tanning, but the point about tanning is that the white person never does become black. A tanned white person is just that – a white person who has acquired a darker skin. There is no loss of prestige in this. On the contrary, not only does he or she retain the signs of whiteness... but it also displays white people's right to be various. Literally to incorporate into themselves features of other peoples. Black people's use of skin lighteners are not so positively viewed. Like tanning, these are harmful, but unlike tanning their harmfulness is stressed as a terrible warning to black people who try to be various. As with tanning, a black person who uses lighteners does not succeed in passing him or herself off as a member of another race – but unlike tanning, this is presumed to be the aim of their use, and the failure to achieve this aim is a source of ridicule (Dyer 49-50).

What Richard Dyer is saying is that white people can become Black without losing their status as a white person, while Black people cannot do the same when they attempt to "become" white. So when applied to music, white people feel it is acceptable to listen to and make Black music, such as hip-hop and rock 'n' roll, but this does not go both ways. Just like it is suitable for whites to tan but unacceptable for Blacks to lighten their skin, the same applies to music, which is why you see little to no Blacks making or listening to Brit Pop and American Indie. "Historically, the record business, the media, and the mass

audience have not been receptive to Black artists that work outside the narrow parameters that the dominant culture set up for members of America's most benighted minority, past and present" (Crazy Horse). Jack Rabid, creator, publisher, and editor of *The Big Takeover*, a nearly thirty-year-old magazine devoted to the publication of unknown British pop and American music comments on the racial divide in music. He says, "it is such a pity that Blacks are more of an exception in their interest with indie music. I know that when Blacks hear it with an open mind, they love it." He continues to note that

it's just that too many Blacks are only interested in music made by other Blacks, in general and in a lot of ways I do not blame them. Black people came up with just about every form of great music this country has founded, and each time it has been co-opted by whites and often watered down. Look no further than rock 'n' roll! That said, there have been some nice exceptions, but of course exceptions don't disprove a rule until they become too numerous, and sadly, I don't think that will ever happen.

While *The Big Takeover* is a magazine built on publicizing unknown artists, of their sixty-three issues, only one has had a Black musician on the cover. This has nothing to do with Jack's own personal taste, as the magazine was named after a song by Bad Brains, an all Black band, but with the fact that Blacks are not as interested in white indie music, as whites may be with all types of Black music, such as hip-hop and rock 'n' roll.

Of course, it does not help that both British pop and American indie music is difficult to find, both here and in the UK. Obviously, this music is independent, so it will not be featured on the radio and will rarely make the top forty charts, so in order to listen to this music, the fan has to seek it out. While Black's do not seek out music created by whites, the likelihood that they would listen to music difficult to find is even more improbable, which is why Blacks have little to no involvement in the British and American indie music scene. Because although with the iPod generation there is a greater

availability of music, if one does not know what to search for then “having complete access to the web seems to be overrated” (Crazy Horse).

Location of Genre Development

American independent music developed from the influence of British pop music, thus you can consider that both genres were truly developed in the United Kingdom.

While both countries are powerful nations, with regards to sheer size and diversity, the UK pails in comparison to the US, which helps explain why fans of both genres, tend to come from a white background.

Because of the Beatles success, bands from both England and America making pop music had a chance to break into the main stream and the houses of youths across the globe. The Beatles took over America in the mid 1960s and their fan base was predominately affluent, white youths of the baby boomer generation. While the United States is a far more ethnically diverse nation than the United Kingdom, the Beatles and Brit pops’ core audience was white. This may have everything to do with the fact that when the Beatles were coming to America, America was in the middle of the civil rights movement and the Black power movement was beginning to gain momentum. This is a time in US history when Blacks were trying to integrate with whites but at the same time have pride in their race and all things Black, therefore becoming fans of the Beatles and other British and/or white musicians was not a top priority. Therefore British pop and American independent music in the US during the 1960s was made by whites for whites, because Blacks were uninterested and also not a market which was and continues to be a huge issue.

Brit pop of the 1960s and today have always been successful in the United Kingdom, and fairly successful today in major cities of the United States. Artists of this genre may very well climb the charts in the UK which is understandable as it is a much smaller and whiter country and Brit pop is a very successful genre there. It is then also very understandable that the majority of those making and listening to Brit pop in the UK are white because their population is disproportionately, white. According to the UK's government website, Neighbourhood, statistics as recent as June 2006, the population of whites in England is 88.7 percent. Compare that to the 2.8 percent that Blacks make up. Contrast that to the U.S. Census Bureau's population statistics for 2007 where whites make up 80 percent of the population and Blacks make up 12.8 percent. The odds alone that a Black person in the UK would create or listen to Brit pop is equivalent to that of their population statistics, which explains why there are little to no Blacks in the Brit pop genre. As a matter of fact, it explains why there are nearly no Black artists, of any genre, emerging from the UK.

The United States, because it is so enormous in size and population and because of its history of slavery and immigration, has a great variety of races in every different location. Some cities are very ethnically diverse, while others are racially homogeneous. With the help of artists like Blur, Oasis, Suede, and Pulp, Brit pop had a revival in the 1990s that continues on into today, which brought the genre into the United States for a second helping of the British invasion. Because of this influx, independent music from the United States had a second chance and a new audience to please. While some of the Brit pop artists were extremely popular, like Oasis, who topped the charts internationally, for the most part Brit pop was only successful in major metropolitan cities in the US, like

New York and Los Angeles. Although these cities are ethnically diverse, fans of Brit pop and American indie are not. This is because both genres truly originated in the UK, where whites are in the majority, and this carried over into the US, partly because the genres were not in the mainstream, and consequently, difficult to find. Another reason for whites being the dominant fan base for Brit pop and American indie is because by the second wave of both genres, other distinct genres such as hip-hop, had become extremely popular and the new racial divide had been set. Blacks especially were unwilling to listen to these new genres because “it can be hard for someone of color to stand out and be different. You can be ridiculed and that’s a tough way to grow up” (Huggins). Because hip-hop had become a genre for Blacks in the 1990s, going against the grain and listening to a genre meant for whites would make the Black youth an outcast amongst his peers and looked oddly upon by whites. The time periods of when these genres developed gives way to why both in the 1960s and 1990s their core audience was white. How these nations were evolving explains their fan base, because the inequality to explore different genres of music comes from a long established line of racism, both here and in the UK.

Conclusion

Each person finds different meaning in music, but it is one of the few things that nearly everyone in the world partakes in, whether as an every day fan, a passionate music aficionado, or as an actual artist. No matter what, music means something to people, which is why there are countless different genres and fans to go with them. In exploring three diverse genres of music like rock 'n' roll, rap/hip-hop, and Brit pop/American indie,

it is apparent that, for the most part, races do not mix when it comes to music, and while that is tremendously distressing, there is more than one reason for this segregation.

Three different hypotheses were applied to each genre as to why the audience and artists are identical in race, and except for hip-hop, they all fell in line to the proposed assumptions. The three theories that pertained to why there is a racial divide within different music genres were: what and who the message of the artist was relevant to, how the genre was marketed to and consumed by fans, and the location of where the genre originated from. All three of these hypotheses proved to be incredibly significant on their own, but when put all together, it is clear why there is such a racial divide within these three music genres and music as a whole.

The only genre to have all the theories apply to it, but refute them was hip-hop. The reason for hip-hop's crossover success has to do with the fact that whites feel it is acceptable to explore different races and cultures, while maintaining their white superiority. At the same time, they explore hip-hop because they think Black culture is cool. Not to mention, Blackness was marketed to whites, especially youths, as something that was not only acceptable, but something that would help them fit in with their peers, whether they were Black or white. It appears that Blacks do not have the same rights as whites when it comes to discovering genres outside their race, and at the same time they choose to stick to Black music as a way to show their pride in their race.

What also proved to be significant to the genre's fan base development, was in what time period the genre formed, because America has gone through many ups and downs with regards to racial equality, and that shows through the success of hip-hop with whites and the usurping of rock 'n' roll from Blacks. I believe that rock 'n' roll would have

had the same successful crossover results as hip-hop, had it existed in a different time period within American history.

These genres and ideologies about the correlation between music genre and the audience's racial ethnicity help explain the issue of segregation within the music industry. There are of course exceptions to the rule, as hip-hop, Anselmo Huggins, and Kandia Crazy Horse prove, but they are rare even in today's day and age when we have our first African American president. As the music industry proves, there are still racial lines being drawn, but with the help of hip-hop this may not continue in the future. The America of today is greatly different than even the America of hip-hop's origin, so hopefully there will be new genres emerging that include fans of all races.

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